

met the discussion was renewed. She was exasperated at what, to herself, she called his obstinacy, but his simplicity and sincerity won her unwilling admiration. For his part, the more he knew her, the less he blamed her personally; but his indignation against the unknown 'they' who had led her astray and, it must be added, taught her to argue so uncommonly cleverly, deepened ominously.

That he was condemning without sufficient knowledge of his subject never struck him; and it was quite a shock when one day Marjorie said impulsively:

'I know you are honest, and, perhaps if you knew something about Catholics you would not be so unjust, and so uncharitable.'

For a moment he was silent, too much taken aback at this accusation of injustice and want of charity—two faults which, he had prided himself, were far beneath him—to speak. Seeing her advantage, Marjorie went on:

'You know very little about the Catholic Church, nothing practically that is true. And yet you judge us. Surely that is unjust! Here, again, without knowing or caring to know the truth, you impute all kinds of motives to our acts and words and accuse us of dishonesty and I don't know what besides. Can you honestly say that this is charitable?' She laughed a little. 'You do not even give us the benefit of a doubt.'

'You see, I have no doubts,' he answered stiffly, 'but if you think I am speaking without sufficient grounds, I should be quite willing, if you have any suitable book of doctrine, to argue with you from such a book.'

Her eyes ran along the bookshelf beside her, and she took down a copy of the *Imitation of Christ*.

'You will find everything here,' she said, 'but I will get you a penny catechism also. I have lent my own copy to the Blackies.'

The rector looked up sharply. The Blackies were one of the indifferent families who would have nothing to say to him; surely this girl was not going to begin a mission of perversion under his very eyes?

'You think I am proselytising?' said Marjorie with a sparkle in her eyes that might have been amusement merely, perhaps mockery. 'Another unjust accusation!' and now she laughed again. 'It is only the two eldest girls. Their mother was a Catholic, and so were they until she died. The father and stepmother are quite willing that the children should be brought up in their own religion. In fact the father wishes it, because he promised it should be done.'

It was not to be expected that the vicar's visits to the Laytons should escape without comment, nor did gossip diminish when it was discovered that these visits suddenly ceased. Many reasons were suggested for this new development, but none approached the truth, which was simply that Vernon Blackburne was studying the penny catechism. As one by one the objections which he had put forward in all good faith crumbled away in the light of simple truth, he could not, dared not, face again the keen young champion of Catholicity.

One day, knowing Marjorie to be absent, Mr. Blackburne called on Mrs. Layton, and an opportunity arose for him to ask a question which had been in his mind ever since he had learned of the girl's conversion.

'You ask if my dear child's defection from Anglicanism was a trial to me?' she answered. 'Indeed, it was, perhaps the greatest trial I have ever had to bear. Yet now if I could take her belief in Catholicity from her I would not do so. You are surprised? Indeed, I am almost surprised myself, but if you knew how it has developed her character, how it has brought out all that was good in her and helped her to curb what was evil, you would understand. Besides, once convinced that our Church was not the true one, in honor could she hesitate to follow where truth led?'

Going back to the study of Marjorie's little blue-covered book, the vicar for the first time questioned himself with an agonising pang, whether he could uphold the sincere conviction that the Anglican Church was the Church of Truth. Mr. Layton, unaware that

it was the—to him—utterly uninteresting topic of controversy that had brought Mr. Blackburne so often to the Cedars, noted the cessation of his visits, and questioned his wife. Mrs. Layton, though quite aware that religion was at once the attraction and the barrier between her daughter and the vicar, in her turn questioned Marjorie as to the reason of the vicar's absence. It was not until this absence had lengthened into weeks that the girl dared to cherish the hope that had sprung into being on the day Mr. Blackburne had agreed to study the catechism and the *Imitation of Christ*. As she had told him, she knew him to be honest, sincere, and naturally just, except when blinded by anti-Catholic prejudice, and his love of God and sense of duty were very deep and true.

At first Marjorie had not even hoped for Mr. Blackburne's conversion; but now, as each day passed without bringing him back to the attack, she both hoped and prayed. And with the absolute openness which had never been clouded between her and her mother, she told of her new-born hope. A further question gently put caused the girl's cheeks to flush.

'No, mother,' she answered, 'there could never be any idea of that. If it is given to him to see that the Catholic Church is the Truth, he will see that there is but one place for him—the priesthood.' And her mother was satisfied that, whatever befell, there was no danger to Marjorie's happiness in her intercourse with Vernon Blackburne.

From her position, alone in a non-Catholic household, living her life among Protestants or people of no fixed belief, Marjorie felt that, even more than other Catholic girls, she was the upholder of the good name of her religion. It is a curious, though unquestionable, fact that whilst Catholics are sometimes apparently despised, nevertheless they are always looked to for good example. Marjorie knew that more was expected of her as a Catholic than had ever before been expected, and she determined to be true to God. She offered her daily acts as well as her daily prayers for the conversion of this man whom she felt would be so worthy a son of the Catholic Church, if only his eyes were opened to the Truth.

Once they met as of old, but now there was no controversy. He merely asked permission to keep her books a little longer. 'They needed thought and study,' he said. She longed to add, 'And prayer,' but she felt that the prayer must still be hers. Then with an air of embarrassment, he asked her hurriedly if she had no other books that she would like him to read before they reopened the question of the Roman claims.

That evening she sent him Rodriguez' *Christian Perfection* and *The Catholic Christian Instructed*.

Although they met during the summer at various social gatherings, only twice was the subject that was uppermost in both their minds mentioned between them. The first time was at a garden party. Finding that he and Marjorie were by chance alone together for a moment, he turned to her abruptly.

'What ever made you become a Catholic?' he asked.

She started in surprise, but noted with inward rejoicing that the qualifying 'Roman' had been omitted.

'The grace of God,' she answered simply in a low voice, 'and the example of Catholic lives.'

There was no time for more, and it was some weeks before they had any other opportunity of interchanging views. This time they met outside the house of those same Blackies who had borrowed the catechism. The father had died suddenly, and Marjorie arrived in time to hear the vicar being informed by the elder of her two pupils that 'of course it was worse for t'others than for them. They could pray for poor father.'

'My task is easier than yours,' said Marjorie, in greeting, referring to the comfort both hoped to take to the house of mourning. 'I have the best, the only possible remedy, but you, of course, do not believe in prayer for the dead.'

'Perhaps I do,' returned the vicar abruptly, as he raised his hat and passed into the widow's house. His words, even his anxiety to avoid her, were taken

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