

A Complete Story

By This We Know

(By ENID DINNIS in the *Magnificent*.)

"I wonder if anyone has ever seen a vision in Westminster Cathedral?" the girl in secular dress asked the question of the old nun whom she was "chaperoning." "But, no," she went on. "I'm certain they haven't. It's much too matter-of-fact—much too near Victoria Street." She heaved a sigh that did not escape her companion's notice.

The old nun smiled. It would be a vision in keeping with its surroundings," she observed. "Westminster is very wonderful, but it is wonderful in its own way. As a matter of fact, I do know someone who once saw a vision here—in the chapel of the Sacred Heart. I can tell you about it as we walk to the station, if you like. We have just time enough."

Outside, the old Sister plunged into the story:

"It was told to me by the woman to whom it happened," she explained. "She was employed in an office somewhere near here. She had intended to enter a contemplative Order, but God said 'No.' He sometimes does that when people have a strong vocation. It seems to be a favorite paradox of the Divine Mind, that calling and rejecting, as the soul sees it—poor human soul!

"Well, she had to get her living in business instead of becoming a nun. A post came along—up in London, and the small mercy for which she thanked Providence was that the office where she was employed was quite near Westminster Cathedral. She would be able to slip in during her lunch hour, and after work. I think she had been 'at her job'—isn't that the right way to put it?—about a week and was feeling what the young ladies employed in her office call 'fed up,' when one evening—yes, of course it was Friday evening—she turned into the Cathedral to say 'Hours.' She had done this every day. Her one object, she told me, was to get the office, and everything to do with it, out of her head as soon as possible. Sometimes this was exceedingly difficult, and my poor contemplative resented the havoc that her uncongenial surroundings played with her 'recollection.' They were quite a well-meaning, well-behaved set in her office, but my young friend was irked by the frivolity and shallowness of the interests that she heard discussed. There was one young person who especially got on her nerves. She was a Catholic, my friend discovered, but not one of the type which visits the Cathedral in lunch hour unless there is something to be got out of St. Anthony. My 'epicure' found her no better than the others—rather worse, in fact, for she was the biggest chatterbox of them all and talked incessantly about the 'boy' who took her on the river on Saturdays, or to Kew Gardens.

"On this Friday evening my young woman felt as she turned into the Cathedral that she had come to the end of her tether. She had her book with the Little Office, but the

other office, the one that Providence had chosen for her, insisted on intruding itself. She found herself reading mechanically, and listening to Betty What's-her-name's shrill voice expatiating on the probability of a fine next day for a proposed trip to Chertsey with 'my old beau.' The narrator's face beamed. "I've got it verbatim," she said. "My club girls keep me up to the latest."

"Then my friend closed the book and tried meditation. That was even more hopeless. Betty and the boy presented themselves in the composition of place, and Chertsey's tea-shops and a crepe-de-Chine frock as 'points.' It seemed useless trying to meditate. Then she did what was really a very sensible thing. 'Well,' she said to Our Lord, 'I simply can't think or pray, so I'll just sit here till You suggest something. You tell me something.' It was a kind of challenge. She had never done such a thing before, but she really was on her beam ends.

"So she sat there, near the statue of St. Anthony, just outside the chapel of the Blessed Sacrament, and waited for something to happen. Something did. A pious zealot came and began to clean up St. Anthony's candle-stand. My poor friends got up and moved on. There were people kneeling in the chapel before the Blessed Sacrament, but to the left she noticed a blaze of light indicating a corner which she had not as yet happened to penetrate. It was the chapel of the Sacred Heart, and she remembered dimly having been told that it contained a beautiful statue of Our Lord.

"She moved over and made her way into the little chapel, realising its nearness to the Blessed Sacrament in that corner, so like St. John's special place at the supper table—not facing the Master but close beside Him. She found a huge scone, blazing with candles, stretching the width of the chapel. Beyond it was all pitch and utter darkness. The altar was in the blackest shadow—the effects of the lights. The chapel was empty and gloriously quiet. My contemplative sank down on her knees with a sigh of satisfaction and gazed through the candle-haze into the blackness beyond. At once a thought entered her mind, alert, for outside impressions—she had asked Our Lord to provide her 'points,' you will remember. Here was a perfect symbol of the mystic's vision. The blinding light, the blackness which was the Divine Cloud of unknowing. She knelt there enthralled. God was indeed telling her something. It fascinated her to try and make out images in the darkness. Once it seemed to her that the shadows were shaping themselves into something, but as she peered into the gloom a sound distracted her. Someone had slipped in quietly. Now the intruder was leaving, not quite so noiselessly. It was the slightest of interruptions, but the shadows thickened again. Still the dense darkness was its own wonder. Oh, she thought,

to be undisturbed, and to be able to plunge into the mystery that was being shown. Oh, to lead a life like those lives symbolised so wonderfully by the self-consuming candles. Oh, to be gazing through the blinding brightness of prayer at the Divine Cloud. She felt her heart getting bigger and bigger within her. Then there came a great pain—a feeling of rebellion against the things which interfered with this. God, thought she, had yet to explain why He was tantalising her with visions of what was being withheld from her. She shot out the challenge into the "dark Cloud." Then she returned to her contemplation. She may have been on the verge of—shall we say 'abnormal state of prayer?'—when there was another interruption. This time it was a real intrusion. Someone entered the chapel, intent on putting up a candle in the shining row. My friend buried her face in her hands and listened with throbbing nerves as the pennies rattled into the tin box below. Then she drew her head upward and gazed into the distant shadow, across the stooping figure of the intruder, expostulating with the One behind the 'Cloud.' She drew her breath in quickly and continued gazing. The darkness had rolled away and now in the pale shadow was distinctly outlined a majestic white figure with outstretched hands.

"For about a quarter of a minute she went on gazing. (The intruder—it was a woman—was still bending over the box containing the candles, some of which she was endeavoring to extract.) Then, as she scanned the white-robed figure that stood out from its dark background, she instinctively bowed her head. "There was a sharp and sudden jog at her elbow. 'Say a little prayer for the fine day,' said a voice in her ear. She looked up. The lights were blazing unobscured. The intruder was standing upright at her side. It was Betty of the office. As for the Vision, it had vanished, like the Vision Splendid in the legend.

"Betty smiled in a friendly way. 'I've put up five candles to the Sacred Heart for a fine day,' she said. 'Isn't it a lovely statue! You can't see it now because of the glare of the candles.'

"'But I did see it just now,' my friend found herself saying. Of course, she had already realised that it was the statue, she told herself.

"'Oh,' Betty said, 'that's because I got in the way and shaded the light. You've got to thank me for showing it to you. By-bye.'

"Betty was off, leaving my friend with a new point of view for her meditation. There were words running in her head, as though they had been spoken: 'He who loveth not his brother, whom he seeth, how can he love God whom he seeth not?' Then her thoughts ran off at a tangent. How disappointing it would be if it were wet to-morrow. Well, never mind, there was the National Gallery and the 'Pictures.' She didn't even smile at the combination. Betty would be sure to make the best of it—she was a real optimist. God must love giving her a fine half-holiday. It must be a real pleasure to His Sacred Heart. Then she stopped and asked herself