

May 23, 1926

The Lady.

If you have done no spiritual reading for the month of May your month is not complete. The Bulletin would wish all its readers to know a little book David Innis, called Mystics All. As an introduction to this beautiful book it reprints a portion of one of the tales told therein, a story of a Greek girl of culture, who had known in Antioch a Christian named Demetrius, who had taken her to hear St. Peter and some of the other Apostles. The tale proceeds:

We had them come to live in Jerusalem, quite recently, from Antioch. I no longer had Demetrius to go to, and I doubt if I would have done so in my present state---Christianity had lost its magic. Yet where was I to go? I had a letter of introduction to the elders of the Church in Jerusalem, that Demetrius had given me. I told myself, grimly, that now was the time to test my convictions---now, when the intellectual side alone remained---when my dangerous emotions were benumbed by the sting of the home wound. (Her family had been scandalized by her sympathy for the Christians.)

Doggedly I turned my steps to the corner of the city where the Christian elder lived to whom my introduction was addressed. He proved to be a gentle, scholarly man, very kind and patient. He listened to my difficulties, which seemed to rise up with seven-fold force, and answered them as skillfully as Demetrius would have done. He, too, showed me the law and the Prophets and explained the prophecies. He was a wonderful thinker, and the strange sanctity that all the more matured members of the Christian Church seemed to possess was very marked in him. But my understanding was hardened, or my heart. I could not be convinced. My instructor took infinite pains. Presently he went and fetched another presbyter, and they conversed together at a little distance off. I heard them mention the name of the great doctor, John. At the Logos, but his high doctrine was known privately to the more scholarly portion of the Church. Demetrius revelled, with his Greek way of thinking, in the wonderful exposition of the great central Christian truth afterwards given to the Church at large. I grew greatly excited at the thought that I was to be referred to this great doctor. I was also more than a little afraid. I wanted to do my education justice, and my head was buzzing with the pro and cons of our recent conversation. After a short consultation my instructor returned to me with a scrip in his hand. This he gave me, and bade me bear it to the house of John, to which latter place a servant would guide me. So I set out for the Great teacher's house, feeling, as I have said, half afraid. They said the Christ had loved this man for his charity, but was it not also he who denounced idols, and was not my father's house to be the truth?

The servant conducted me to a still more obscure corner of the city. The entrance to the preacher's house was in a little courtyard. It was a mean place, and surrounded by places of no good repute. That would my mother have said if she could have seen me there?-- or Diana? I did not have long to wait on the threshold. Soon the figure of a woman approached from within. In the dim light I could not see much of her--I suppose I was very nervous, but I seemed able to grasp very little except that she was smiling at me.

"You are Agatha," she said simply, not asking a question, but stating a fact, and I followed her in, wondering how on earth they had prepared her for my visit. The room she took me into was poor and bare. A newly-kindled fire burned on the hearth for it was a cold day, but otherwise nothing was suggested but the utmost poverty. And yet, there was an air of dignity about the place that I could not account for--that I have tried to reproduce since in other places by trying to banish all unnecessary furniture from an apartment. But I have never achieved that majestic result.

The lady led me to a seat by the fireside. She sat down opposite me. I saw that I would have to wait for my "audience," and this, of course, I was quite prepared for. I glanced at the face before me. It was in the shadow--a worn, curiously beautiful face. I could form no idea of its owner's age.

She regarded me for a few moments. "So you are not a Christian yet," she said, in the same tone of stating a fact. It drew forth an answer more irresistibly than any question could have done. I gave my reason:--

"No," I replied, "I am not yet able to believe."

She went on regarding me quietly, with shrewd eyes, into which crept a smile.

"And why not?" she asked. And she sat there, smiling at me steadily while I racked my brain to formulate my principal reasons for remaining outside the Christian Church. They suddenly seemed to have become rather paltry, I discovered, and I had a feeling, furthermore, that she could fathom their paltriness, yet it was with the gentlest interest that she was awaiting my answer. There was no scorn in her amusement.

When my answer came it was a curious one--one I had never cited before, never dreamt of acknowledging. "My parents are worshippers of Diana," I said; "I don't know what would happen if I became a Christian."

She looked at me, still silent, but listening with indescribable intentness. It had the effect of making me scrupulously accurate--she seemed to be setting so much value on what I was saying.

"I don't mean," I explained hastily, "that I should suffer persecution. My father would protect me--he is a good man, but he believes the things that they say of the Christians, and he wouldn't, he couldn't understand."

My voice trailed off. I looked down at my thumbs. It sounded such a feeble little reason. I had an idea that she would be once again smiling that shrewd smile at my poor mean confession of paltriness.

I heard her give a quick, sharp sigh. I looked up. She was grave, and her face was full of the tenderest sympathy and concern.

"But that is hard," she murmured, almost to herself. "Harder than persecution." Then she added softly, "There are seven kinds of sorrow, and seventy-seven kinds of suffering." I think that was how she put it, but I cannot quite remember. I know that, once again, what she said had that same authority--as though she knew. I looked into her face, and then I understood the extraordinary, uncommon beauty, something that a foolish portrait-maker would have touched out, but which an artist would have given his days to be able to reproduce.

Then she began to ask me about myself and my home, listening quietly, with very little comment, while I found myself pouring out my story, the story, not of my intellectual difficulties, but of my ideals and aspirations--of the strong desire to believe that existed in part of me, at least (something in her way of listening made me punctiliously careful to speak the truth--to represent myself as I was). I told her everything--all about my little petty troubles, and how petty they were! And the better, the more she seemed to sympathise, as though she had actually experienced them all. Yet she said little. I can scarcely, as a matter of fact, recall a single sentence of what she did say. I only know that she drew the story out of me, bit by bit. I could not have conceived it possible beforehand that I could unburden myself thus. I seemed to get to know myself as I talked. She sat looking, sometimes at me, sometimes at the fire, her eyes, at times smiling, at times full of gentle, helpful sympathy, seemed to draw out all that my heart contained. I had forgotten all about the metaphysics and philosophy. This lady had intervened!

It is strange that I can recall so little of what she said, for when it came, it was always positive, yet not like the opinions of Demetrius which courted contradiction by their very assurance. The memory is, in a way, blurred, like a dream. Mine was an unconscionably long story. I told her how the Christian ideal had filled a great void in my heart-- of the strange feeling of absolute restlessness that came over me when I felt the atmosphere of the Christian communities to which Demetrius introduced me-- of my groping after the light which I felt was shining there, although I could not see it. "That, though," I added hastily, "is a contradiction, for darkness is dispelled by light."

I can remember what she answered then. "No," she rejoined quickly. "The light shines in the darkness and the darkness comprehends it not."

"If only I could see the Christ," I cried, as I had so often cried to myself. "You know Him, perhaps?" I suddenly hazarded.

"Yes, I know Him," she said. "I know Him."

I noted how she substituted the word sense. I gazed up at her in awe, but I was arrested by the tired, worn expression on her face. I had fagged her out with the endless tale of my troubles. It had become twilight. It must be getting late. I gazed at her in the flickering firelight, and as I gazed I felt my heart thrill within me. "Tell me what He was like," I whispered.

She made no reply. She simply sat smiling at me. I had amused her again somehow. And then, suddenly I knew--I knew what He was like. I almost got the idea that He was there before me. Was I scanning a vision that memory had called up in her mind?

"You knew Him well?" I breathed the question very diffidently.

"I am His Mother," she replied.

So she sat there, smiling at me, and holding my very soul with her smile.

I was without speech. I knew now that I believed-- and I knew what He was like. His Mother! That was the secret of this adorable Lady, this exquisite listener.

I found myself on my knees at her side.

"You will be brave," she said, answering my unspoken confession of faith,

then I was daring and smiled back at her.

"I don't need to be brave," I cried; it's quite easy now. I'm not afraid. I know now. I believe, and I love"-- I took her hand shyly and kissed it--"I love-- Him!"

She kept hold of my hand, and of my eyes with her eyes. She only said one thing, very gently: "Can't you feel Him very near?".....

I knew that the time had come for me to go. The thing was accomplished...I had not been instructed in the mystery of the eternal Logos after all. I had received no sublime disquisition on the Word made Flesh in the House of John, but I had found the Christ, and I had found Him as the shepherd had found Him-- with His Mother.