

For the Little Tots



To-morrow I Will be Good

It was in the year 1918 at the end of the great war. Jean a French soldier from Paris had just arrived home. Alas! the war had not made him better. He was a drunkard. This was due to his friends who after work invited him for a drink to the next tavern. After the first drink came a second and a third and so on. So every night he went home without money and without brains. His poor mother had given him a very pious education, but when one has become the slave of his passion, his mother can only weep and pray: both she did.

One evening, Jean as usually drunk, was on his way home. Passing by a church not yet closed, nobody knows why, Jean entered it and took a chair somewhere in a hidden corner. Very few people were in the church. After a while they all left. The porter of the big church made a short inspection of the building rattling his keys, but Jean had fallen asleep and not even thunder would have aroused him from his drunken sleep. The

door was closed. Jean was alone in the house of God. How he slept!

It was ten, eleven o'clock. Jean slept still on his chair. Midnight. Twelve times echoed the sounds of the big clock on the tower. Jean made a slight movement. All at once a voice yelled thru the dark naves. Jean woke up. He had heard that noise. He tried to look around, to figure out where he was. His trembling hands met only what he took for chairs. Again the voice sounded and this time it seemed louder than before: "if somebody is here in the church who can serve mass, please let him approach and serve my mass." This was enough to make Jean the most sober man in the world. He looked all around and lo! at the door of the sacristy he saw . . . what? . . . a dim light . . . in the midst of it was the form of a priest dressed for Mass . . . Jean would have screamed but he dared not. Why was that priest there? What time was it? Where was he? Then he remembered how

he had entered the church, how he must have fallen asleep. Again for the third time the voice of the priest asked for a server to serve his mass. While a boy, Jean had often served Mass. Shall he serve the Mass of that mysterious priest? He thought. He remembered the story of his mother who told him once how a priest, who during his life had forgotten to say a Mass, had come back after death to celebrate the sacrifice he had forgotten in his negligence. This priest too might be a dead priest in need. "After all, said Jean, he will do me no wrong . . . I will go and serve his mass." This said, Jean approached the apparition. But when nearer the spectre, for a spectre it was, how Jean repented. There, at four steps away from him, stood a priest. His head was a skull. The fingers with which he held the chalice were only tiny yellow bones, the extremes of a skeleton. The ghost addressed Jean in a pleading and hollow voice. "My friend, he said, will you serve my mass? I will ask God to reward you greatly for your service." Jean wished he had been at his mother's side. To escape was impossible. But then the ghost seemed to be well intentioned. Jean acquiesced to render him the service he asked. At this, the priest proceeded to the altar. Jean followed and found everything all at once ready. The candles were lighted, the water and wine were ready, the altar was uncovered and the book was at its place. As an ordinary priest the ghost mounted the altar and came back again to say the prayers at the foot of the altar. Jean knelt trembling at a little distance. Whenever the

ghost bowed his skull or his skeleton, how the bones rattled! When he beat his breast with the bony fingers, how Jean shivered. The mass proceeded. Jean brought the water to the ghost to wash his fingers . . . just think of this: to pour water over the bony sticks protruding from under loose sleeves while the big vacant eye holes seemed to gaze at Jean. Jean would have preferred a bombardment in the trenches. Anyway he got through with his service. The Mass was ended. The last benediction was given. Then the ghost stopped and turned his skull towards his server, his visible white teeth rattled once more. "Listen, he said, you have delivered me from purgatory. I thank you. In turn I will render you a service. I tell you: next year at this date and at twelve at night, you will die. Go and prepare yourself."

At this, the ghost disappeared and left Jean alone and of course deep in thought. What? next year, he would die? And he had lived such a bad life. He, a drunkard for many a year, he would have to go before his God and judge to give an account of his life, so sinful, so bad. Oh! he would change all at once. To-morrow he would begin his penance, he would do great, terrible penance, for his sins were many and great, he would find a place in a convent and as a lay-brother spend his last twelve months in the most holy life. Four hours more, he had to wait before he could get out of the church, gave him ample time to strengthen his resolution.

(To be continued.)

(Cum licentia ecclesiastica)