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Author(s): W. M. Letts

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THE MAN WHO BURNT HIS CRUCIFIX

By W. M. LETTS

"The Soul cannot live without sorrow"—W. B. Yeats

I REMEMBER a night: it was in Summer, at a time when the silence is broken by the voices of corncrakes. For us it was a silence made audible, as it were, by the rush of the river over the weir, far below us where the Liffey flowed through the valley. It was at the time of daisies. Even the sky above us seemed scattered with them as the stars came out. And the darkness of the field was strewn with them. The field sloped downwards from the avenue, and below the field was the shrubbery, and below that more fields down to the river bank. The Banksia roses were in flower; and at either side of the steps where we sat the escalonia bushes were in bloom. The fresh, strong scent of them was pleasant in the night air.

It was not strange that we, who sat there on the steps of the house, fell into silence. For on these summer nights we mortal beings seem in some sense but lookers-on at the pageant of nature; and, as is fitting, we must listen to her symphonies, striving to understand the subtleties of her music, and realising the grossness of our hearing.

It was my friend who spoke first, his eyes on the western sky where Venus blazed above the mountains:

“ ‘Such harmony is in immortal souls;
But, whilst this muddy vesture of decay
Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it,’ ”

he quoted.

I looked at him, his thin worn face, passionate but yet ascetic, seemed the face of a man who might have heard immortal harmonies. When I spoke I said to him: “On a night like this how hard it is to believe in the darker side of our life on earth, in death and disease and poverty. One seems back in the golden age.”

THE IRISH REVIEW

He was silent for a moment. Then suddenly he asked me a question :

"What is the greatest symbol?"

I had no answer ready.

"The Crucifix," he said, "for it is the symbol both of sorrow and of joy. There is no other symbol that is joy and sorrow at once. That is why it has conquered the hearts of men."

As he spoke he unfastened a chain that was clasped round his neck and drew out a crucifix. He handed it to me. I bent forward so that the light from the hall behind us fell upon it. The craftsmanship was wonderful. The cross and figure were exquisitely wrought and chased in gold. The wounds in hands and feet were small rubies; the crown of thorns was jewelled, too.

"One rarely sees such work."

"No; it belonged to a man who was, I think, one of the greatest craftsmen of our time. He collected beautiful work of many kinds. But it is not the value or workmanship of this that makes me prize it, but my love for him."

He was silent, then added "May he rest in peace."

I gave him the crucifix again.

"I should like to know the story," I said.

"Very well, I will tell it."

Many years ago, he said — perhaps fifteen years, for I was twenty-five at the time—I was writing a book on old Irish silver. I lived a happy, hand-to-mouth life, haunting libraries and old shops, picking up strange knowledge, and falling more and more under the glamour of the streets.

Ah! towns have their devotees, and I am one of them. Gas lamps are as inspiring as stars to me. Dublin took me to her heart in those days, and I cling to her still, dirty, romantic old town that she is.

She's her dirtiest, shabbiest, most sordid self about the quays, as you know, and it is just there that I love her. The very dinginess, the smell of malt from the Brewery, fascinate me. Those old shops

THE MAN WHO BURNT HIS CRUCIFIX

that huddle along the quays—they're the caves of Aladdin, full of treasure. Oh! yes, the quays fill me even now with exultation.

Well, it chanced one day that I went into a dark little shop full of the usual assortment of old silver and china, curious prints, jewellery, Waterford glass, and foreign postage stamps. I had gone in to examine a fine old potato ring, and the owner of shop being himself a connoisseur we soon fell into conversation. After some talk he told me that if I wished to see real treasures I should call upon a lodger of his, an artist and a collector of beautiful things. But, he added, Mr. Kernahan, the man of whom he spoke, was a curious man, and I might not care for him. He was, it seemed, half Greek by nationality, and whether for this reason or another he was not a man of many friends.

At this moment a man came into the shop from some inner room. He was very tall, and gave one an impression of strength. His thick hair was quite grey, but his face was that of a young man. When his eyes met mine I felt a curious thrill of interest. He stared at me frankly, and then smiled. When he smiled my interest was animated by an extraordinary attraction such as I have never felt for another human being. I felt as though in the presence of a leader who might exact any service of me.

"This gentleman," said the owner of the shop, quite heedless of what had passed spiritually between us, "is like you, Mr. Kernahan, a lover of beautiful things. I have told him of your collection."

Kernahan frowned. His face expressed a violent anger that amazed me.

"You're a fool, Crawford," he said, "why do you talk about me or my affairs?"

"Quite right, sir," Crawford answered nervously. "But this gentleman, sir——"

"Is an exception?"

Again he turned to me and smiled, and again my whole soul went out to him.

"Are you an exception?" he asked me.

He was laughing. His white, even teeth gave him that look—

THE IRISH REVIEW

"Did you want to come up with me—really?" he asked.

"You know I do," was all I said at the moment.

After a moment I said: "Go on about the temple of Aphrodite."

"You don't expect me to describe Aphrodite, do you?" he asked; besides, one doesn't see her—it's only a glimmer. I come out of the temple in a sort of rapturous terror, and sit on the steps and talk to the nymphs and fauns—and there's no sadness there, and no hurry and no anxiety, only endless leisure and sunshine, and nothing to do but to sing and play and laugh and kiss."

"How different from life here," I said.

When the gas was lighted I could see what sort of room Kernahan's was. I saw now that it was untidy and shabby with poor furniture and threadbare carpet. But at once I saw beautiful things, some water-colours on one wall, engravings on another, a marble Bacchante on a pedestal, an illuminated Missal and a silver punch-bowl on the table, a case of cameos, and some Japanese lacquer. On the mantel-piece stood old Sheffield candlesticks, and above it a large and beautifully carved crucifix.

I was surprised to see the crucifix, for nothing about Kernahan or his room seemed religious.

"That is beautiful work," I said, looking at it more closely.

"Yes," he answered, "an ugly thing beautifully done. That's why I've kept it so long—I hate it."

I was surprised by his vehemence. I had always had a sort of vague reverence for a crucifix, and I had not accepted the opinion of my parents that it is the symbol of popery, and therefore to be banished.

"A Tyrolese peasant carved it," he said; "he was a saint—a fanatic I should call it. They say he never carved a crucifix but on his knees. If it weren't such a perfect piece of work I should burn it—or break it up—or throw it into the dust-bin."

Again some sort of instinct of reverence made his words painful to me. But my faith was too vague, and I was, besides, too great a coward to say anything that I thought would displease Kernahan.

We were interrupted at the moment, for after a rather timid

THE MAN WHO BURNT HIS CRUCIFIX

knock a young man opened the door and stood there looking at Kernahan.

"Could you let me have a penny stamp, Mr. Kernahan?"

"No, I never write letters. I'm sorry, Lawson."

"Thank you, don't trouble; I'll ask Crawford."

He disappeared.

"Who was that?" I asked.

"Oh! he's an odd sort of fellow called Lawson."

"How is he odd?"

"He's odd because he's so ordinary. He lives a ghastly life, and never seems dissatisfied."

"Why is it ghastly?"

"He's a clerk in a big drapery business. He lodges in the room over mine. Now, he's the sort of fellow who would like that crucifix."

"Then why don't you give it to him?"

"No; I'm not going to foster that sort of spirit. Why encourage a man to worship misery? Indeed, I told him I didn't like it—he wanted to buy it, but he couldn't afford my price; he's very poor, and I didn't want him to have it. He's given over to that sort of morbidness; his room is full of thin saints and pale Madonnas, and crosses and prayer desks. Of beauty—of life, real life—the poor young counter-jumper knows nothing. How can he in this rainy and religious country?"

I forgot Lawson very soon, for I was wandering round the room looking at the innumerable treasures there. Kernahan went to a cupboard, took out a bottle of Alicante and two beautiful glasses. "Now," he said, "you shall look through my portfolios. But first you shall drink this Alicante. It will make you think of summer, and of sunny fields and hot thymy grass. You will forget the grey streets, and go back to Greece in the days when Pan was alive."

I took the portfolios and turned over the drawings one by one. It is difficult to describe them to you. Some day I will show you three of them, and then you shall judge. It was not his sense of form, nor his marvellous feeling for colour, nor even his decorative

genius, that made his work so extraordinary. It was, rather, the abounding life that it conveyed to one. The pictures were like scenes from a carnival of the earth. They showed a riot of joy unrestrained by thought or conscience. He had dreamed of a world intoxicated with life and sunshine, and he had drawn it in all the gladness of his spirit.

You know Aubrey Beardsley's work, and how it conveys a sense of fear and repulsion. Kernahan's pictures were as wonderful; but they gave one the feeling of unshadowed joy, the joy of a pagan world where the shadow of the cross has never fallen.

An hour or more must have passed as I looked at these drawings of dancing fauns and mad Bacchantes, of dryads and sylphs and gods who wandered amongst men. Sometimes Kernahan, looking over my shoulder, described the scene as though he had seen it; or he pointed out some flower-grown spring or shadowy grove, saying that he had been there in his dreams, and he would speak of the scent of the hot flowery grass and the sound of a shepherd's pipe in the still air and a boy's voice singing.

I lingered on, and we had dinner together — a very scanty dinner that I enjoyed more, I fancy, than any meal I have ever had. It seems to me now that no man can talk as Kernahan did. Somehow his speech was like new coinage, bright, golden, stamped clearly with the imprint of a vigorous mind.

He asked me after a while if I knew Greek.

"Fairly," I said.

"That's good. I don't, neither ancient nor modern. I can only get my classics in translation. But I love to hear the sound of Greek. Will you come and read to me sometimes?"

I promised eagerly, and he thanked me. I felt that he saw my admiration in my eyes, for he smiled with a sort of tolerant good humour.

"Very well, then," he answered. "We'll have Bion and Moschus and Theocritus, and some of the poets. Philosophy and tragedies may stay outside the door. We never get half enough of joy in this dreary country."

THE MAN WHO BURNT HIS CRUCIFIX

At nine o'clock I left him. I was glowing with excitement. Someone came down the dark stairs behind me. I felt sure it was the devout young clerk of the room overhead. He evidently thought that I was Kernahan, for he said: "It's a cold evening, Mr. Kernahan."

"Is it?" I asked; "I'm very hot."

"I beg your pardon, I thought you were Mr. Kernahan."

He followed me through the shop. I turned to speak to him. His mistake had left him flushed. He had good grey eyes that made one like him. We went out together.

"You're English aren't you?" I asked, for his accent had told me that.

"Yes, I've only been over here for two years."

"Do you know Mr. Kernahan well?"

"No, indeed—I only see him because I lodge at Crawford's."

We were going the same way, and we walked together by the river wall, watching the reflection of the lights in the dark waters.

"I wish I were Kernahan," I said at last; "there are not many artists like that."

"No? Perhaps not. I'm no judge. I like Leighton—those lovely draperies, you know. And Watts I rather like—though it's hard to make out his religious views."

I wanted to laugh, but I asked gravely enough: "You're a Catholic, are you not?"

"Yes—but over here they only use the word to describe one branch of the Catholic Church. I am an Anglican Catholic."

I said "Oh" rather blankly, for the young man's religious views did not interest me.

"Are you a Catholic?" he asked, eagerly.

I was young and very arrogant.

"I suppose I am in the widest sense," I answered. "All religions are good; I don't distinguish between them. I consider dogmas a hindrance to the pursuit of truth."

He turned to look at me, and a gas lamp threw a bright light

THE IRISH REVIEW

on his face. He was smiling. I think this time it was he who repressed a laugh.

"I see," he answered very quietly.

We had reached O'Connell Bridge, and our ways parted.

"Good-night," I said.

He paused.

"I don't wish I were Mr. Kernahan," he remarked so abruptly that I was startled.

He smiled, blushed again, raised his hat, and went off towards Nelson's Pillar.

For the next few weeks Demetri Kernahan was my one absorbing interest. I went to the little curiosity shop nearly every night and up the dark stairs and into his room. There, whilst he drew or carved, I sat watching him or reading Greek, translating it sometimes or reading on that he might get the splendour of the sound.

Lawson, the young clerk of the attic, sometimes came in to borrow a pencil or to buy a postage stamp from me. He refused the Alicante or liqueurs that Kernahan offered, and took but a careless glance at his pictures. We both laughed at him, but still we respected him. Lawson had, with all his bashfulness, an air of quiet strength that gave one pleasure in his company.

"I wonder," said Kernahan sometimes, "that the fellow isn't a priest; he'd make a good one."

It was a jest with us that at a certain time there was a heavy sound overhead when Lawson knelt to pray, and then after a while the creak of his bed. Kernahan said that he liked to think that Lawson was asleep, and not praying in the cold. Then, in the hour before midnight, we read and talked of the sweet-voiced Thyrsis, of quarrelsome Comatas and Lacon, of Daphnis, the well-loved herdsman, and of that poor love-sick giant whose pastoral soul beamed through a solitary eye, and whose shaggy form repulsed his sea-born love. And it seemed to me, as I read and he drew, that we were making a little world in the midst of this grey world beside the quays. With our own thoughts and desires we were drawing the old world back, gathering about us the happy wanton

THE MAN WHO BURNT HIS CRUCIFIX

crew of gods and shepherds, nymphs and satyrs, piping goat-herds and dancing fauns.

The room next to Kernahan's had been occupied by one of the Crawfords. When he went to some post in America his father offered the room to me if I wished to take it. I was delighted at the chance of being near Kernahan, and gladly accepted it. I found, too, that I had a curious pleasure in being in the same house with Lawson. Kernahan said sometimes that Lawson represented a force that he could not analyse. We called him the Philistine and his attic "Philistia," but I liked to hear his footsteps overhead or his whistle as he ran downstairs.

One night I came from the library rather late; it was cold and damp. The bare-footed children running with their papers looked pinched and cold. I was conscious of the discomfort of physical existence in a northern country. Not a face passed me but it looked cold or anxious or unhappy. I looked forward with intense eagerness to the warmth and comfort of Kernahan's room, supper by his fire, and then our work together. I found him sitting at his table, drawing. He was intensely eager about his work. He looked up at me with brilliant eyes.

"Do you remember," said he, "how the goat-herd offers Thyrsis a drinking-cup if he will sit under the elm and pipe and sing to him? The cup was of ivy wood, rubbed with sweet wax and fashioned with two handles. It was carved with ivy and marigolds, and on the inner surface with a woman to whom two men are speaking words of love, and with a hardy old fisherman casting his nets with boyish vigour, and with a little boy making a locust trap while the foxes are spoiling his vines and sniffing at his wallet. That must have been a fine cup, Grier; I wish we could see it now."

He stood up and came to the fire, where I was warming my hands. "I shall make one, too, and mine shall be finer than the goat-herd's; there shall be no craftsmanship like it in the modern world. I have begun the design and bought the wood. It shall be a cup worthy of Dionysus."

By some strange impulse we both raised our eyes to the crucifix above the mantel-piece. Kernahan stared at it with contempt.

THE IRISH REVIEW

"Yes, my cup shall defy that crucifix as beauty and joy defy the image of a tortured god."

He raised his hand quickly, dragged the crucifix from the wall, and threw it into the fire.

I caught his arm, but he pushed me back.

"Let it burn," said he. "You think I shall burn in hell for that? If I have carved my cup according to my dreams I shall not care. Don't look so frightened, man; fill your glass and drink to the beautiful thing I am about to make."

"I have told you—how truly God knows—that I am a coward. I feared Kernahan, but I feared another power. I would not drink with him. I stammered out something about being a Christian. Kernahan laughed.

"You aren't much of a Christian, Grier; to be honest, you're neither one thing nor the other. You are not a passionate Philistine of a Christian as Lawson is, for instance; nor are you a pagan as I am."

I was angry and ashamed, so I left him and went to my own room. For a while I thought of finding Lawson and telling him what had happened, but that seemed childish; yet a sort of terror at the thing Kernahan had done haunted me all that night.

A man may burn a crucifix for the love of God, and I do not doubt that, though he destroys the image of his God, it is counted to him for righteousness because of the love that makes him do it. But Kernahan's act had borne a deep significance. Of deliberate choice he had defied the power of Christ crucified. He had exalted the spirit of pleasure above that spirit of joyful sacrifice which is, as you know, the very core of Christianity. There are moments in many lives when this choice between two services is offered—between God and Mammon or between God and the god of pleasure. He had chosen and had rejected God as God is known among Christians.

The next day Kernahan made no mention of what had happened. He was absorbed in his designs, but he was friendly and affectionate, and asked me to read to him in the evening. He chose the Bacchae

THE MAN WHO BURNT HIS CRUCIFIX

of Euripides. I found a good translation, which I read first, giving him the original Greek in the finest passages.

"It is that spiritual intoxication," he said, when I had done, "without which no man can be an artist. He must be beyond himself, he must be possessed by a power greater than himself. I think every mythology sets forth that idea in some form. Here it is in the mad worship of Bacchus, and in the intoxication which strong wine symbolises. Why, the very Apostles of your Bible were thought to be drunken with wine."

He looked at me with a face aglow with an intense life and eagerness. "At the bottom of my cup," he said, "I shall have the head of Dionysus crowned with vine leaves, and vines shall cover the inner surface, and among them you shall see the faces of poets and dreamers, and great craftsmen—all of them possessed by the power of the god. And then, on the outside, I shall carve a riot of life round and about the cup. Here is the design. Dionysus is leading them, and he is followed by maenads, their hair blown about their faces; and after them are shepherds playing on pipes, followed by capering lambs and kids; then come nymphs hand in hand with fauns, and a riotous satyr clashing cymbals above his head. Behind him are children, the sheep dog capering before them, and after the children a fisher-boy—you can see that he is shouting as he goes. And all of them are blown about by the spring wind, and dishevelled by their dancing. Then on this page you see the handles; they are branches of vine, and at the base of them the faces of laughing fauns peeping out from under clusters of grapes."

I looked at these drawings in silence. I have never seen their like. I know of no artist with such a power of showing life by mere outline.

"It is marvellous," I said. His glowing face was bent above the book.

"It is almost super-human," I added.

"Yes, that is what I told you. All art is in its essence super-human; it is a divine possession. The god possesses me now or I could not work as I do."

THE IRISH REVIEW

The next day the carving was begun. Only a man with unusual vitality could have borne the strain of such continual work and of such spiritual energy. Once, fearing for his health, I said to him as he worked: "Demetri, you are killing yourself. Your own life is going into the cup."

He laughed at that.

"Then I shall have a worthy immortality," he answered.

Once or twice Lawson came in and looked at the work.

"I do not like it," he said, with great frankness.

"No. You would rather have Sir Noel Paton?"

"Yes," said Lawson. "I would."

Lawson came to my room.

"I think Mr. Kernahan will go mad soon," he remarked; "you love him, don't you? You had better watch him. When the cup is done, this tide of energy will turn, and he will die or lose his reason. A normal man cannot work like that."

For weeks Kernahan worked at the cup, and I watched it grow in all its fine beauty. The fire of energy that was in him did not seem to flicker or fail. And when I looked at the marvel that grew under his hands it seemed to me that his life was in it, and that it was his own joy that made the dancing procession shout and play as they followed the god round the bowl.

When it was nearly finished, I went away for a few weeks to stay with friends in the country.

"It will be done when you come back," said Kernahan.

"Yes; I long to see it. What will you do with it?"

"Oh! I don't know; I shall sit and look at it, and praise the gods that such work can be done."

I left him bending over his carving, and went out. And I said to myself, as I took the grey, muddy way to Amiens Street, that he was like a young god at work.

After three weeks I returned to Dublin. The evening was cold and foggy, and I made haste to reach the shop on the quays. Crawford was at the door as I went in.

THE MAN WHO BURNT HIS CRUCIFIX

"You are welcome, sir," he said in the kindly Irish way.

I asked whether Kernahan were in.

"Yes," he answered, and looked at me strangely. I went up the stairs with joy in my heart and a greeting on my lips. When I opened Kernahan's door, the room was almost in darkness. The fire was low. I could only just see a man's form bent over it. Somehow the joy of return died in me at that moment. I put my hand on his shoulder and shook him affectionately.

"Demetri," I said, "are you so far away in Greece that you can't come back to welcome me?"

He did not answer for a moment.

A sort of fear took hold of me then. There are terrors that lurk in the dark places of life. I believe they are always there, ready to leap upon us from their ambush. An old childish dread awoke suddenly in my mind, the dread that from a familiar and well-loved face strange, fierce eyes should look at me. I believe that many children know this fear. As a child I have watched my mother as she lay asleep, or as she sat sewing, with a terror lest she should look up at me suddenly and some malignant spirit peep out at me from her eyes.

This old fear, asleep for many years, leapt at me in the darkness.

Then Kernahan spoke.

"I have not been in Greece," he said very quietly; "I have been in hell."

"You are out of sorts, that's all. You should go away. Have you finished the cup?" I asked as cheerfully as I could.

"Oh! yes; it's over there on a table."

I lighted the gas, found the finished cup, and looked at it for a long while.

"It is all I thought and more," I exclaimed. "Oh! Demetri, there's not a craftsman like you in the world."

He made no answer. He remained in the same crouching attitude over the fire.

In the light I felt more cheerful. The panic of childish terror that had seized me for a moment seemed wholly absurd now. I

THE IRISH REVIEW

poked the fire, laid the supper, and made the coffee and an omelette.

Kernahan came to the table and sat opposite to me. He was very pale, and his eyes, when he raised them for a moment to mine, were full of hopeless misery.

Although he was my friend, I shrank from him. The change in him was so startling that he seemed to me another man.

"To-morrow," I said at last, "I shall take you to a doctor, Demetri, there's something up. You're overworked. What have you been doing since I left you?"

"I am not ill."

"Then what is the matter?"

"If I told you, Jack, you wouldn't understand. We have words for the disease of the body, none for that of the soul."

"Tell me," I said; "you know what your friendship means to me, Demetri. Let me stand by you."

He raised his miserable eyes to mine, and looked at me as an animal in pain looks when it craves for human help.

"Will you stand by me?" he asked.

My will wavered when he looked at me. How can I tell you what I felt? I was like a weak, timid swimmer who is asked to save a drowning man.

"You know I will," I answered; but I knew that he, too, had discerned that consciousness of weakness.

He went to the fire again.

"Oh! I'm better now," he said; "when you're here, I—I am safer. Will you read to me?"

I read to him for two or three hours. It was late then. I had heard Lawson run upstairs, whistling as he went. His door had banged behind him. And I had wished with an inexplicable desire that Lawson would come to us in Demetri's room.

"You'll be turning in now," I said; "you need a good sleep."

"I cannot sleep," he said; "I shall stay here by the fire."

"Do you read?" I asked.

"No; Crawford turns off the gas before he goes to bed. I don't think I have any candles."

THE MAN WHO BURNT HIS CRUCIFIX

He bent over the fire, and I turned to go. I knew I was a coward. But fear had me again. I longed to be by myself.

"You might turn out the gas before you go," he said.

I did as he asked, then went to the door.

He spoke to me suddenly out of the darkness.

"Jack."

"Yes."

"Have pity and stay with me to-night. I—I daren't be alone—it would be a comfort to feel someone, someone human, was near me. It would make me feel as if I had some hold on the world."

I shut the open door and came back to him. It was a great effort of the will, for it seemed to me that the comfortable, everyday world lay beyond the shut door, and that within the room phantasmal fears and nightmare made real things vague and far off.

I sat down beside him, but I found nothing to say. The house was quite silent now. I wondered if Lawson were asleep in the room overhead.

Presently Demetri spoke.

"Pull your chair nearer to mine," he said, "or the child will touch you."

"What child?"

"The hunchback child who stands on the bridge sometimes. He comes every night. His face is so pale that I think he must be dead, but he keeps his eyes fixed on me—they all do; I know they want something, but they do not speak."

"What are the others?" I asked in a whisper.

"Oh! you know them," he said. "I have seen them going about the town—but I wouldn't look, for they seemed a blasphemy against life. They should be shut up and not let to show their hideousness and misery—there's a woman——"

"Yes."

"We saw her outside the Carmelite Church once. She has lupus, you know. Her face is terrible. She should not show it, should she? But she comes, too, every night—and she crouches there by the fire—near the child——"

THE IRISH REVIEW

"Do you see her now, Demetri?"

"Yes, she is watching me. I think she is listening. I try not to see her—but I can't help it. She wants something, I believe, but I dare not ask her. Why do they all come to me, as though I had robbed them of something?"

I tried to speak, and could not for a moment.

"But they are not real," I said; "they are just delusions of your own overworked brain, Demetri. You must set your will to fight against them."

He stared at me, and I flinched before his eyes.

"They are real—as real as we are," he answered; "perhaps they have come from hell. I don't know—for I think they pray—and I can't. They say that there's a heaven—there's a hell, too; Jack, I am in hell now."

He turned and looked towards the door.

"That man," he said, "who is dragging himself over the floor towards us is the one we saw outside the theatre one day. He begged, do you remember? He was so foul, so horrible, such an incarnate horror of deformity I wouldn't look at him. You gave him sixpence——" he paused, and then he laughed—"as though sixpence could make up for a body like that!"

"Where is he?"

"He's here beside me. I think if he touches me I shall go mad."

I rose to my feet. My love for Kernahan was paralysed by fear. His misery had cast some awful spell over me. I felt I could not stay.

"I will call someone," I said.

He caught my hand.

"No, no, Jack. Stay with me. I cannot be alone with them. Their eyes are killing me—you are my friend; you loved me when I was sane—before I was drawn into this carnival of disease and death. Save me somehow—tell me of your God—the old gods have deserted me—I've called to them, to Pan and to Dionysus, but they will not come—only these—these creatures come to show

THE MAN WHO BURNT HIS CRUCIFIX

me their disease and misery. You said you were a Christian—perhaps your Christ can deliver my soul from hell.”

He clung to my hand, moaning; but I could not speak for the terror that was all about me. I struggled with it, but there was no strength in me. I had no comfort for him. His terror only quickened my terror to fierce desperate panic. His very touch was horrible to me. I shook him off. I left him.

Like a child terrified by nightmare, I stumbled up the dark stairs and flung myself against Lawson’s door.

“Come in,” he called.

Shivering and breathless I stood before him. He was kneeling at a prayer-desk near his bed. One candle made a little light behind him, and illumined the cheap plaster crucifix over his head. He was a quiet man, not easily moved from the sober method of his ways. He looked at me in surprise. Then he rose from his knees, came to me, took me by the shoulders, pushed me into a chair, and brought me some water.

“Drink that,” he said, very quietly, “then draw a good breath and try to tell me what has happened.”

His perfect calm influenced me. Here was a force strong as the terror that had brought me to him in sobbing panic.

I told him all that I have told you. I told him, too, the story of the burnt crucifix, and of Kernahan’s defiance of the cross.

Lawson listened in silence. Then he went to his bedside and detached the crucifix from its nail. He went towards the door, but I caught his arm.

“Don’t go, don’t go,” I cried; “you can’t go to him. You don’t know what it is to be in that room. It is like being in hell. Stay here with me and pray if you can.”

Lawson looked at me, then smiled in his slow, gentle way.

“I think you’d better go to bed and try to sleep, Mr. Grier. I’ll stay with Mr. Kernahan all night, if he’ll let me. There is no need for you to be so frightened. Try and pull yourself together.”

Still I held him back. “It may drive you mad,” I said.

“No, it will not drive me mad. Remember St. Patrick’s hymn :

THE IRISH REVIEW

The word of God to give me speech,
The hand of God to protect me,
The way of God to prevent me,
The shield of God to shelter me,
The host of God to defend me.
Against the snares of demons—
Against every man who meditates injury to me.

Now let me go to him.”

Lawson pushed me from him, shut the door, and went downstairs. I heard him opening Kernahan's door and closing it again.

The night passed. I did not try to sleep. I knelt by Lawson's bed listening to the faint sounds in the room below, the monotonous murmur of voices. Sometimes one was raised loudly. I thought it was Kernahan's, and sometimes there was a long silence.

It was a little before dawn that, in the room below, I heard a great cry, the cry of a soul in peril of death. I went out and groped my way downstairs and into Kernahan's room. There was light there, for two candles stood on the mantel-piece.

Before me, on the ground, lay Kernahan, face downwards. Lawson knelt beside him, the crucifix raised in his right hand.

As I came in, Lawson turned slowly and looked at me. His face was the face of a man who has looked upon the Divine Vision. I think for a moment he did not know me. When I cried out at the sight of Kernahan, he spoke to me :

“It is all right,” he said ; “please go and tell Crawford, if he is at the door, that there is no cause for fear, and then come back to me.”

I found Crawford shivering in the passage. When he heard Lawson's message he crossed himself, and said : “Thank God !” and went off to bed, his heelless slippers flapping as he walked.

I returned to Kernahan's room. I was conscious of that peace which one may feel at seeing one long in agony wrapped in the stillness of death.

“He is dead?”

THE MAN WHO BURNT HIS CRUCIFIX

"No," said Lawson; "he is not dead. But I think he will die. Help me to put him to bed. I will stay with him for the rest of the night, but you must take care of him to-morrow. There is nothing to fear; I will call on the doctor on my way to the office."

"You can't go to the office after a night like this?"

"Yes, indeed; why not, Mr. Grier? Now, let us lift him up."

Some instinct made me obey Lawson unquestioningly. I returned to my room and slept for an hour; then I went to Kernahan, and Lawson took breakfast in his own room before he started for the office.

Kernahan was asleep when I went in, his face turned to the wall. Lawson had been tidying the room in his own inimitable style. He had arranged everything symmetrically, and hidden the great carved bowl behind a curtain. The fire burnt brightly, and about the whole room there was an atmosphere of peace and hope. After a while the doctor came. I told him of the almost ceaseless work and energy that had resulted in something that I described as madness. There was nothing very strange in such a case, and I knew before the doctor said it that Kernahan was dying. A man does not go through the darkness of darkness and live.

After the doctor left, there was silence for a long while, broken only by the crackle of the fire and by the cheerful morning noises of the household. I went to Kernahan's bedside and looked down at him. His face was that of a dying man. In his right hand he held Lawson's crucifix pressed against him. As I looked at him he opened his eyes, and smiled when he saw me there.

"I'm dying," he said.

"Yes, Demetri. You are not afraid?"

"No. But there are things which must be done. You are my friend, Jack; you must help me."

Then the remembrance of how I had failed him came upon me with a great shame. He saw it in my face.

"That was my fault, too," he said; "but you will help me now, and that will be your punishment."

He gave me directions about all his possessions. A few were

to go to Crawford and Lawson and me, the rest were to be sold for the good of certain charities.

"My portfolios are to go to Lawson, Jack."

"To Lawson? But he knows nothing of art. Give them to me, Demetri. You know how I shall prize them."

"I know it. Lawson may give you two or three pictures. If they were yours, you would want the world to have them, too; I mean to leave nothing of myself behind; perhaps I may take with me certain knowledge, certain skill into my new life; but the man who has lived here is to be forgotten."

"We shall never forget you."

"I know it."

Then he made me look through a case, till I found this crucifix which I have shown you to-night, and he said to me what I have said to you. "This is the greatest symbol, for it is the symbol both of joy and of sorrow." And he gave it to me, and I promised to wear it always and to remember the symbol.

After a little while he asked me to bring him the carved cup.

He held it in his hands and looked at it, turning it this way and that.

"It is perfect," he said.

"Yes."

"But the noblest art is imperfect, because it can never realise its ideal."

"Demetri, what shall I do with the cup?"

"I will tell you. You must break it up and burn it—now—before me."

"I cannot do that. It would be sacrilege."

"Then you are not my friend."

"I am, but I love you and I love your work. How can I burn it?"

"You must burn it, as I burnt the crucifix, but in another spirit."

"But why should it be destroyed, this beautiful thing? It is not evil, and all your genius, your very life, have gone into the making of it."

THE MAN WHO BURNT HIS CRUCIFIX

Kernahan raised himself a little, and spoke eagerly; his eyes were fixed upon me, and I listened, fascinated by him as I had been from the first.

"I'll tell you why you must burn it," he said; "or, I'll try to tell you. You know what happened last night—I suppose it was last night, it seems a lifetime ago. You don't know, pray God you may never know, the darkness in which my soul lay then. I had denied the only power that could save it.

"When I burnt the crucifix I defied the power of Christ. Of course, a crucifix is only an emblem; it has not power in itself. But the thing signified has the power—and I defied that.

"I refused to see misery, to look at disease and death, to face their very existence. I would not believe in a God who Himself felt that misery as only divine nature could feel it. I wanted the old joyful gods back. Ah! I was blind. I would not see. And the misery was there in every street of the town, in every hospital, in every workhouse—everywhere—everywhere—crying out for a God who has conquered death and disease and pain—not by ignoring them, but by suffering all things Himself."

"And the people you saw—you thought you saw—last night?"

"They had come to me for comfort—and I could not give it to them. The emblem of their help was the crucifix I had burned. And their need became mine. God abandoned me to the misery of a world without God. There is no time in hell—a moment there can hold a lifetime of horror. I can't describe to you the state of a soul adrift from God. If you had ever known the agony of drowning, you'd know in the physical sense what I suffered. It was like that when—when——"

He paused, and I knew the rest.

"When I left you?" I said.

"Yes—but don't blame yourself—perhaps I'd taken God from you, too."

"And then Lawson came?"

"I suppose so. I was drowning, and a hand took mine and saved me. I'm sure I made an effort to reach it, that my will

turned to the divine will. Even God can't save a man who won't be saved."

Kernahan's eyes blazed with all the old life and joy that had been his when I first knew him. "And now I know," he said, "that the greatest God is the God Whose face had no beauty 'that we should desire Him,' and yet Apollo is not so beautiful, nor Mars so brave, nor Pan so mighty as He."

"But why should He make you burn your beautiful cup?" I asked, for that dismayed me.

"No, He doesn't command it, but—but I wish it. Oh! Jack, you must help me. I burnt His symbol; I defied Him. My sacrifice to Him shall be the most beautiful thing I have. I know the idea of it is indestructible; that is His, too; but the form of it shall be burnt."

"Wait till Lawson comes back," I said.

"No—no. I may not live till then; he knows it. Jack, you and Lawson must be friends all your life long. But now do as I tell you, burn the cup."

I knew I must obey him. I knew that this was the finest action he had ever done. I made up the fire till it burned fiercely. Then I put the carved cup upon it. It seemed to me that I officiated at same great significant sacrifice.

I knelt by the fire watching the beautiful thing burn and crumble. At the last a little blue flame leapt up round the embers of the carving. The sacrifice was consummated.

I turned towards Kernahan. He was lying back amongst the pillows. His face was peaceful, so peaceful that I thought he slept. The feet of the crucified Christ of Lawson's crucifix were pressed to his lips. I saw that he was dead.

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There was silence for a while when my friend had finished his story, and I heard again the roar of the water over the weir, and the calling of the corncrakes, and a little rustle of wind-blown leaves.

"And Lawson?" I asked.

THE MAN WHO BURNT HIS CRUCIFIX

“Lawson is my dearest friend. He is head clerk in the same office where he worked long ago—he is still a Philistine. But I believe it is true that the nature of Christ is manifested in certain men and women now in our own day. I believe that they through His power have a strength we rightly call super-natural, and that evil things know them and tremble. Such a man is Lawson.”

He rose, and I followed him into the house.