

Wishing the Readers of the Catholic Courier & Journal
A Merry Xmas and Happy New Year

ESTABLISHED 1913

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Professor Jackman's Secret

By G. C. HESELTINE
In "The Far East"

Those who remember the sensation caused in the early nineties, at the end of 1892 to be exact, by the sudden retirement of the brilliant young scientist, Professor Henry Jackman, F. R. S., at the height of his career, will recall that no adequate explanation was ever forthcoming. Despite the persistence with which the press tried to solve the mystery, the Professor himself doggedly refused to be drawn on the subject or give any hint of his real son for such a sudden and totally unexpected abandonment of his work at Cambridge. Consequently, since no one who knew him could throw any light at all on the affair, it soon faded from the public mind. I had myself forgotten all about it until it was vividly recalled to me by finding Professor Jackman in a base hospital during the South African war, very seriously wounded. It was my privilege to read to him regularly during the long illness preceding his death; and since he honored me with an intimate friendship, I begged him to tell me the secret and allow me to make it public when I thought fit. He assured me that there was really no secret at all, but that the story of his change of life was far too sacred for him to expose to cheap publicity. And in any case, he said, no one but his friends would have believed him, and the rest of the world, at least the non-Catholic world, would have merely scoffed.

Hence it is that I am able to tell his story now as nearly as possible as he told it to me.

It will be recalled that such few details as the newspapers were able to give of this great man who was so naturally reticent about his private life showed that he was a self-made man of humble origin. At an early age he ran away from his home in the remote Dorset village of Wayham and in picking up a living as a new-boy, errand-boy, window-cleaner and so on, he had drifted from Manchester to Crewe and finally to London. He had always been fond of books and he was never happier than when he was browsing on second-hand bookstalls. It was thus that he became acquainted with the great outburst of freethought and rationalism which was at that time revealing such impetus from the scientific world.

Beside The Crib

Thy little hands against my heart
Are as strong hands to bind me,
So tiny and so frail Thou art,
And come so far to find me.

How soft about Thy baby brow
The tendrilled hair is twining,
Close may I lean above Thee now,
Since Thou hast hid Thy shining.

My eyes run down with tears to see
Thy upturned face beguiling,
And rapture in the soul of me
Is fed upon Thy smiling.

If Thou wert not so little, Lord,
How should I come so near Thee?
For thinking on Thy thunder word
I could not choose but fear Thee.

Thy saints have cried aloud to Thee
In terror of Thy smiting,
Lest Thy sharp spear of equity
Thou seize for sin's requiting.

But when I see Thy nestling feet,
Thy dimpled fingers moving,
My spirit laughs to find Thee sweet,
My heart is faint with loving.

O God Who are my Brotherkin,
O Child Who are my Father,
O Lamb and Shepherd leading in
The strayinglings Thou dost gather.

How may Thy slender shoulders bear
The weight of all my sinning?
How wilt Thou take on Thee the care
And pain of my soul's winning?

—Blanche Mary Kelly
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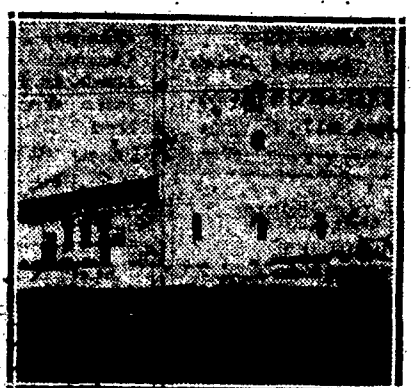
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In the public eye from about 1885 to 1892. It was generally known in academic circles, of course, that he was engaged on a new and very important work, and those more intimate with him knew that he had amassed an enormous amount of important evidence, historical and physiological, and somewhat of a miracle. His Honorary Doctorate at Oxford and his Fellowship of the Royal Society were the rewards for some of the very important research papers which he published as offshoots from his main task. They were purely academic and bore little trace of his earlier controversial life. He was saving his ammunition for the final storming of the fortress of Faith.

Slowly and laboriously he sought evidence against miracles. First one group of miraculous phenomena and then another he made to come under the axe of his theory, which developed and gained strength with every new discovery. So that it was towards the end of 1892, when he was barely thirty-seven, that he began to gain a sense of his coming conquest and triumph. He had worked to the point of breakdown on at least half a dozen occasions, and had been saved only by a complete abandonment of his work and a prolonged sea trip. Other than that, the only breaks from work which he had permitted himself had been the week-end visits to the quiet comfort of Wayham to see his father and mother.

For although he had run away from home to escape what he felt to be the tyranny of his parents, he had always retained a few faint memories of his childhood, which were at least soothing to recall when he was fatigued with overwork. And after all, success and fame gave him the right opportunity to forgive generously any wrongs which he felt he had suffered in his boyhood.

As a matter of fact, the very eventful years of his youth, his times of multifarious odd jobs and no jobs, privation and adventure in the footsteps of a great city, then his heterogeneous reading and his studies and examinations, had left him but very few memories of his early home life. Even they were vague and somewhat intangible. But as he told me, he could clearly remember a dear old spinster aunt, and coconut oil never failed to revive the sight of her in his mind. He could remember how a crossbred sheep dog, Tip, used to lie sleeping always across the same corner of the hearthrug. He could remember being in church, apparently at night, and once looking up when everybody else was bowing down, and seeing the priest in white hold aloft on his two hands a little baby—though he now guessed, of course, that that was a trick of the imagination, association of ideas and so on. And he could remember very vividly the little currant cakes which his granny always had baking hot from the oven whenever he went to see her.

Yet these memories, although all equally real when they drifted across his mind at rare intervals, were in a strange way unreal to him—set in the past like a fly in amber, almost forcing him at times to wonder how they came to be there.

At the time of the event about which there was so much mystery, the Professor was at his rooms in College when all but the town-folk had left Cambridge for the Christmas vacation. Even the few undergraduates who had stayed on to cram and recover lost ground, had at last packed and gone, leaving him quite alone, deep in the final stages of his treatise on the fallacy of miracles—the work which he and the rest of the Rationalist world had not the slightest doubt would kill all faith in miracles and revealed religion beyond hope of a resurrection. He was glad to be alone because he would be undisturbed and he always worked best in silence. The only sound he could hear from his study was the occasional chirp of a sparrow in the ivy outside his window and the sharp splashing of broken water at irregular intervals as the gusty wind blew handfuls of spray from the fountain in the court on to the rim of its basin.

(Continued on Page Twelve)