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Tony

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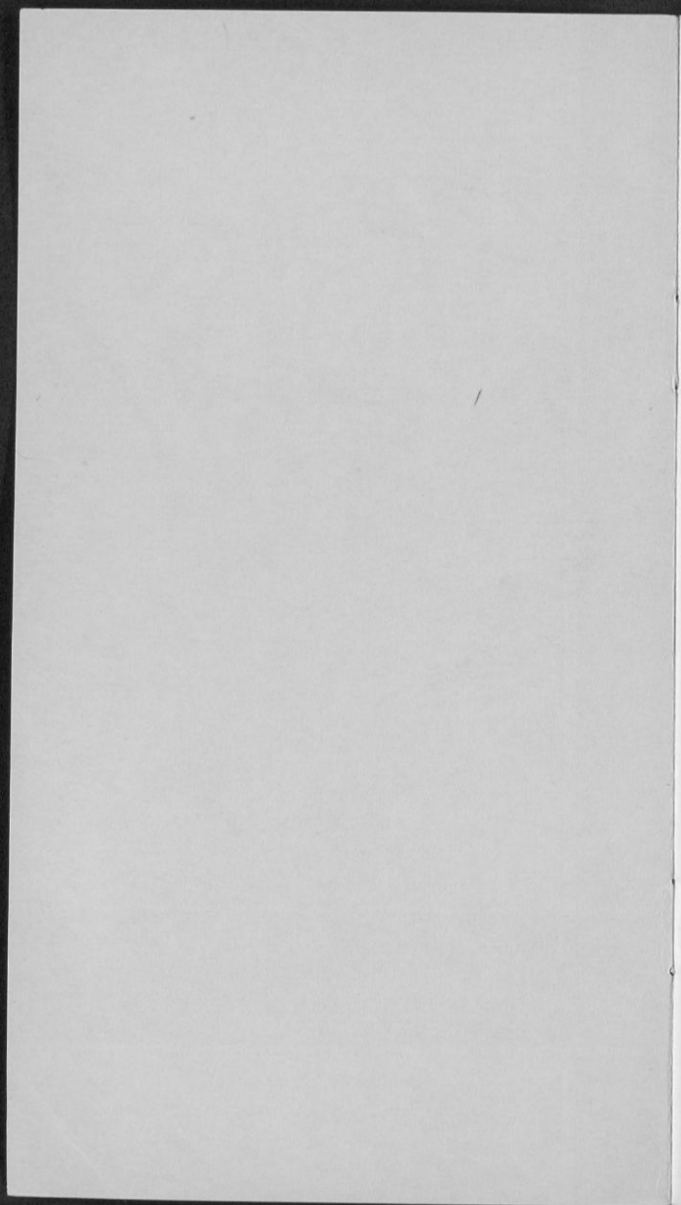
# Tony

by

THOMAS B. CHETWOOD S. J.

*THE QUEEN'S WORK*

3742 West Pine Boulevard  
ST. LOUIS, MO.



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### INTRODUCTORY NOTE

This story is one of a series intended to set forth imaginatively the influence of Christ's *human* presence amongst us. Each story is religious fiction, but in its handling and setting it deals with familiar flesh-and-blood personages and situations.

No one can question that the Eucharistic dwelling here of the Son of God and the Son of Man is far from casual and purposeless. How far men and women are influenced by the nearness of that Heart which beats incessantly beneath the white veil can only be conjectured. The author has made stories out of the conjecture.

May they stimulate as well as entertain.



# Tony

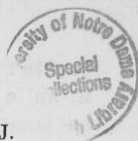
By Thomas B. Chetwood, S. J.

TONY was a thorough "mick." One glance at him would have confirmed this conviction in those who coined the word to designate his class. The origin of the word may have had something to do with racial or national snobbery, but when I was a child it had come to mean merely one who came from the vile and unsightly quarter of a great city, who was extremely dirty and extremely dangerous to all who were decently dressed and carried anything worth "swiping."

## A Neighborhood Terror

Tony was certainly all this. Though only ten years old, he had already "smashed" four velvet-trousered "guys" under the very eyes of their nurses. This had been on four different occasions. On the first two he had escaped scot-free. On the third the nurse had overtaken him; for the victim of his assault, screaming and bleeding, had clung to him in spite of repeated uppercuts and "knee-shots" in the stomach. The avenging nurse had slapped him over the head and given up in sheer despair of making any impression.

On the fourth occasion he had sustained a long chase and been finally captured by an irate and energetic father, and had then, under the strongest arm he had ever known, been brought back kicking and taken into a room with a carpet "so thick that you



couldn't hear nothin' when you walked on it, an' a lotta pichurs, some uv 'em hangin' an' some uv 'em standin' on V-shaped things, an' a marble shelf fixed up wid a grand clock an' a lotta things like a pawnbroker's window."

How severe his punishment would have been, it is hard to say. For when his captor, retaining his overpowering grip, had bawled for somebody to bring a stick, a woman "dressed like a Sunday-school teacher" (Tony's only experience of nicely clad females) had appeared and exclaimed: "What utter nonsense, George, to bring that filthy little thing in here! He smells most intolerably and you'll cover yourself and this whole place with vermin."

So Tony was thrown out the front door and, with the aid of an impelling shoe, landed in a heap at the foot of a short flight of steps.

### Foraging

He was somewhat jarred, but free. He picked himself up and ran. It was wiser to have a generous distance between himself and an arm like that. After a while he slowed down to a walk, then to an easy shamble. The gutter was the most interesting place for him now. There was always the elusive chance that a piece of money would look up at him out of the oily slime. He picked up the cap of a ginger-ale bottle, then a cigarette coupon, which he dried on his shirt. The stub of a cigarette was the next prey of his searching fingers. It was



too damp to smoke, so into the pocket of his trousers it went for future use.

Before any find worth while rewarded him, he was greeted by a friendly voice, and a hand caught his shoulder.

"'Lo, Tony," said the voice.

"'Lo, Bud," he answered, without much enthusiasm.

"Feel like er napple?"

"Sure. Where?"

The answer named a street near the river.

"Where's they any loose apples down there?"

"Ole Gormer's. The wire cage on one uv his barrels is busted."

### Enough for Two

That was enough. So the two started forth on their robber's errand. They were soon at their destination. Gormer's was a grocer's store on the corner. There, sure enough, was the barrel with the wire screen on the top broken. Into the aperture went the arm of Tony, while the faithful Bud mounted guard. Bud grew a little tired of waiting. He turned and exclaimed,

"Gimme a show, will yer?" Then on second thought he queried,

"Have yer got enough fer two?"

This roused Tony. He stood upright.

"You take a chance," he said. "I'll lay yer kiggy." (That is approved argot for "I will stand sentry.")

"Didn'tcher git more'n one?" the other asked as his arm disappeared.

"No. Only one," Tony unblushingly lied. There were three apples stowed in the recesses of his ragged trousers.

### Sally

All seemed to be going well. But there was an eye inside the store window that at this moment caught the unfortunate Bud in the act of pilfering. It was Sally Oates, aged twelve, and the hereditary foe of the gang. She saw him through the interstices of a great cardboard sign, an Arab on horseback proclaiming the triumph of a certain brand of cigarettes.

She went straight to old Gormer.

"Kid out there has his hand in your apple barrel."

By the blessing of the gallant cardboard Arab, Gormer couldn't see from where he stood. With a muffled "Vere?" he rushed out, and Sally with him to see the fun. The watching Tony saw him coming. Tony was standing a safe distance from the theft.

"Quick! Cheese it!" he cried.

The warning reached the trained ears in time. Under the boxes and barrels that made old Gormer's table of display, dived Bud; and there he would have lain safe but...

### Influence of a Nickel

The irate grocer, with his informant at his heels, drew near swiftly.

"'Tain't him," said Sally. "It was another feller."

"Vere's he gone?"

"I swear he was there a minute ago. Hand in that barrel."

Gormer stood by the barrel now, fingering the rent in the wire guard. He turned and fixedly regarded Tony.

"'Tain't him," said Sally. "Bigger guy'n him."

Gormer's eyes narrowed.

"Looker here, sonny. What was de poy's name what cr-rook de apple? an' I give yer a niggle."

"'Gimme it if I tell yer where he's hidin'?"

As an answer the tradesman drew the coin from a jingling pocket and offered it to Tony. The boy advanced and took the coin and felt his other arm held tight while the donor said:

"Vere is he hidin'? Show me now."

Tony indicated with a gesture the place under the boxes. At an injunction of "Look, Sally, vill yer?" the female informer stooped and cried out at once:

"Sure. There he is."

Tony was released at once and made off. Before he had gone far, he heard screams in the intervals of loud thwacks (probably from a barrel stave). He did not turn and look. He kept on putting distance between himself and danger. In a small way, but indisputably, he was a coward and traitor fairly proved.

## A Flood

Tony was now pausing by the side of a hydrant. He had devoured one of the stolen apples, core and all. There was not the least bitterness in it. He began on another, and in the satisfaction of the juicy pulp he gathered energy and ambition.

Someone had left the heavy top of the hydrant open and Tony saw the handle of the turncock. He held his apple in his teeth and applied his hands to the turning handle. It gave. He turned and turned and turned, and presently a great gush of water drove the refuse of the street into the opposite gutter and reached, foaming and rippling, the sidewalk on the other side.

No one noticed the small boy who scuttled away. People thought, as they made a wide detour out of reach, that it was some freak of the waterworks man flushing out the pipe. It was astonishing for what a long time the gallons upon gallons were allowed to waste before someone turned the water off.

## The Fateful Emmings

Tony now stood before a fire-alarm box, the door of which had been left open. Here was the best chance yet for a thrill. The clanging, ground-shaking engines were a delight to see. He thought this as his grimy hand reached towards the hook which gives the alarm.

We cannot help reflecting that this unregenerate bit of humanity would pull the

keystone out of the arch of civilization if his small hands could reach it.

This time he was intercepted. A hand caught his hand and a voice accosted him,

"Lay off on that! Kid Beazel caught doing that the other day, an' y'oughta see the lamming he got."

Tony desisted and looked up at the face of the protector of law and order. It was the face of a lad about fourteen years old and therefore belonging to the hero class for Tony.

### The Slums

"'Lo, Emmings," was all he said. Then, with folded arms, he slumped into a position of waiting for further orders. The other evidently thought this "kid" worth more than a passing reprehension.

"Come on down and have a swim off the scow. You can swim, can't you?"

"Sure," was Tony's only answer, and the two started off together.

The street leading to the river lay between towering tenements, their fronts all covered with fire-escapes on which families in all forms of slatternliness took their pleasure. There were large-eyed babies kicking on dirty pallets. There were children at the uproarious age, whose wranglings came down to the street below and swelled the chorus of their companions on the curbstones. Stout women whisked in and out of the windows, and a few old crones sat mowing and meditating. There was not a

man on any of the hanging porches. They were elsewhere.

Tony and Emmings held on their way through all the teeming avenue of life. Nothing made the least impression on them. The shrill cries, whether of quarrel or of laughter, were too familiar to make them pause or listen.

### The Unfinished Church

Finally their steps took them by a structure that a strange tourist might have paused to inquire about. It was evidently the beginning of a building that had been carried to an initial stage and then roofed in the hope that some later day would see the resumption of construction. It was a large basement that had to be entered by a flight of steps. The roof, which rose only a few feet above the sidewalk, was made tight with tar and pebbles. A cross that rose from the near end of the roof proclaimed the structure a church.

But it was very unlike the sublime ministers that religion can show in near lands and in far. The wretched thing would not have been worth mentioning if it were not for the fact that Tony, who never seemed so much as to glance at it, had not tugged at his ragged cap as he passed. There was nothing devout in the air with which he did it. In fact a peculiar sullenness was written on his face. His companion caught the act, and the following conversation ensued.

"Whadger do that for, Tony? Sign of the tribe er somethin', ain't it?"

"Tribe nothin'!" was all Tony answered, with the same sullen air.

But the other was evidently curious and would not be put off.

"I ain't laughin'," he said. "They's lots a people that do the same. Tell me what yer do it for, will yer? Somethin' like politics, ain't it?"

### The Waterfront

"Politics nuthin'!" was all that Tony vouchsafed.

"Is the priest lookin' outa some winder to see if yer do it?" Emmings was obsessed with the demon of curiosity.

"Nah," came the answer, this time with a note of disgust.

They were walking on the street that fronts the river. Soon they would be at their destination. Emmings stopped squarely in front of his companion.

"Looket here, Tony. This whole thing has me guessin'. I seen a whole lotta guys do what you done. Every time I asks 'em the reason, they shut up an grouch jest like you. I asted my old man about it once, an' he tole me that youse blokes wuz brought up to figger that there wuz someone livin' in the church that could look out and see yer. Zat so? Say no if it ain't so; and if yer don't say nuthin' I'll take it fer yes."

"Lay off on the talk, will yer, please,

Emmings?" The smaller lad's tone was earnest with pleading.

"Yer ain't said no," the other answered, with a shrewd look.

At this moment there came a distraction in the shape of a collision with something that brought them both up short. It was a fig vender's pushcart. They had not noticed it, so complete had been their preoccupation.

### "Here's a Nickel"

All was now forgotten but the situation in hand. A number of the figs with which the cart was high piled had been shaken to the ground. The vender, who looked like a Greek, at once stooped to recover his property. Emmings now nudged Tony,

"Listen. I'll dive under the cart an' make out to be grabbin' at the stuff in the gutter. He'll come crawlin' after me, and you get busy'n nail a pocketful."

"Naw," replied Tony sadly. "Here's a nickel. Buy some off him."

The other was too surprised to do anything but seize the coin and purchase a bag of the much-prized sweetmeats. His mouth was too busy for further questioning for some time to come.

\* \* \*

They both stood on the deck of the timber scow. They were dripping from a couple of plunges. The river water, though rather yellow, was certainly refreshing. The last fig was swallowed. And the first eagerness



of the plunge was dulled by experience. Emmings had grown thoughtful again.

"Say, Tony," he questioned, "why d'ger shell out the nickel that time stead er grabbin' the wop's stuff?"

"Cause yer got me feelin' funny from that fool talk a yours." And Tony took a running dive into the tawny stream.

His companion paused for a moment thoughtfully. "Zat so?" he uttered, and then he followed his partner.

\* \* \*

"Whose is he? Do yer know, Emmings?"

This was a whole hour later. The two boys had had plunge after plunge into the water, which, though it reeked with the drainage of a great city, was yet their chief joy in life. They had been lying somewhat exhausted on the deck of the scow, when a tiny mangy-looking kitten ran out from round the corner of the cabin into full view. The poor little creature was the object of the question from Tony, who had risen and caught up the squirming, clawing thing.

### An Unwary Cat

"Doan' know," answered Emmings. "Looks like the one Tappy Skillen bought offen Chick Puffer fer four cents."

"Mean little skunk," remarked Tony as he watched his captive. "Scratches the hand off yer." Tony did not stop with these words, but reënforced his displeasure with scurrility to suit the lips of a pirate. He was

only ten years old. What was there in him that the poison of the slums had not touched?

His next remark will carry him lower than anything he has said or done yet—at least in the estimation of some moralists.

"I'm gonna tie a brick to its tail and drop it in an' see the bubbles."

A brick was soon secured and a bit of string. The executioner's heart was further steeled by sundry scratches that he received from the victim, which seemed to scent danger. Then he advanced to the edge of the scow with the bundle in his hands. The only remark that came from the reclining Emmings during the preparation was, "Better not let Tappy see yer. His big brother runs a nawful hard bunch."

#### Raw Material of Criminals

Those who read will exclaim with horror that such an insensible little bit of humanity as this Tony is unworthy the title human. He is not only selfish, cowardly, filthy, but, to crown all, wantonly cruel, finding the pleasure of play in the drowning of a helpless animal. All that they say is true. Only let them not say that he is a creation of fiction, that his like is not legion on that outer edge of society where fearful want and sullen discontent make criminals in the cradle. Tony was not even material for a sturdy criminal. He was rather the stuff out of which the degenerate tools of criminals are made.

It is true that Tony had gone to church for a whole year and had made his First Communion. This had been under the spurring of Father Noonan, an energetic young curate who had since been made a pastor in a distant place. It was only two years ago, this First Communion and all that went before it, but it seemed a long lifetime to the boy now. Will not some fleeting memory of that holy past hold his hand now and save a bit of innocent brute life? Never a one. The boy's face looks sodden and coarse, and his eyes narrow upon the wretched deed. He holds the brick in one hand and the squirming kitten in the other over the swirling water.

But the forces of humanity are not idle. Up from behind the bulwarks of a neighboring scow rises a form, and a voice shrieks out, "Don't you drown that kitten, yer bum yer! It's mine."

### Watching the Bubbles

It was Tappy Skillen. His cry was vain. Tony glanced up contemptuously; then he let the burden in his hands go and gloated on the furious, struggling thing down below and on the bubbles as long as there were any to see. Then he went silent and calm back to his resting place beside Emmings.

Retribution was not long delayed. Scarcely five minutes later a half-dozen heads could be seen making their way swiftly through the water to the place where Tony lay so secure. Swiftly they drew themselves

up the side of the scow, six rawboned bodies in the fulness of strong boyhood.

It was Skillen and his gang. They were called The Swedes, from the origin of the greater number of them. Tony was only conscious of a shadow between himself and the sun, when he was yanked to his feet and a harsh voice demanded, "Whadger drown the kid's kitten fer, yer dirty little prune?"

### Slimy River

The scow on which this drama was taking place was deep laden with heavy timber. It swung from the pier by chain cables and made a v-shaped space in the water between its inner side and the pier. Here was formed a kind of backwater, thick with slime and refuse. Water-rats splashed in and out of it from the hollows between the great stones.

Tony was now dragged towards the inner side of the scow. His struggles were worse than futile. Two big boys straddled the v-shaped space, one foot on the side of the scow and the other on a protruding stone of the pier wall. Then the offender was let down by the heels headfirst into the slimy, choking river. Once, twice, they dipped him. Then they drew him up coughing and retching, his eyes starting from his head, his face covered with slime.

They did not realize how near he was to exhaustion. He had been swimming about for a couple of hours and he was below the average in ruggedness. He was habitually

undernourished, too, in spite of the food he managed to steal.

They held him in their strong hands as easily as he had held the kitten, and glowered at him.

### Torture

"Make him say something, Skillen," suggested one of the Swedes.

"Yeah," answered Skillen. "Say this, kid: 'I'm a dirty yellow-faced Dago an' a Republican an' a Protestant'."

Tony hesitated, more from lack of breath than courage, and in a trice he was inverted once more over the black water.

"Kick this leg when yer ready to say it," howled Skillen down at him just before he lowered the victim's head. "An' not this leg," added the Swede who assisted.

He was hardly down a second, it seemed, when there came a violent kicking of the limb that Skillen held. A boy was drawn up whose purpling lips belched forth first a volume of water and then the words demanded: "I'm a dirty yellow-faced Dago an' a Republican an' a Protestant."

"He's easy," exclaimed Skillen in disgust. "Go and get the kid brother. He'll give him somethin' more to say."

### Painful Interlude

One of the party went to get the little fellow from the neighboring scow, and Tony, limp and weak, was allowed to sit on the bulwark and wait for further torture.

The captors wandered round the deck. They knew Tony could not escape. Then Emmings drew near him. He had been a meek onlooker all the time, thanking his stars that he himself was safe.

"Listen, Tony. Tell me what I ast yer before an' I'll swap yer free wid a pen-knife I found an' a wire an' a little looking-glass."

"Whatcher wanner know?" answered Tony between gulps and gasps of stomach and lungs together.

"I mean about that church where yer tipped yer hat. Go ahead tell me who's in there or what. I have a turtle I'll give 'em if the other stuff ain't enough ter let yer go."

To Emmings' astonishment Tony was in tears. Grief was added to his other discomforts. It was not a dignified grief. He stamped his foot as fiercely as his feeble little body could.

#### Can't Say It

"Whadger bring that up fer?" he bawled. "Now yer got me thinkin' uv it again. An' if they—an' if they ast me ter—ter say somethin', I can't say it. Then I'll have ter be dr—drownded in that mucky water." He burst into tears again and hugged his trembling body in an agony of apprehension.

Emmings' eyes opened with wonder.

"Wot's the thing yer can't say?"

"'I'm a Protestant'."

"Why can't yer say that? I'd say me

mother was black ter git outa the trouble you're in."

"I c—c—can't say it."

"Why?" The word was keenly prolonged by Emmings' mystification.

The dripping, blue-lipped urchin stamped his foot again. "'Cause Protestants say, 'cordin' ter Father Noonan, that they ain't no one there."

"Ain't no one where?" queried Emmings.

"In the church, livin' there."

"Livin' there? Yer mean all the time?"

Tony nodded. There was terror in his eyes, out of which he was trying to rub some of the slime of the river.

"Livin' there all the time!" repeated Emmings slowly.

"Yer don't mean the priest, do yer? Father what's-his-name?"

Tony only shook his head. Emmings grew thoughtful for a moment. Then he raised his head.

"This all has me guessin'. But anyhow, if there is someone there, how's it goin' ter hurt him fer you to say he ain't there? An' how's he goin' ter know it, anyway?"

### The Test

There was no time to deal with this theological difficulty; for the diminutive Tappy had now been secured and hauled up the side of the scow and was now advancing against the enemy who wronged him. Surrounded by his avengers, he faced Tony.

"Think yer fresh, don't yer?" And he spitefully slapped Tony on the neck and with bare toes swung a kick against his shins. Tony hardly felt it. His body was numb.

"Tell him ter say somethin', Tappy, an' we'll duck him till he says it." This was from the big brother.

"I'm a sneak, I'm a Nigger, I'm a Sheeny," commanded Tappy volubly.

Almost before the words were out of his mouth Tony had repeated them, "I'm a Nigger, I'm a sneak, I'm a Sheeny."

Only a marvelous Providence knows why the next word was suggested to the mind of the child exulting in his vengeance. But so it was.

"I'm a Protestant," he commanded.

Tony's lips trembled. He said nothing. Hereupon Emmings stepped in.

"Don't make him say that," he pleaded. "He do'n' wanner. Look. I'll give yer a turtle an' a pen-knife an' a—"

"G'wan, mind yer own bizness." This was from the elder Skillen and was accompanied by a swinging blow to the side of Emmings' head that sent the boy reeling out of the way.

### Martyrdom

Then the executioners got to work on Tony. Down once more into the water they lowered him. They did not notice how limp his body was, save for a few feeble twitchings. If they had, they would have been



frightened. After a long, long immersion they hauled out his head and Skillen cried down to him:

"Say it, yer nut. 'I'm a Protestant!'" Not a sound came from below.

"Duck 'im again," cried little Tappy, whose face was ugly with gloating vengeance.

Down he went again; and before he went, the elder Skillen called out:

"Wiggle this leg when y'ere ready."

Inside of that little strangling body down there wonderful things were happening. They were happening far faster than can be set down in words; yet, with each happening, great eons, as it were, were crossed like the distances crossed by the beam of vision in a mighty telescope that leaps from star to star with ease.

The basis for all the happening, the staff that gave him the leaping power, was the resolution of Tony's little will. His will had been so feeble and so faltering before, so cowardly, so shrinking from the smallest obligation that for it to buckle itself into any resolution whatever was indeed marvelous. It had been so sordid, so soiled by degenerate pleasures, like bruising the faces of velvet-trousered boys or, even worse, drowning a defenseless kitten, that it was marvelous indeed that anything high or noble could rally it. But it did rally, and on such a simple proposition; "I can't say Y'ere not there. I can't say Y'ere not there."

## The Agony

First came the terrible desire for air. It lasted for ages on ages. It racked every inch of him up to the feet that were held above him. Then, when the ages were done, he came breasting through. "I can't say Y'ere not there." Then came the rush of water into his lungs, whole rivers on rivers of it, that filled his body to bursting, especially his ears. If they would only burst, there would be relief from this straining agony. Something must give way; the top of his head will soon go—something—

Shouldering up through the agony came that resolution, "I can't say Y'ere not there." The strange thing about the resolution was that, though it was his own, it seemed to come from another and to fill his soul and body with a strength that was in no way his own. It filled him and kept rigid the leg that Skillen held.

We cannot go further as to what happened down below there. If we did, it would all be mystical guessing. We are brought up short by a wall that the strongest lights of science are baffled by. One thing is sure, though. Tony came up to that wall with the words that trembled in their first saying, but grew stronger at the end, till they trumpeted like a battle clarion: "I can't say Y'ere not there." And all the petty sordidness had slipped from him—the thieving, the cowardice, the cruelty and the scurrile vileness—as the shadows slip from the hills in the growing dawn.

"I can't feel a wiggle in this leg. He has

wind like a water rat." This was from the thoughtful Skillen.

He had no time for further observations, for the shrill cry of "Cheese it! Cops!" was sounded. He let the leg go. The Swede with him did likewise and they made off with all speed. It was the water police. Swimming *au naturel* was against the law.

\* \* \*

### Testimony

Ten long years have now gone by since Tony's drowning. There is a neatly dressed woman who goes up and down the stairs of a big tenement, one of those by which Tony and Emmings walked on their way to the river. The woman knows the family troubles of every floor and has stitched clothes for innumerable babies. The summit of her achievement is the appearance of the men as the evening hour deepens. Their voices make a pleasing note in the voices on the fire-escape.

"She's Eyetalian. An opree singer once. Her'n her man didn't git on well. They lived apart. She was awful proud. But when the boy was drowned, she hunted the man back an' nursed him until his death. She had the priest marry them. Doncher tell no one that." All this was furtive rumor about Tony's mother.

Her own account was somewhat different. It was very brief and told to someone who won her confidence.

### Tony's Favors

"It was the face of my dead boy with the beauty of heaven on it. That made me another woman on the spot. Then came the story that the Swede boys told me. You've heard that. They were trembling and frightened. I told them not to be afraid; that Tony would take care of them. It's marvelous how he has taken care of them. There's Andersen, one of the most respected young men, and Barsen and Sotik and Parmer. And Skillen too. He's not Swedish. They are all the prop and pride of Father O'Brien."

The most efficient helper Tony's mother had was Sally Oates. "Yes, I knew him," she said. "But I never thought I'd cry as I did when I saw him in the coffin. I was an awful wild girl then."

Emmings became a Catholic and then a priest, and is now working in the West Indies.

Bud is the most faithful of sextons for Father O'Brien. His oft-repeated commentary on the past is, "God made a saint of Tony in a day. It'll be a lifework with me." He had developed into a very silent man.

### Old Gormer Speaks

Even old Gormer, in a white shirt and well-brushed black tuxedo, invariably present in the same pew at high mass every Sunday—even he has a place in this epilogue.

"Yes, I became a Catholic, for reasons

that ain't nobody's bizness only mine. My mudder was a Lutheran—an awful fine God-prayin' woman till she died. No one can't say nothin' against her. Nor I can't neither. But—well—I mind my own bizness. Did I know Tony? Yes, I did. No. I can better say I tort I know this boy until he vuz lyin' dead. Then God take dat beautiful dead boy's finger" (here Gormer's voice would tremble a little) "an' shake it at me an' say, 'Gormer, dere are some things you don't think about. Nuh?' Wuz he once a bad boy? No. Why would I say he wuz a bad boy? He wuz shust all the time hungry. Who ain't hungry when he's hungry?" This was the substance of Gormer's testimony.

The strangest testimony of all came from Lester Bradly. He was a police lieutenant. He got the job from civil life. He belonged to a very exclusive family with influence. He was a graduate of one of the most aristocratic eastern universities and remained a fine athlete even up to middle life; a rattling good sportsman too.

### In the Morgue

"I was inspecting the morgue when the boy's body was brought in. I never would have believed that after at least a couple of hours in the slimy river there could be left such a pallid beauty. I'm not a poet. At least I don't know that I am. But I would put the message that came to me somewhat after this fashion: 'There simply must be, without any possibility of question, a

life of calm vision and understanding when this life is done.' That's what came to me from those closed eyes and those silent lips. Nobody, with all kinds of insisting and proving, could ever have told me the thing so plainly."

Lester applied himself with great energy to the work of identification. "I am somehow sure I saw him before," he said.

Inquiries along the waterfront soon secured the story of Skillen's gang. It was told with gasps of frightened self-accusation. "We didn't know he wuz tired out an' suckin' in water. Honest to God we didn't."

Nothing could have been more unlikely than prosecution for homicide. "Nonsense," said Lester Bradly at the very suggestion of it. "It's nothing but the give-and-take of these water-rats. It's going on all the time. We should have to hang half the East Side for murder."

What the lieutenant particularly sought and found was the name and address of the victim so that the body could be sent to his home. He also found the shirt and trousers which made up the entire wardrobe of Tony.

It was strange how these garments affected Lieutenant Bradly. He held them up. "I knew it," he shouted. "There's the rent in the shoulder that I made with my own hands. Put clothes and boy together and I recognize him for the poor little beggar that I collared for abusing Ashton. Ashton's my one and only."

Ashton Bradley, the heir-apparent of the Bradlys, died a couple of years after his encounter with Tony. He was always a frail child. His mother and father nursed him to the end. After the end came, the father said very tenderly, "Helen, I'll bet you Tony called him. Think of the friends they'll be out yonder."

Mr. Bradley is now the one "swell" parishioner of Father O'Brien, whose church is no longer a basement, but a shining, arresting jewel of chaste Gothic. The only thing about it that is not immaculate is the front entry, which is constantly soiled by the footprints of those that go and come all day long.

"It is perfectly extraordinary the hold that my husband's religion has on him since his conversion to Romanism." This is Mrs. Bradley's testimony. She often goes to mass with her husband, though she has remained so far a High-Church Anglican. "She'll come over some day. You see if she doesn't," is the knowing comment of the aged female parishioners.

### The Real Hero

We must close the list of witnesses. Otherwise the ever widening circles of testimony would take in the whole proletariat of this great republic.

What we must point out in conclusion is that it is not the poor little waif Tony that is the real hero of this story. It is the Power that made of him, all at once, from the weakest of reeds a flaming firebrand of

testimony to the things that are but are seen not. It is not an impersonal, but a very personal, power of the One who dwells and listens and watches with an intensely human Heart in the church day and night. How could he live there and remain idle while the bickering and the roar of human life go on all around him?

It is He of whom Tony said, with strength that he got from Him, "I can't say Y'ere not there."



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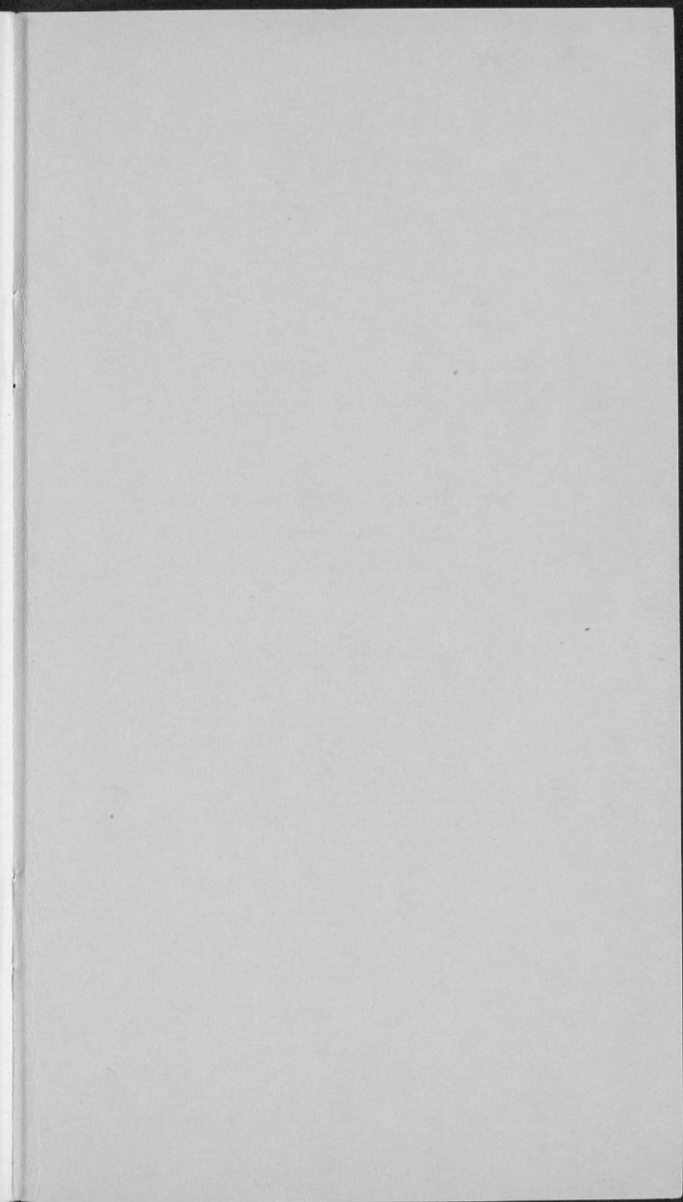
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