

## SENTIMENTAL

MRS. Seemsby-Gore liked one to have a title, so when she went to the Pyrenees she made up her mind to look up Miss Fairleigh—the Honourable Miss Fairleigh, she would remind you, Lord Fielden's daughter. If you said 'Ah!' vaguely, because you didn't know Miss Fairleigh and had never set eyes on Fielden, she was tempted to write you down an outsider.

Miss Fairleigh—'Dubbin' to her intimates, though Mrs. Seemsby-Gore didn't know that—was staying in Lourdes while she put in a month of service at the Piscines. Consequently she wasn't at home when Mrs. Seemsby-Gore called. However, she returned the call the following evening just before dinner, explained the situation and said she would be free to go for an expedition into the mountains two days later. There would be no big pilgrimage in, she said, so she wouldn't be missed at the Piscines.

Miss Fairleigh's talk of Piscines and Pilgrimages bewildered the other lady, who wasn't a Catholic and thought that Catholics, with rare exceptions such as Miss Fairleigh, weren't good form.

'Do I "see" Lourdes?' she asked doubtfully.

One saw a Duomo or a Gallery if there was one. She wasn't sure about Lourdes.

Miss Fairleigh's eyes twinkled a little.

'I think one should,' she said. 'I'll lend you a book. I could drop it in as I pass in the morning. You could glance through it while you breakfast and then wander about by yourself. No one'll say anything to you. Anybody can go anywhere.'

Mrs. Seemsby-Gore faintly liked the idea.

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The day of the expedition turned out gloriously fine. It was one of the loveliest moments of the year. Moreover, the main tourist season was over and winter not begun. In fine, it was early October, when poplars are thin yellow flames and chestnut woods living braziers. Yet, though the year was getting late the sun was hot, so hot that they walked coat on arm, seeking the rare scraps of shade on the dull stretch of road leading to the station.

The travellers exchanged unimportant items of news culled from a hurried glance at the morning papers. Deciding wisely to start with the least exciting expedition, Miss Fairleigh suggested taking the train to Argelès-Gazost and then walking to Pierrefitte by the path above the valley that winds through Saint Savin.

The train ran up the beautiful valley of the Gave, threading its way between the rows of poplars, clattering over the viaduct where the torrent widened to pebbly shallows, twisting round humpy hills where watch-towers that had defied the Saracen crumbled slowly away, while the ribbed mountain flanks, caught in an illusion of movement, circled northwards.

Then Miss Fairleigh remembered that Mrs. Seemsby-Gore had spent her yesterday wandering about by herself.

‘What d’you think of Lourdes?’ she asked her.

‘My chief feeling,’ was the unexpected reply, ‘was that there were a great many people there who would have been better off if they’d never been born.’

Miss Fairleigh laughed as unexpectedly.

‘I’m not sure that’s not a bull,’ she said. ‘But I think you didn’t approach Lourdes the right way. It’s no good going there with a hate on, so to speak—I mean, a wanting to flee from one’s fellows. Besides, the idea is to be uncomfortable there—at least, to a certain extent.’

'Modern equivalent of peas in your shoes?—medieval nonsense!'

'The Dark Ages and all that sort of thing,' completed Miss Fairleigh with solemn face but with something like derision in the set of her eyebrows.

Mrs. Seemsby-Gore snorted.

'There oughtn't to be such people,' she enlarged vindictively. 'Idiots! Monsters! People with perfectly *horrible* diseases! People like that have no business to be born.'

'Sweeping, sweeping,' came the mild protest from the opposite corner. 'It might be retorted——'

But the train was slowing down and the sentence was never completed. In any case Mrs. Seemsby-Gore was fumbling for her ticket, her attention completely otherwere.

They were soon free of the town and had begun the lovely climb to the road above the valley. The air was silver and gold and crystal clear. On the left were yellow-red chestnut woods, the husks thickly carpeting the earth; on the right, meadows fringed with acacias and melodious with springs. The autumn crocus faintly starred the green. Penetrating scents of autumn were everywhere. Beyond the folds of the hills the first snow gleamed on the peaks.

Suddenly Mrs. Seemsby-Gore swung round towards her companion.

'So you don't believe in the limitation of families?' she said.

'No,' answered Miss Fairleigh slowly, but with conviction. 'I don't believe in it in the sense I believe you do at the moment.'

'Why not? I see everything for it and not a single thing against it.'

'I don't believe in it' for two reasons. You'll probably laugh at them both. But I'll tell you them all the same. The first is that I'm a Catholic and Catho-

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lics aren't allowed to believe in limiting families in the sense in which it involves the use of contraceptives. The other is, that though I can see a person without religion might think he had convincing arguments in its favour, I hold that it's self-indulgence that makes him blind to arguments on the other side. And I *feel* it's perfectly damnable.'

'Oh!' almost shrieked her companion with a shocked face. 'Oh! if it comes to feelings, I feel it's perfectly damnable not to enforce it by law. If you'd had as much experience of the slums of London as I have——'

Mrs. Seemsby-Gore was an ardent and really generous slum worker.

'——if you'd had as much experience as I have,' she repeated with conviction, 'you'd feel as I do. Take the case of Mrs. Brown. Husband tuberculous. *She* has fits. There are five children already and another on the way. Ought they to have had all those children?'

Miss Fairleigh was tempted to a flippant reply.

'As they're there already,' she said, 'the question as to whether they ought to have had 'em seems to me secondary. But in any case are you sure you're in a better position than Mr. and Mrs. Brown to decide how many children they ought to have? Aren't they the best, the only final judges?'

'There you're being absurd,' was the rapid retort. 'I suppose you'd say imbeciles were justified in marrying and having children!'

'No, I shouldn't—though there, too, there are qualifications. First of all you have to define your imbecility. The standard of sanity has a habit of shifting with the mind that's doing the judging. You and I'd soon be at loggerheads on that point. You think, for instance, that all Catholics are unbalanced in so far as they are Catholics. I think that, in so far

as we're Catholics, we're the only people who are completely sane.'

'You're terrible people to argue with!' protested Mrs. Seemsby-Gore, half in earnest.

A car coming down the road at breakneck speed divided them at this point. When the dust had subsided and they were walking side by side again, they were nearing the crest of the hill. The last fifty yards were so steep that they climbed them in silence. The top provided them with a magnificent view. Below was the wide valley with its ancient watch towers above the winding river, and poplars, like exclamation marks, dividing the chequered fields. Here they sat on the parapet of a bridge and ate their picnic lunch while their gaze travelled about that vast and fertile area—among the fields, in and out of the woods, up the slopes on the other side to villages tucked away at astounding heights on the *cols*.

But suddenly Mrs. Seemsby-Gore turned her back on it all.

'What d'you mean by saying that the non-Catholic is blinded by self-indulgence or self-interest or whatever it was you said, to arguments against limiting families and so on? I'd have said it was exactly the other way about—that it's just you Catholics who are so wilfully blind.'

'It's like this—'

Miss Fairleigh took a long breath.

'—To begin with I'll make you a concession. There are occasions—as, for example, when it would be dangerous for the wife to have a child—where it does seem to me that the non-Catholic, up to his lights, has something of a case. It's difficult to see how, in such circumstances, if he doesn't believe in a God Who has revealed His laws and has a right to impose them on creatures who owe their very existence to Him, one

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can argue with him. But in the everyday cases about which the main flurry of argument centres—the case in which husband and wife are ordinary healthy human beings and who use contraceptives simply because they don't want to be bothered with children—the evidence points to the fact that the practice is harmful, to the individual as to the race. People talk an awful lot of rot, it seems to me, about breeding a superior race by eliminating the unfit and selecting suitable parents, but in how many cases, I ask you, among people who use contraceptives, is this motive taken into account? People have one or two children and then stop, sometimes because circumstances are difficult, but in many more because, as I have said, they simply don't want to be bothered. The wife doesn't want to be put out of action by child-bearing and both she and her husband want to be comfortable. It's certainly true, isn't it, that for the majority of non-Catholic families the car comes before the child? In fact, the motive for birth-control is pure self-indulgence. And I maintain it'd be better for character and lead to more true happiness if either there were more children with all the excellent qualities that life in a big family produces, or if birth-control took the form of restraint.'

'Oh, but,' ejaculated her friend hotly, 'there you're quite wrong! Restraint in that sense leads to nerves, drink, breakdowns, drugs, all sorts of evils! You simply don't know what you're talking about!'

She stared at this little well-bred spinster who didn't hesitate to be literal, but Miss Fairleigh, unaware of the effect she was making, answered her calmly:

'I think I do, you know. I'd warrant to produce specialists to maintain that it's just the use of contraceptives that's sending women to lunatic asylums.'

'Oh! oh!'

It was obviously a denial.

‘I admit that estimates are difficult. But I personally know a woman who was neurotic till she had a child.’

They had eaten their sandwiches, so eagerly had they talked, at a rate well calculated to produce violent indigestion, but if they suffered from it then or later in the walk they did not notice it. They were too absorbed in their argument and—in the pauses of it—in the lovely scenery they had walked out to see. They now re-packed their sandwich cases and having drunk from a convenient spring, they went on towards Saint Savin.

‘It’s all very fine,’ said Mrs. Seemsby-Gore at last. ‘But what about the people on the dole? If you only saw the misery they live in, if you only knew it as I do from personal contact with it—’

Miss Fairleigh did, but she wasn’t going to interrupt Mrs. Seemsby-Gore to tell her so. She had also been prepared to bet heavily that the dole argument would turn up.

‘—if you only realised how mentally-deficient and tuberculous people reproduce their kind without thought, you’d be horrified. And they just leave the upper and middle classes to pay. All the burden falls on us.’

‘In fact,’ almost shouted Miss Fairleigh, bored after all, and being bored, irascible, ‘just because the average politician is too criminally grasping or too crassly stupid to get our poor country out of the mess into which his kind has plunged it, the poor are to be deprived of one of the few compensations left them—their natural joy in their children. They accept their burdens of privation and heartache. Why should we hesitate to take on the burden of taxation?’ And what right has any outsider to step in and say, ‘Because you, So-and-so, are tuberculous or because we think you’re mad or because you drink, you are either to

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deprive yourself or be forcibly deprived of the joys of parenthood? If a given person is a menace to society because of his evil habits, he should be prevented from associating with his kind on those grounds. In that way, and from those motives alone, is it justifiable to prevent him from reproducing his kind.'

'Oh! But that'd cost so much!'

The inevitable objection!

'Not more than the bureaucracy that'd impose birth control by force.'

Mrs. Seemsby-Gore shook her head as much as to say she didn't think so. They had reached an impasse. But by this time they had also reached Saint Savin.

They went round the tenth century abbey church, both outside and inside, they saw its curious crucifix, the organ with the grotesque heads, the silver casket and the saint's discoloured old ceremonial comb. Then once again with their faces to the mountains, they climbed to the hermitage, but the beautiful chapel was locked and so they sat down on the close-cropped grass at its base to watch the mighty view. Clouds gloomed over the gorges, light was playing on the wild summits and away to the left the valley was changing with every puff of wind that sent the shadows racing across it. But once Miss Fairleigh sighed. It seemed so hopeless to talk. So many people who hadn't the faith thought that simply because an idea was new it was advanced, and therefore right, and therefore to be advocated, and therefore to be imposed at all costs—as if it were better to spend one's life flying round and round the earth than to settle on some happy plot and cultivate it and found a family and a home. And there was no new thing under the sun.

She glanced up at that declining orb and then at her watch. It was time to be moving if they were to



catch their train at Pierrefitte. They slid down over the slippery turf to the road.

The turn of it came at last. The power-station and the azote factory were in sight. And then, tired as they were, hot, dusty and inclined to be fractious, just before they reached the flat land and the tarred main road, they saw their train steam out of the station.

Miss Fairleigh was almost discouraged, but she pulled herself together.

'Coffee, I think, and perhaps cognac,' she said and led the way, without waiting for an answer, to the nearest hotel.

That took up three-quarters of an hour. Afterwards there was another forty minutes to fill in as best they could. Try as they would, they didn't seem able to get away from the factory and the power-station till Mrs. Seemsby-Gore had the good fortune to spot a curio dealer's. They both made for it at the double and there they spent a blissful ten minutes with noses glued to the window. One of them loved pewter, the other adored brocade. Finally, Mrs. Seemsby-Gore saw a paste buckle she must have at any cost. Miss Fairleigh followed her into the shop.

While the long bargaining was in process her eyes strayed nonchalantly from one lovely thing to another. Suddenly she caught her breath. On a shelf above her head was a Madonna and Child that she thought in some ways the most beautiful she had ever seen. It was wooden, in the round, and stood about a foot high. Our Lady held the Holy Child on her hip, her left arm supporting the weight of Him. He appeared about two years old and her right hand was guiding His in the act of blessing. Our Lord was looking into her face as though searching for her approbation.

The wood was alder, oiled. The spirit of the carving was that of the more ancient of the work at Saint

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Savin. Miss Fairleigh would have put it at fourteenth century, therefore, or even earlier, but that actually the texture of it, the surface and colouring, suggested that it had been done to-day.

She caressed it tenderly, smoothing it gently with her hand, rubbing it with her palm to give it an extra polish, standing it on her hand and turning it slowly to observe it in every light and position. Then she looked round at the dealer, who was putting the buckle in a box.

‘How much?’

‘Five hundred francs, Madame.’

Miss Fairleigh produced her purse.

When the five hundred francs had been counted and she was sure that the lovely, the heavenly thing was her own, she raised her eyes from her treasure to the dealer’s face.

‘It’s history?’

The dealer turned in the queerest way to Mrs. Seemsby-Gore, as though it were she who had asked the question.

‘Madame,’ he said, ‘the statue is a copy. The original is said to be nearly a thousand years old, but the carver of this copy is still living. You may see him any day if you will take that track—’

He had walked to the door and was pointing to the flank of the mountain that towered above his shop.

‘—and follow it to the third village. But if you find him it will be useless for you to try to talk to him. He would not understand you, for he talks only *patois*. In addition he is weak here.’

The man was tapping his forehead with his finger. Then his voice gathered energy.

‘The man is a fool. A fool he was born and a fool he will die. He comes of a race of fools. They are

good for little but copying the works of better men. All day long the carver of this statue sits on the floor of a church with a knife and a piece of wood, copying carvings to sell to summer visitors. The Madonna that Madame has just bought is his best work, the only thing he has ever done of any real value in his life, and he is now eighty. That is why I ask as much as five hundred francs for it. They say that a great work of art must have the impulse of strong emotion. In the case of this one copy alone does the carver seem to have added anything to the original, anything of his own feeling. But then in this one case he worked in a touching circumstance. When he was nineteen his mother, who had already had twelve children, was to have a thirteenth. She was a stupid woman. It is true that there were complications, but she was also superstitious, and she believed that both she and the baby would die. Her idiot son heard her speak of this to a neighbour. It was to reassure her that he carved the Virgin and Child. It stood on the mantelpiece when the pangs came upon her. Her eyes were on it when the child was born. They both lived. Never had she had so happy a delivery, never so fine a child.'

He turned at last to Miss Fairleigh.

'The sculptor will receive the full reward for his work, Madame.'

His voice was rich with the consciousness of a noble gesture. He sought for an envelope, inserted the five hundred francs, sealed it and addressed it. Then he held the envelope up for her to see.

'Michel Théas,' she read aloud.

The name seemed familiar.

'Théas!' she repeated. 'Théas! How curious! There's an Abbé of that name who's a famous naturalist.'

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'Michel's uncle, Madame,' said the curio dealer.  
'There was an astronomer, I'm told, too. Sometimes,  
just now and again, the family does seem to run to  
brains instead of just foolishness. There's no guess-  
ing at God's ways.'

Mrs. Seemsby-Gore said never a word.

AILEEN MARY CLEGG.

## FAITH

**M**UST I submissive bow to earth my head?  
Restrain the restless daring of my mind?  
Bound by the palimpsests of men long dead,  
Live in the daylight as a man made blind?'

'Yea, lowly bend thy stubborn neck and knees,  
And thou shalt win what thy proud ardours seek.  
This pathway leads to kindled mysteries  
That none have ever seen except the meek.'

'Never for me such craven sacrifice!  
Bravely I go upon a lonely quest.  
I will not fold my hands and close my eyes  
To gain an easy and ignoble rest.'

'So thou hast courage? Test it. Thou shalt find  
Precipitous the pathway to be trod.  
Summon the utmost valiance of thy mind.  
Only the audacious ever win to God.'

THEODORE MAYNARD.