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An Out-of-the-Ordinary Story Is This

The Tabernacle

By HENRY S. WHITEHEAD

KAZMIR STROD knelt very low in his seat in the pine pew of St. Stanislas' Church just after he had come back from the altar rail, so low, by purpose, that no one up there at the altar, not Father Gregoreff nor any of the acolytes, could possibly see him. The clean handkerchief which he had taken to church, unfolded, was still in his left hand where he had put it, somewhat damp because of his emotion and the fact that it was a warm April day. It was, indeed, so warm that his bees had swarmed the evening before and he had got them, successfully, into the new hive.

The Holy Host remained intact, between his teeth, held lightly. He felt sure that It was not even damp, because he had carefully wiped his lips and teeth, in that same low-kneeling posture, with the clean handkerchief just before rising, genuflecting, proceeding to the altar.

He placed the handkerchief over his mouth now and to the accompaniment of several brief prayers took the

AUTHOR'S NOTE: This is a very ancient tale, running back far into the early history of religion in Europe. It has cropped up, traditionally, in many lands and in various periods. Members of the older religions will understand its implications without explanations. To those unversed in the traditional belief concerning the *Sanctissimum* (the consecrated bread of Holy Communion among the older, Catholic, religions), it may be mentioned that this bread, known as the Host, is, after consecration at the hands of a validly ordained priest, understood to be "really" the Body of the Lord. The type of this "reality" varies among different theologians, but the belief in the essential identity of the consecrated Host with the True Body, with all the implications which follow this belief, is general. As the Lord (Jesus) is Lord of the Universe according to ancient Christian belief, His Body should be sacred to all His creatures. Hence this very ancient tradition which is here told in a modern setting.—Henry S. Whitehead, Ph.D., F.A.G.S.

Host from his mouth. He held It, very gently, the *Sanctissimum*, in the clean handkerchief. He felt very strange. He had never done such a thing before.

Bending now, very low, he felt for the small, thin wafer inside the clean handkerchief's folds, broke off a tiny piece, and placed It in his mouth. He must receive Holy Communion or it would be further sacrilege. He swallowed It, with difficulty, for his mouth, under this stress, had remained very dry. He said the prayers of Reception with his mind on them, but as rapidly as he could. He did not leave out a word of those prayers.

Then, and only then, he slipped the handkerchief into his pocket. He was kneeling upright, like the rest of the congregation, the men with shining newly shaved faces, the women, on the other side of the central alleyway, with multicolored shawls over their sleek heads, when Father Gregoreff was turning toward the congregation at the end of the Mass.

"*Ite, missa est,*" boomed Father Gregoreff, and turned to the altar's end for the Last Gospel.

Kazmir spoke to nobody on the way home. That, too, he imagined, would be sacrilegious, for, like a priest, he was carrying the *Sanctissimum* upon him.

He went straight to the new hive. There were almost no flowers out at this time of year. On the broad landing-board, several dozens of bees were lined up in rows, like little soldiers, finishing the sugar-and-water honey he had placed for them to keep them

in the hive where he had placed them last night. He was sure the new queen was within. She would be, of course, in the center of the swarm, and he had lifted them, very carefully, off the bush where they had swarmed, into the new hive. It had been an unusually large swarm. He had worn his high rubber boots, his bricklayer's gloves, and a folded net about his head over his cap. Even so, he had had a few stings.

He was going to make this hive the greatest hive there was! He was going to use old, old "magic," the way it had been done in the Old Country, for luck and for the success of a vegetable garden, and for many other good purposes, even though it was, good purpose and all, sacrilege. God didn't mind such things. It was only the priests who objected. A little bit of the Host placed inside the hive. That was all. That would make the bees prosper, bring luck to the new hive. Over here, in America, you didn't hear so much about doing things like that. But Kazmir knew what to do for bees. Those old-time ways were good ways. They worked. The Holy Host had many virtues. Along with garlic-flowers it was a sure safeguard from vampires. Placed in a coffin, he had heard, It kept the body from decay. With even a tiny crumb of It, wrapped tightly in a piece of clean linen, sewed into your clothes, It was sure proof against the Bad-Eye.

There was practically no sound inside the hive. The bees on the landing-board moved slowly, lethargically. If this heat held, there would be flowers soon, and he could discontinue the sugar-and-water "honey." Too much of that and the bees laid off working! Bees were like humans, very much like humans, only dumber! They never took a rest, had no relaxations.

He raised the hive's top, carefully, leaned it against the side of the packing-box on which the hive itself stood. There were the frames, just as he had

placed them yesterday, a little old comb, for the bees to build onto, near the middle. That was all right. He removed the crushed bodies of several bees which had got caught when he had placed the top on the hive in yesterday's dusk of evening. The new queen would be down inside there, somewhere, surrounded by her eager, devoted workers, the swarm which had accompanied her out of the older hive yesterday.

Kazmir crossed himself, furtively, and glanced around. Nobody was looking; indeed nobody was, at the moment, in sight. He took the handkerchief out of his pocket, touched his right thumb and the index finger to his lips reverently, extracted the Sanctissimum and dropped It into the open hive between the frames. Then he replaced the top and went into the house. The bees should prosper now, according to all the old rules. Kazmir had never heard of putting such a charm on bees before. That was his own idea. But—if it worked as the old tales said it worked, for horses and cows and the increase of a flock of goats, why not for bees?

It was a quarter past six by the kitchen clock. Time for the woman and kids to be getting up for seven o'clock Mass. He went up the rough stairs to awaken his wife and their two children. This done, he returned to the kitchen to boil four eggs for his breakfast.

IT TURNED out to be a very quiet hive, the new one. Its bees, too, seemed to be stingers. He received many stings during the summer, more stings than usual, it seemed to him. He had to warn Anna and the children to keep away from it. "They got a lotta pep, them bees," he said, and smiled to himself. It was he, applying an old idea with true American progressiveness, who had "pepped them up". He gave the process this phrase, mentally, without the least thought of incongruity, of irreverence. The efficacy of

the Sanctissimum was the last, the very last thing that Kazmir Strod would have doubted, in the entire scheme of the world's regulations and principles.

It was only occasionally nowadays that Kazmir worked at bricklaying. Ten years before, in the Old Country, he had learned that trade. Always a wilful, strong-headed youth, independent of mind, he had flown in the face of his family custom to learn a trade like that. All his family, near Kovno, had been market-gardeners. That strong-headedness had been responsible for his emigration, too. There had been many disputes between him and his father and older brothers. The strong-headedness and the trade! There were great openings for a good bricklayer in America.

But, since he had married—rather late in life, to this Americanized Anna of his, at twenty-two; he was twenty-seven now — with enough money to buy this place, earned at the bricklaying, he had reverted to his gardening, even with good land like this, and sometimes Anna would nag him to take a job when a contractor offered one, but there were all the deep-rooted satisfactions of the soil; the love of it was bred deep in his blood and bones, and he had a way with tomatoes and early peas and even humdrum potatoes.

This devotion to the soil, he felt, triumphantly, had been amply justified that August. He had an offer to go and be gardener on a great estate, a millionaire's, eighteen miles away. The offer included a house, and the use of what vegetables he needed for his family. He accepted it, and told Anna afterward.

Anna was delighted. He had not been sure of how she would take it, and her delight pleased him enormously. For several days it was like a new honeymoon. He spread it all over the community that he wanted to sell his place.

He got six hundred dollars, cash, more than he had paid for it. There was a couple of thousand dollars worth of improvement which he had dug into its earth, but six hundred dollars was six hundred dollars! The title passed, after a day and a night's wrangling with the purchaser, Tony Dvornik, a compatriot. Kazmir and Anna and the children moved their possessions in a borrowed motor-truck.

IT WAS in October that Tony Dvornik killed off the bees. Tony did not understand bees, and his wife was afraid of them. He hired Stanislas Bodinski, who was one of Father Gregoreff's acolytes, to do the job for him, for a quarter-share of what honey might be discovered within the four hives. Stanislas Bodinski arrived, with sulfur and netting. Tony and his wife stood at a little distance, watching interestedly; telling each other to watch out for stings; marveling at Stanislas Bodinski's nonchalance, deftly placing his sulfur-candles, rapidly stuffing the horizontal opening above the landing-boards, the edges all around the hive tops.

Stanislas joined them, removing his head-net, and stood with them while the sulfur fumes did their deadly work inside the hives. Later, they all walked over to the hives, Stanislas reassuring Tony's wife. "They ain't no danger now. They're all dead by now. Anyhow, they die after they sting you, but you needn't worry none. Jus' the same, you better keep away a little. They's some bees was out the hives when I stopped up them cracks. They'll be flyin' around, kinda puzzled, now."

The comb was lifted out, to exclamations on the part of Tony's wife, into a row of borrowed milk pans. It piled up, enormously, honey covering the bottoms of the pans viscidly.

"You'd wonder where it all come from," said Tony's wife, again and again, "outa them little hives! You

wouldn't think they'd hold that much stuff, would ya?"

Stanislas Bodinski arrived at the last hive, with two remaining milk pans, and proceeded to lift the top away from the hive. They saw him look in. Then he stopped and looked close. Then he stepped back, raised his arms in an amazing gesture of wonderment, sank to his knees beside the hive, and made the sign of the cross on his breast many times.

Wonderingly, they approached, Tony's wife murmuring:

"What's *bitin'* him? Is he gone loony, huh?" Then: "Hey, Tony, they mus' be somethin' awful strange in that-there hive, huh—for Stan to ac' that way!"

There was indeed something strange in the hive, although there was very little honey in it. They did not dare touch it, and, after Stanislas had somewhat recovered himself, and put back the top with hands shaking, the three of them, just as they stood, Tony's wife not even taking off her apron, started for the rectory, to get Father Gregoreff.

The priest came, rather grumblingly, Stanislas following half a block behind the other three. He had run into the sacristy to get the priest's cope and a stole, and something which he had to hold onto, in his pocket, to keep it quiet! He hoped Father Gregoreff would not look behind him and see what he was carrying. He was a bit of a mystic, this Stanislas; otherwise he would not, perhaps, have continued to be an acolyte after he was nineteen. He, too, had come from near Kovno, like Kazmir Strod. Stanislas had listened to strange tales in his earlier boyhood, back there in the Old Country.

He came in through Tony Dvoretz-

nik's gate well behind the rest, furtively. They were all standing, looking at the hive, when he came around the corner of the house. He walked around them, knelt before his priest, seized and kissed his hand. He handed the amazed Father Gregoreff his stole, and the priest put it on mechanically, murmuring, "What's this? what's all this?" Stanislas rose, hastily invested his pastor with the white cope, and stepped over to the hive. He knelt, and turning to the others, motioned them, authoritatively, to kneel also. They did so, all three, the priest's cope trailing on the ground, a few feet behind Stanislas.

Stanislas, making the sign of the cross, reached his arms into the hive. Carefully, the sweat running down his face, he lifted out a shining yellow, new-wax structure, intact, with infinite care. He turned, still on his knees, and placed what he had lifted in the priest's hands. It was a little church, made of wax, made by the bees whose dead bodies, suffocated by sulfur fumes, now littered the dead hive.

Then Stanislas took the sacring bell from his left-hand pocket, and, his head on the ground, rang it to indicate to all who might be within ear-shot that they should prostrate themselves before the Sanctissimum.

1. Herbertus Turrium, *De Miraculis*, iii, 80, Ed. Chiffet, pp. 378-379 (cf. Petrus Venerabilis, *De Miraculis*, i, 1., Migne, CLXXXIX, 851-853).

2. Cæsarius, ix, 8, Ed. Strange, II, 172-173.

3. Etienne de Bourbon, *Septem Dona*, Ed. Leroy de la Marche, *Anecdotes Historiques*, 1877, pp. 266, 267, and 328.

4. Giraldu Cambrensis, *Gemma Ecclesiastica*, i, II, Ed. Brewer, II, 42-43.

5. Herbert, *Catalogue of Romances*, III (1910), 23, 388, 448, 517, 647.

6. *An Alphabet of Tales*, No. 695, Ed. Banks, II (1905), 465 (from Cæsarius, 2 supra). Cf. Deecke: *Lubische Geschichten und Sagen*, 5th Ed., p. 280.

7. *Blaetter fur Pommersche Volkskunde*, IX (1901), 3. (Host buried in a garden to improve the crop—1482, A. D.). *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft fur Schleswig-Holsteinische Geschichte*, XLV (1915), 199.

