

**THE PRIEST: A TALE OF
MODERNISM IN
NEW ENGLAND.
THIRD EDITION. 1918**

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The Priest: A Tale of Modernism in New England. Third Edition. 1918 by William L. Sullivan

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WILLIAM L. SULLIVAN

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THE PRIEST

A TALE OF MODERNISM
IN NEW ENGLAND

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "LETTERS TO HIS
HOLINESS, POPE PIUS X"

THIRD EDITION



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PREFATORY NOTE

Because a piece of fiction has taken Modernism for its subject, it should not be forthwith condemned as a mere manifesto which usurps a province of art for crude ends of partisanship or revolt. Modernism has every right in the world to literary treatment in the forms of fiction or the drama. For if it is the function of these departments of literature to set forth the histories of human hearts and the crises of human conscience, it is doubtful if they could find in the aggregate of contemporaneous experiences a richer field than Modernism. Modernism began with the scholar. It is ending with the martyr. It first appeared as a movement of critical scholarship concerned with debates as to the date and authorship of certain ancient scriptures, and the validity of divers venerable texts and institutions. That aspect of the matter is now subsidiary. To-day the most vital interest of Modernism lies in the conflict — the fierce and sombre conflict — which it has flung upon many choice spirits of the race; the conflict between sincerity and enforced conformity; between ruthless Truth and life's tenderest affections; between the mind that would follow its new light and the heart that would cling to its lifelong loyalties. It is a desolate struggle, fought out in the presence of strange spectators: on the one hand, loneliness, ignominy, penury; on the other, honor, fidelity and the memories of those faithful

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ones who have consecrated the hallowed Calvaries of the world. Here surely, where life works so mightily, literature may linger reverently, and may make of these gropings, conflicts, sufferings, a theme that is worthy of her highest forms of art.

No apology, then, is needed for the choice of the subject matter of this book. But perhaps concerning the execution of the enterprise the author should say a word which he is in doubt whether to call an apology or not. At all events, here it is in all frankness. The author's deepest feeling all through the book is for what may be called, in a large sense, religion rather than art; for a faithful reproduction of a profound spiritual struggle rather than for the technical perfection of the narrative which describes it. He has indeed done his poor best in this latter respect also. He has tried not to forget that he was writing a story and that his conscientious endeavor should be to make it as good a story as was in his power. But having had an opportunity to observe very close at hand many of the interior experiences and some even of the external events herein written down, it has been primary with him to transcribe these experiences and events with what vividness they possess in his own mind, and with what emotion they evoke in his own heart.

Whatever, then, his falling short of the professional fiction-code, this he cannot help feeling, that this book is, in a vital way, true; that the tragic processes on which it lifts a corner of the

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veil are to-day going on in hundreds of beset and harassed hearts; and that the utterance which these processes find here is above all genuine, above all sincere. In these primitive qualities, too, there may possibly be manifested a certain form and species of art which, perhaps, are somewhat overlooked by the rules of the masters and the schedules of the schools. The author has sometimes beguiled himself with thinking so. But however that may be, this is a chapter of contemporary life that is little known because essentially solitary, and a picture of present-day reality that gives few outward signs because it lies in that province of experience about which men are most sensitive and most reticent. To such as are interested in this deeper side of life, in this profounder region of reality, this modest contribution to the literature of a great movement is respectfully offered by

THE AUTHOR.

I

A New England winter lives long, as the world knows, but only those with experience of it are aware how hard it dies. In rural New England above all, the last state of the storm-god's deviltry is worse than the first. Just as it is time for him decently to depart, say about the first week in March, he shows the perversity of the possessed, lashing himself into paroxysms of tempest; flinging up mighty snow-ramparts in a night; freezing tight every pond, lake, and stream; and from his frozen fortresses howling mad defiance to the timid reconnoitering of Spring. Then does rural New England look inhospitable indeed. The streets are deserted save for a traveller now and then who plods along with head down, hands in pockets, coat collar buttoned about his mouth, and with a general air of being about a desperately disagreeable business; the bare trees creak in every stiffened joint, and clash icy branches together in the forlornest of choruses; the white fields stretch away beyond the huddling houses which seem to be shivering too; and the dismal hills in the distance appear ominously like posted sentinels to keep this cold domain inviolate.

A stranger of anti-Yankee prejudices approaching a New England hamlet at such a time might well find confirmation of his personal antipathies in the wild aspect of the scene before him. How typical of Puritan austerity these biting winds!