

**IN COLIMA AND
OTHER POEMS**

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In Colima and Other Poems by Francis Speir

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BY

FRANCIS SPEIR

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IN COLIMA

Was it a sin?—Ah, there I am at sea,
Between the blind insistence of a soul
That will not cease from brooding on the past
And what our church, with no uncertain sound,
Approves, bidding me rest at peace with God.
The more I dwell upon the dreary day,
A heavier drag these latter days appear.
Confessions ease alone the itching tongue,
Yet leave the seething heart no lasting peace.
In sorrow have I lived, in sorrow die;
God wills it; may His name be ever praised!

At Crux, before the altar of the church,
Robed in my priestly garb, I knelt in prayer,
From early vespers on a Christmas Eve,
Until the dawn of blessed Christmas Day;
And all the burden of my prayer was peace,
That I might know no trace of troubled change,
Secure among my little flock might dwell,
Till Death should slowly steal my quiet days.

Then morning came, and with the growing dawn
God's love divine transformed my glowing soul.

In all the joy of newly answered prayer,
I fell from Heaven within the depths of Hell;
For, as I turned, there came a sudden sound
Of one who sinks in mortal agony.
Alas! there lay before my very eyes,
Among the flowers that decked the Virgin's shrine,

A man whom death had smitten at a blow:
Beside him crouched was one with lambent eyes
And pallid, upturned face, who, trembling, gazed
An instant; then I found him at my feet,
Pleading, with tears, by all my sacred vows,
To hear confession of repented sin.
Half-dazed, I gasped a timid, weak assent,
And heard him tell a tale of murder foul,
Of grievous guilt that closed in sacrilege.

Receiving penance that the Church appoints,
He turned and fled, absolved from guilt, and free,
His secret safe and hid from all the world
Beneath a seal the law could never break.

Thus God rebuked me, for I asked too much:
I wished for pleasant ease, and He had sent
This thorn, like Paul's, to prick my flesh and turn
My sunny days to years of darkened nights.

They found a stranger dead within the church;
The secret sin seemed hid forevermore.

A few months passed, and with their kindly touch
The earth seemed brighter and the sun more sweet;
Yet, in the end, there came a haggard man,
Who meekly begged that I should give him work,
To gain a shelter and his dole of bread.
Then clearly I perceived the hand of God,
Who willed that I should bear the heavy cross
Of close communion with a blood-stained soul.

Through five long years he toiled from morn to night,
With eager heart, to aid the Master's work,
Exact in all the rites our Church prescribes,
The kindest helpmate man had ever known.
Yet, in those years, my heart was ever torn—
My very sleep was haunted by two forms—

A slayer, and the slain who cried aloud
For vengeance.—Then I waked, to sleep no more.
Too well I knew that I was never born
To press against grave odds that try men's souls;
I slip and hesitate, and, shrinking, fall;
My place was in the plain of daily life.
But in His wisdom it is otherwise,
And when I strove to tread through mountain heights
I stumbled, halted, fell, and here I die.
God help me! I have suffered grievous pain.

Where was I, Father?—Yes, the coming end.
One Christmas, when I came from morning mass,
He met me in the little outer room
And, kneeling low, he smiled and slowly spake:
"Thou art the truest friend man ever knew;
Thy hand hath saved a sinful soul; yea, thou
Did'st find me naked and thou clothedst me,
Hungry and sore athirst, thou gavest me
The bread and water of immortal life;
Thou hast Christ's very spirit in thy soul."

For death and sorrow man is doubly born;
I knew it, in my very heart of hearts,
Seeing the omen in his lustrous eyes
That presaged trouble hardly to be borne.
"Nay! hear thou must, for speak I must and shall—
Not to the priest, but to the kindly friend
Who all these years has ever truly shown
The tender pity that will vanquish all—
The love incarnate of the God made man.
This sinful life is thine, and thou must deal
With me, thy servant, as thou deemest best;
Naught shall be hid, but all be freely told.
I killed the stranger, for he foully stole
The only thing I loved on earth—my love!
Her soul and heart and body, all were mine;
He came—love ceased—bereft was I, and poor;