

BARRIERS

BY FLORENCE J. CLARK

I

It is an experience far from uncommon for a man to wake up one day to the realization that he is living in a prison, builded, very likely, by his own hands. Unscalable walls confine him.

Since defeat is unendurable to the human spirit, he will, perhaps, triumph subtly by cultivating a taste for the prison which defies him.

Stone walls do not a prison make,
Nor iron bars a cage;
Minds innocent and quiet take
That for an hermitage.

In some such way, his soul flies free.

But there is an occasional Houdini of the spirit to whom no stone wall, however high, presents an insurmountable barrier; a stone wall, in short, is built to be climbed, and the higher it is, the better.

Mrs. Nardo, for instance, could extricate herself so, literally, when seemingly tied hand and foot, that it did not require the eyes of a poet to see that her soul was free. Her free soul was indeed as patent as the smile upon her face.

She lived in a little tumble-down house in a yard — a small yard. Surrounded by high brick tenement houses in a crowded neighborhood, both the yard and the tiny three-roomed house were unexpected things to come upon. And unexpected too was Mrs. Nardo; for who could dream of finding, in so sordid an environment, such capacity to soar?

Like all Italians, she loved living things; people, animals, plants, all were companions.

She had managed somehow to make some green grow in the yard, — chiefly weeds, but the right color, — and in one spot she had achieved a few inches of grass.

'See the lawn,' the children would say, pointing to it proudly.

She also kept hens. Where the hens lived, whether in the yard or in the house, a casual visitor could not determine. Mrs. Nardo said they lived in the yard, but there was some evidence to the contrary.

'I woke up last night, so scared!' exclaimed Concetta, aged seven, one day. 'I felt something scratching my face.' Then, fearing lest she may have aroused too great expectations, she hastened to add, 'But it was n't nothing; it was only the chicken, wanting to sleep with me.'

Whatever reassurance Mrs. Nardo got from the sense of moving, restless life about her, she must have sorely needed, for her thirst for it was well-nigh insatiable. Eight children, hens, a dog, — in three rooms and a miniature yard, — and still it was not enough.

Her children found this trait in their mother very acceptable. Dominick, eight years old, was in the country one day on a picnic. He was fascinated by the gay butterflies.

'See the little angels,' he exclaimed

delightedly, using the pretty Italian name for them. He watched them for a long time.

When the time came to go home, it was discovered that he had captured one and tied it in a handkerchief borrowed for the purpose.

'I'm taking it home to my mother,' he said eagerly. 'She'll like to see it flying in our yard.'

Mrs. Nardo's final acquisition was a parrot. Angelina, aged fourteen, feeling that self-respect demanded a utilitarian motive for its presence, did what she could to supply it.

'You know parrots are very useful around a house,' she said. 'They keep the floor clean, picking up crumbs and things.'

Mrs. Nardo's own attitude, however, was far from apologetic. She took frank pleasure in its bright feathers and its discordant voice.

Mrs. Nardo was the delight and the despair of the Settlement workers, who tried in vain to add to her wholly charming personality a few of the sterner virtues. This effort she resisted with complete success. And fortunately so, for, could they, by some unlucky chance, have succeeded in transforming her, they would, I fear, have known themselves for the meddlers which she occasionally felt them to be.

Overwhelmed with the vastness of the task of clothing and feeding her large family, she eliminated all work not strictly essential; and she was open to no suggestions in the interpretation of essentials.

A nurse in the Settlement, Miss Campbell, as Scotch as her name, could never quite give over the attempt to introduce into Mrs. Nardo's home some rudiments of hygiene. Mrs. Nardo did not resent this, for she loved Miss Campbell, who had, with tenderness equal to her own, nursed her adored Romie through a critical illness. No,

she did not resent Miss Campbell's attempts, she simply ignored them.

A strange friendship existed between these two — Miss Campbell, who took responsibility so seriously, whose work was a religion, and Mrs. Nardo, who shouldered no responsibility and did no work in which joy was absent; Miss Campbell, so solicitously burdened by the care of a dependent mother, and Mrs. Nardo, so far from burdened by a husband and eight children.

Miss Campbell alternated between two extremes of feeling with Mrs. Nardo. In her strong moments she was righteously indignant with her. At other times she yielded weakly to Mrs. Nardo's fatal gift of charm, finding perhaps relaxation in her from her own exacting sense of duty. An invisible battle, interspersed with invisible truces, waged continually between them. Yet they never ceased to be fast friends.

Miss Campbell and the little president of her club in the Settlement, of which Tony Nardo was also a member, had a moment of perfect harmony one day. The president, a responsible little leader at the age of nine, held the members rigidly to the payment at each meeting of their dues of two cents a week. One day, irritated beyond endurance, he burst out in the middle of a business meeting with, —

'Miss Campbell, look at Tony Nardo, laughing, and he has n't paid his dues for three weeks.'

II

Mrs. Nardo's house was always dirty, her yard littered, she herself was no slave to soap and water, her children were ragamuffins.

Occasionally, prodded to the point of desperation, she made an heroic effort, and was greatly surprised and grieved at the success of her own training.

'The teach send Tony home from

school to-day,' she said once in Tony's presence, as a lesson to him, 'with note to tell me clean him up. I clean him fine. But he don want be clean. He take all his clean clothes off and hide them on me and put his old ones back on — so's he can go dirty, like a pig.'

Perhaps the secret of Mrs. Nardo's charm lay in her unusual capacity for enjoyment. For whether the fact indicates richness or paucity of imagination, a fact it was that Mrs. Nardo extracted from life a nearly continuous stream of pleasure. To her the world was a playground filled with toys, and she a child, picking up one after another in wonder and delight. Every experience was an entrancing novelty.

Her children were a source of immeasurable satisfaction to her. 'Some people go to country to get fat,' she said one day. She looked whimsically at her own ample figure. 'I get fat here, looking at the children, I like them so much.'

She enjoyed her troubles too, and that without a touch of corroding self-pity — even to the husband who figured in her conversation as an unmitigated misfortune.

Mrs. Nardo was always trying to make both ends meet and was always finding success just a little beyond her reach, for reasons which she was glad to explain. The neighbors expected to share their food with her and she expected them to. Yet the few eggs the hens laid were given to a sick cousin. The few treasures she had brought from Italy, a string of corals, a cameo pin, she could not keep. Not the least inconvenience about being poor was that there was so little to give away.

She was very much interested in her own situation as revealed to her by Miss Campbell — just as interested in fact as she was in everything that came within her line of vision.

'You're so smart in the Settlement!'

she said. 'I always say Mr. Nardo get thirty dollars a week. He get five dollars a day. But Miss Campbell say to me, "Does he work every day in the week?" I say, "He never work every day; he work three, four, the most five days in a week." She say, "Then he get twenty dollars a week, not thirty dollars." So smart she is!'

It is to be feared that Mrs. Nardo's attention was so focused upon this as an exhibition of Miss Campbell's intelligence that its personal implication was quite lost on her.

Sometimes her interest went far afield — as when she heard about wireless telegraphy, words carried through the air without assistance! And a fellow countryman had achieved this miracle. She was as fascinated by it as a small boy by a magician.

One day, when I went to call upon Mrs. Nardo, she was looking out of the window, and she saw me coming with real consternation.

'Wait a minute,' she called out. 'I don know what to do. I can't open the door.'

'What is the matter?' I asked.

'I can't get out myself,' she replied. 'I'm locked inside. This door only lock from the outside, the key don work inside. I forget that this morning and I tell Tony lock the door when he go to school and throw the key through the window. Now I can't unlock myself.'

A solution suggested itself. 'Here,' she said; 'I throw the key to you. You unlock the door.'

I picked up the key which she threw to me, and went inside the hall and started to unlock the door.

'That ain't the way,' Mrs. Nardo called out. 'You have to turn the key upside down. This lock put on upside down.'

It took some time before the door was unlocked — to the tune of Mrs. Nardo's refrain, —

'How I going to get the children's supper if I can't get out?'

At last the lock turned, and great was Mrs. Nardo's relief.

'I kill the man put on that lock,' she said pleasantly. Her eyes twinkled. 'He have his head on upside down.'

When I had finished the errand upon which I came, Mrs. Nardo, all smiles, called my attention to a brand-new doll occupying the most conspicuous place in the bare room. It was a large French doll, dressed in bright pink.

'You see that doll?' she asked. 'I get it just the other day. You know Angeleen never have a doll. She like dolls. We get it this way. We save trading stamps. The other day we go to get some dishes with them. We need dishes very bad. But we see this doll.' The pride of possession spoke in her voice. 'We get it instead.'

It is very evident that Angeleen is not the only member of her family who likes dolls. But, for that matter, do little American boys go to the circus, frankly, alone?

She continued, her face shining, 'Then I buy a little piece silk, cheap. Now we tell people that's the doll Angeleen used to play with.'

One passion Mrs. Nardo had: she loved to travel. A trip back to her beloved Italy every now and again was apparently the very breath of life to her. When the call came, she shook off husband and children as unquestioningly as she had acquired them, and followed it.

Shame upon those unresourceful souls who are thwarted by an untoward environment. Mrs. Nardo, with no money and a large family, had, in a little less than ten years, been to Italy seven times.

On her last trip she had cut a small Gordian knot. Miss Campbell had a coral pin which had been brought to her from Italy by a friend some time

since, and she had always wanted another like it. She showed it to Mrs. Nardo.

'Sure I get you one like that,' she said. 'Plenty of them in Napoli.'

When Mrs. Nardo returned, she had brought presents for us all — pretty tortoise-shell hat-pins. No mention was made of Miss Campbell's pin. After a considerable time had elapsed, she inquired about it. She was met by evasive answers, but at last the truth leaked out. Mrs. Nardo had sold the pin. At the last minute she had wanted to buy presents for her Settlement friends, and had found herself without money. But there was Miss Campbell's pin. She sold it and her problem was solved.

'Very common pin it was,' she said. 'In It'ly, hundreds of them. I buy you another next time I go.'

One spring, for the eighth time, there were recurring signs of the Wanderlust, or homesickness.

'I feel very sick,' she said one day. 'My stomach hurt me, I can't eat, I can't sleep. Angeleen, she have to clean the house. The doc say I have to have baths — in It'ly.'

'But surely something else can help you.'

She shook her head. 'No, nothing. These baths very good for me; the water very special.'

Then, with a shrug of the shoulders and a resigned lifting of the eyebrows, she continued, 'I don know what I can do — eight children, no money, baby nine months old. How I go to It'ly?'

She could never be crude, but it was clear that she understood that beggars cannot be choosers — a harsh world.

We did not dwell upon a misfortune which, to our limited vision, could not be remedied. Neither was Mrs. Nardo's poor health so apparent as to stir pity in unimaginative souls. In short, we took the matter very casually.

Summer approached. Miss Campbell was about to sail for England for a short vacation. A few days before leaving, she collected some trifles for Mrs. Nardo: some clothes for the children, a skirt for herself, a few toys. She put them into a suitcase and sent for one of the Nardo children to come and get them. When Dominick arrived, she gave him the suitcase, with careful instructions to bring it back immediately after removing the contents. He promised to be back in half an hour.

He did not return. Toward evening of the next day Miss Campbell became uneasy, as in her plans for getting about Europe the suitcase had a place. At last she sent a small boy of the neighborhood to get it. The little messenger returned with the astounding news that Mrs. Nardo had sailed for Italy that very morning.

'Well,' murmured Miss Campbell, as soon as she had caught her breath, 'God certainly takes care of Mrs. Nardo. She is about to go abroad, and a suitcase arrives on the eve of departure.' (Mrs. Nardo, by the way, returned the suitcase immediately upon her return.)

Although we could scarcely credit the news that Mrs. Nardo had gone to Italy, we were not surprised that she had not discussed her plans with us. She had made an honest attempt, and we had ourselves prevented her from giving us that whole-hearted confidence which, doubtless, her soul craved. Miss Campbell, however, had not been equally reticent. Mrs. Nardo knew her plans — how long she was to stay, the boat she was to sail on.

Our natural curiosity concerning Mrs. Nardo's method of management was satisfied by a neighbor.

'It was this way. Everybody know

what a hard time Mrs. Nardo have — so many children, such a bad husband, no money. Now she sick. If she die, what happen to the poor children? If she take baths in It'ly, she get well. The moving-pitch man on the corner, he hear about it. He feel sorry for her. He think of something. He say he give benefit performance for her Wednesday. He say everybody who come to moving-pitch Wednesday help Mrs. Nardo go to It'ly. He put up big sign. Big crowd come. Mrs. Nardo, she sit in the front row with the children. They make lots money. Mrs. Nardo, she buy a ticket quick, she go. I go to the boat, lots people go to the boat. She take only the baby.'

In my mind's eye, I could see Mrs. Nardo, already cured, the baby in her arms, in the centre of the crowded steerage, the happiest passenger on the great liner.

'What did she do with the other children?'

'She put them in a Home for the summer. The Home where they was last time would n't take them. She find another.'

So she was off on her eighth trip to Italy in ten years. We bowed to her.

The next day Miss Campbell sailed for England.

'No, I won't cable,' she said, a little before the boat sailed. 'Cables are too expensive in these safe days. I'll write.'

She did. I quote from her first letter.

'When we were out a day, I received a marconigram. You can imagine how it frightened me to be called to in mid-ocean. I tore it open and read — one Italian word, —

“Salute.

MRS. NARDO.”’

A BOY WHO WENT WHALING

BY CHARLES BOARDMAN HAWES

I

HE wanted adventure and, by the gods, he got it. He went in an old whaler down to the stormy waters of the Horn. From a stove boat, he jumped literally out of a whale's mouth. He hunted for treasure buried by pirates on an island, whither, to this very day, men resort on the same errand. He escaped with his life from a band of armed men who nearly trapped him, when, as a run-away sailor, he lay concealed in a hut high in the Peruvian Andes. He saw the death of the great lone whale of Paita. By an odd turn of his whaling voyage, he became, first, a clerk at a South American port, then, a consul; and in 1862, when he resigned his office and embarked for home, he carried with him a fortune in gold.

This boy whaleman, Leonard Gibbs Sanford by name, was no mere vagabond adventurer. His father owned thousands of acres of timberland in up-state New York, and served his district in the House of Representatives. His mother was the youngest of the seven daughters of Dr. Leonard Gibbs of Granville. It is easy to understand why there was a family upheaval when the Sanfords discovered that sixteen-year-old Len was running away to sea — in what established household would there not have been? But in meeting the situation raised by the exploit of their lively son, the father and mother manifested uncommonly sound judgment.

If he was determined to go to sea,

they reasoned, why, let him go, but in good standing and in a good ship. So they gave him a chest and an honest outfit, which no young sailor ever got from the soulless landsharks of our ports, and arranged that he should sail on a whaling voyage to the Pacific Ocean in the ship *Lancer*, of New Bedford, whose captain, Aaron C. Cushman, was an old friend of George Sanford, the father.

There was no railroad, then, along the water-front of New Bedford. Big jiggers loaded with oil casks ploughed through the black dust and mud between the town and the whaling vessels that lay at the wharves in every stage of decay and repair. Some of the vessels were unmasted hulks which had served their time the world over; others were stout new barques and ships, ready to sail on maiden voyages to the antipodes. In the lofts old seamen with palms of leather and with stout needles talked of selvages and gores. In the shops and streets hammers rang and metal clanked and drays rumbled, and men of every race and color shouted and called.

They hove the *Lancer* down, and cleaned her, and patched her and coppered her anew. They bent on sails, and rove halyards and sheets and tacks. They brought on board staves and hoops and cedar boards. They swayed new boats up to the cranes, and stowed down new craft in the forehold. Then Captain Aaron Cush-