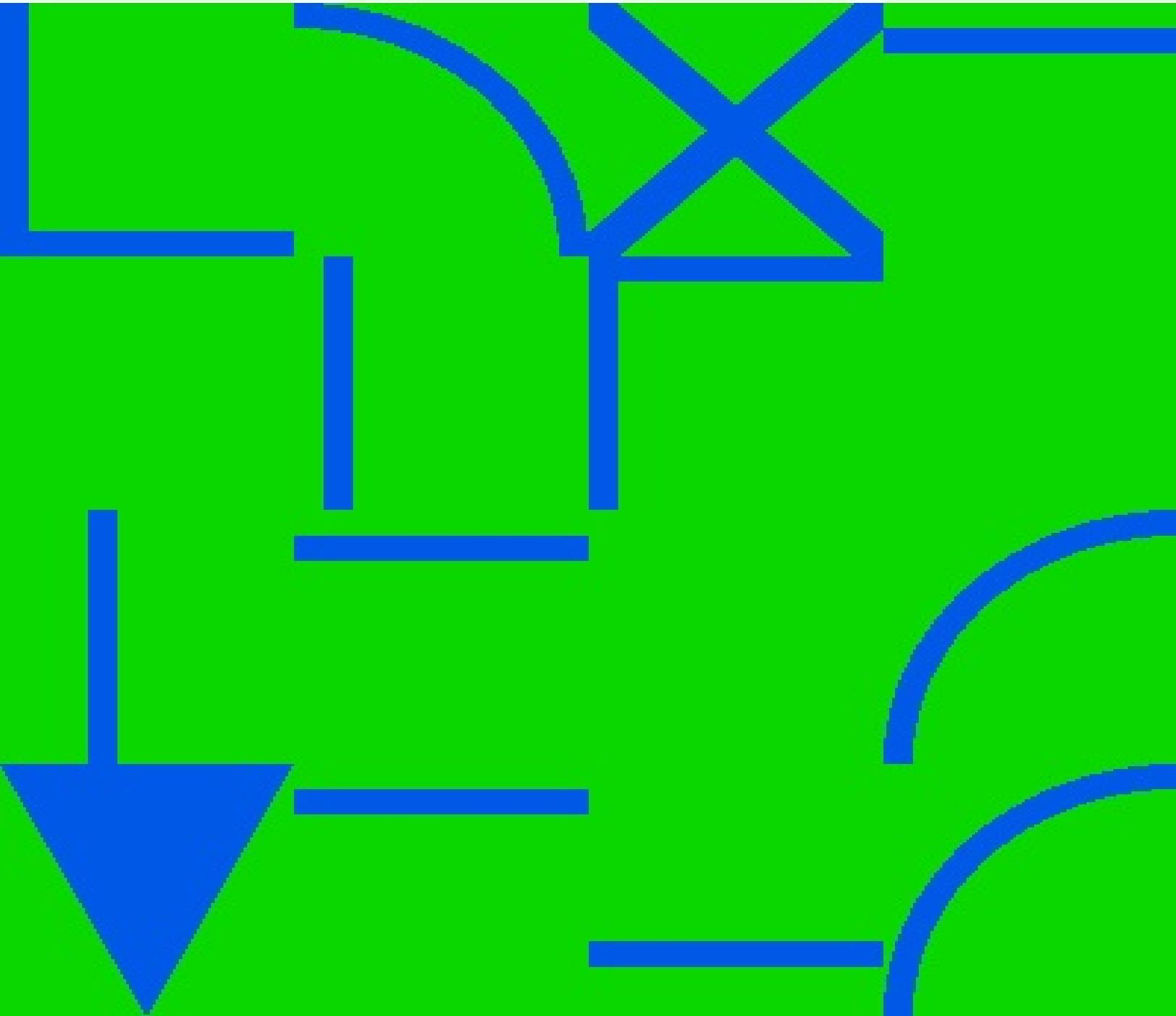


Live to be Useful

or, The Story of Annie Lee and her Irish Nurse

Anonymous



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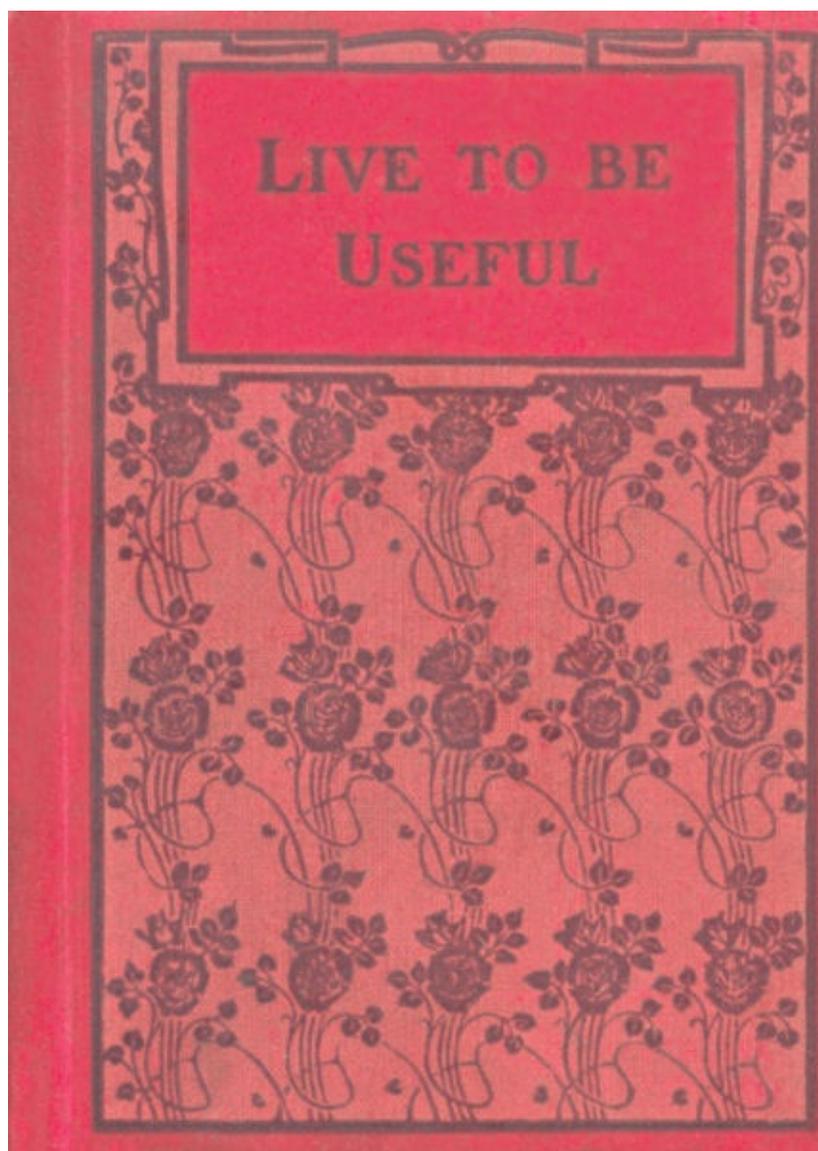
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**LIVE
TO BE USEFUL**

OR,

***THE STORY OF ANNIE LEE AND
HER IRISH NURSE.***



*THOMAS NELSON AND SONS
London, Edinburgh, Dublin, and New York
1913*



Annorah turned, and saw the shadow of a man on the sloping rock.
Page 25.

- CHAPTER I.** ANNIE'S PLAN.
CHAPTER II. ANNORAH'S FIRST APPEARANCE IN THE SICK-ROOM.
CHAPTER III. ANNORAH LEARNS TO READ.
CHAPTER IV. THE PRIEST MEETS ANNORAH AT HER MOTHER'S COTTAGE.
CHAPTER V. PHELM BRINGS BAD TIDINGS TO ANNORAH.
CHAPTER VI. THE CONFESSIONAL—AN IRISH FROLIC.
CHAPTER VII. BIDDY DILLON BECOMES A "HERETIC."
CHAPTER VIII. ANNIE'S DEATH—ANNORAH'S PROSPECTS.
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LIVE TO BE USEFUL.

CHAPTER I.

ANNIE'S PLAN.

Annie Lee was a cripple. Until her eighth summer she had been strong and well, like most other children; but then disease began to appear, and although she had skilful doctors and kind nurses, it was soon too plain that she was never to be well again.

Five years of pain and weakness had been her portion at the time our story commences. So accustomed had she become to her sad situation, that it seemed like a delusive dream when she remembered the sportive hours of her earlier childhood. Like other sick children, she was far more thoughtful than was quite natural at her age, and very seldom in her easiest moments laughed aloud. But she was not an unhappy child.

As soon as she was old enough to understand that she had a sinful heart and needed salvation, she had earnestly sought the Saviour of sinners, and had been graciously received by him, and made a lamb of his flock. In the school of Christ she learned to bear pain without murmuring, and to submit with cheerfulness to her lot in life. Instead of requiring comfort from her parents, who seemed to realize her misfortune more fully than she did herself, she became their consoler, and rarely failed in her efforts to lighten their sorrow on her account.

"It might have been so much worse, mamma," she said one day, when Mrs. Lee was lamenting her condition. "Only think of poor lame Phelim, Bidy Dillon's little boy."

"What is the matter with him?" asked her mother.

"Have you not seen him? He is often in the back-yard when Bidy comes to wash in the kitchen. I've watched him often. I think it was before he came to this country—but I'm not sure—that a large stone, falling from a wall, so mangled his poor limbs that one of them had to be cut off. I never see him limping about on his crutches while Bidy is washing without thanking God for my happier fate."

"Why, Annie, it is not probable that he suffers one-half as much as you do."

"As much *pain*, do you mean, mamma?"

"Yes."

"I wasn't thinking of that. They are very poor; and if he lives to be a man, how can he earn the comforts of life? I need have no care on that account."

"I daresay he has none. There are several trades that he might learn which require a sitting posture; he might be a shoemaker, for instance. Do not fret on his account, Annie."

"It seems to me, mamma," replied Annie, with a thoughtful air, "that his only prospect for the future is to be pushed about here and there in the crowd, until at last he finds a refuge in the grave."

“What foolish fancies!” said Mrs. Lee, rising, as a noise in the yard below attracted her to the window. “We know nothing about the future, and it is not quite right to make ourselves sad about it. It is hardly like your usual trust in God, to be thus imagining trouble. There’s a little lame boy in the yard, who, I suppose, is Phelim; he seems happy enough. Hark! don’t you hear him sing? He is sitting on the bench behind the clothes-frame, and his mother is hanging out the clothes to dry. Don’t you hear her laugh at what he is singing?”

“What is it, mamma? Can you hear the words?” asked Annie, brightening up, and raising herself on her elbow as she lay on her low couch.

“I hear them very well; but his Irish gibberish is as Greek to me. All that I can make out is what seems to be the chorus:

““O Ireland, green Ireland,
Swate gem o’ the sae!””

“Mamma,” said Annie, after listening with smiling interest a while, “it troubles me very often because Phelim knows nothing about our Saviour. He has a sister, two years older than I am, who cannot read. She never went to school; and none of the family can read a word.”

“How did you learn this?”

“From Phelim. I speak to him sometimes when he plays under the window.”

“Well, I don’t know how we can help them. If we should offer to teach them, they would not be willing to learn.”

“Are you sure of it, mamma?”

“Not quite so sure, perhaps, as if I had tried to instruct them; but I know that they regard a book as a sort of Protestant trap, made on purpose to catch them, soul and body. It is an evil that we cannot remedy.—Have you more pain than usual, my dear?” said Mrs. Lee, appearing a little startled, and bending anxiously over Annie’s couch as she observed an unusual flush on her pale cheek.

“No, mamma; but I was thinking of a plan that I have had for some weeks, and hoping that you would not object to it.”

“Object! You shall have whatever you like, if it can be procured. What is it, Annie?”

“Oh, dear mamma,” said Annie, “I do so long to do some good! I cannot bear to live such a useless life. Every day, when I feel the goodness of God and his great love to me, I long to do something for him. And I think, mamma, that I have planned a way to do good without getting off my sofa.”

“You are always doing good, Annie. Do you suppose that your patience under suffering is not a lesson to us in our smaller trials? There are many ways in which you are a blessing to us all; so do not weary yourself with new schemes. If God had required active service from you, he would have given you health and strength.”

“But I can do something, mamma. Please to hear my plan. I want to tell you something more about Phelim’s sister. She has been Mrs. Green’s servant, and her business was to assist in the nursery. She would have done nicely, Phelim says, but for her violent temper. Last week one of the children was cross

and provoking, and the girl got angry and pushed him down-stairs. He was much bruised; and, of course, she was dismissed at once.”

“I should hope so. But your plan, Annie?”

“The poor girl has no place, mamma, and, with such a dreadful temper, is not likely to get one soon. And they are very poor. I know that since Jessie left us, you are too closely confined here with me; and my plan is to have this poor girl to wait on me, and—”

“Why, Annie, what a wild project!” interrupted her mother. “You must not think of it. She would be throwing you out of the window, or beating you to a jelly, in her first fit of ill-temper.”

“Oh no, she won’t, mamma,” urged Annie. “She will not be so easily vexed here, and no one is ever angry with me. Please to try her.”

“Are you really in earnest, Annie?”

“Yes; and very anxious to be indulged in my strange plan.”

“Have you thought how awkward she will be in assisting you?”

“I have thought of it all, over and over,” replied Annie, “and I think she will make a good nurse for me.”

Mrs. Lee hesitated a long time. She could not bear to deny Annie, and could not overcome her dislike to the proposed arrangement. But Annie’s pleading look at length decided her.

“You wish very much to try this wild-goose plan!” she said, resuming the conversation.

“Very much, mamma,” replied Annie.

“Well, you shall have your own way about it. It will last but a few days, I am sure; and the change will interest you at any rate, poor thing!” Then going to the window, she looked down into the yard, and said, “Mrs. Dillon, come up to Miss Annie’s room, will you?”

In a minute the woman made her appearance at the door, with the suds still lingering in foamy flakes upon her arms and along the folds of her apron.

“You have a daughter, I believe?” said Mrs. Lee.

“Two of them, an’ ye plaze, ma’am,” replied Bidy, wiping her arms as she spoke.

“Are they both at home?”

“It’s Bessie that is in service; and it’s only Annorah that’s at home, shure.”

“What is Annorah doing?” inquired Mrs. Lee.

“Doing?” repeated Bidy wonderingly.

“I mean, how does she get her living?”

“At service too, ma’am, when it is to be had. But, shure, it’s a bad timper she has, and will sthrike and scold whin her blood is up. An’ she has lost the fine, comfortable place she had with Mrs. Green, jist for a thrifle of spaach.”

“That is unfortunate.”

“Oh, thin, ye may well say that. Anither mouth in a family like me own is far from convenient whin the cost of the mate and the flour is beyond raach intirely.”

“Well, Biddy, Miss Annie wants some one to wait on her in the place of Jessie, who has gone. She has taken a fancy to try your girl. When can she come?”

“Coom! Why, this very hour, an’ ye like. A blessin’ on yer swate, pale face!” said Biddy, looking pityingly towards Annie.

“She must be gentler here,” said Mrs. Lee; “she must govern her temper. Miss Annie must not be excited and made worse by your girl’s fits of ill-humour.”

“Leave her to me, mamma,” said Annie. “I think, Mrs. Dillon, that there will be no trouble. What did you say is her name?”

“Annorah, an’ ye plaze, miss.”

“Annorah? Very well. When shall she come, mamma?”

“Not until Monday, I think,” replied Mrs. Lee. Then turning to Mrs. Dillon, she added, “You may send her on Monday.”

“An’ she gets a mad streak along o’ that pritty crathur,” said Mrs. Biddy, as she went down-stairs, “she deserves the warm bating she’ll get from her own mother at home.”



CHAPTER II.

ANNORAH'S FIRST APPEARANCE IN THE SICK-ROOM.

Monday came, and Annorah came too. It was with a doubting heart and a troubled look that Mrs. Lee introduced her into her daughter's chamber. It would be difficult to find a plainer-looking or a more awkward girl.

Mrs. Lee looked at the monstrous foot in its heavy shoe, and at the thick, freckled hands, that seemed incapable of the gentle services that Annie's helplessness required, and wondered at her own folly in indulging the singular caprice of her daughter. But a single look at Annie assured her that she, at least, felt no misgivings. Still, she did not like to leave them by themselves until she had tested the new attendant's ability.

"Annorah," she said, "what sort of work can you do? I'm afraid you are not used to such services as Miss Annie will require."

"I can do most anything, ma'am," answered the girl resolutely.

"Indeed! Well, let me see how you would manage to place Annie on the bed when she is tired of the sofa."

The words were scarcely out of her mouth before Annorah had lifted the frail form of the invalid in her arms and deposited her in the middle of the bed. Annie burst into such a laugh as she had not indulged in for a year.

"I think you may be satisfied, mamma," she said; "I never was moved easier."

Mrs. Lee began to think better of Annie's plan, and joined quite cordially in her daughter's mirth.

"And if she were too tired to rest in any position, what would you do?"

"Carry her to the windows, or out in the air, for a change.—Will ye plaze to thry it, Miss Annie?"

"Not now, Annorah." Then looking towards her mother, she said, "Mamma, you may be easy; Annorah and I shall get on famously together."

Thus assured, Mrs. Lee left them, and went down-stairs with a better opinion of the rough Irish girl than she had thought it possible to entertain an hour previous.

Left by themselves, the two girls began to form an acquaintance with each other. Two persons more unlike could not have been brought together. Annorah was evidently much interested in her young charge, and felt the most unbounded sympathy in her sufferings. Annie spoke first.

"Please draw my couch nearer the window, Annorah. That will do. Now, sit down on this low stool, and tell me how long it is since you left Ireland."

"It's two years, miss, coom April."

"So lately? Then you remember all about the old country?"

“Remember! An’ it’s me that’ll niver forget that same. The beautiful counthree it is!”

“Pleasanter than this, do you think?”

“A thousand times. There is no place in the world like it; the dear ould counthree!”

“Why, then, did you leave it, Annorah?”

“Bad luck we had, miss; and a worse luck intirely here, the mane town that this is.”

“Tell me all about it.”

“What for? That ye, too, may laugh like the rest, and call us the mane, dirty set of Irish vagabonds?” asked the girl, her small eyes kindling with a sense of imaginary insult.

“No, no, Annorah. You don’t think I would say such things, do you? But you need not tell me a word if you had rather not. I only thought it would make me forget my pain for a little time; and, besides, I love dearly to hear about Ireland, or any place where I have never been,” said Annie, with a tone of voice so calm and earnest that the girl could not doubt her sincerity.

“Do you, in truth? Why, thin, it’s me that’ll talk till I hoarse meself dumb for yer good. It was the famine, miss, that came first, and stole the bit o’ food that was saved. The praties were rotten in the field; and the poor pigs starved that should have helped us out wi’ the rint. Och, but it was a sore time o’ grief whin sorra a mouthful were left for the bit childer and the ould people who were weak before wi’ ould age! In the worst time o’ all, whin the need was the sorest, our Bessie got into disgrace, and came home from service wi’ niver a penny to help herself or us. There was nought to do and nought to eat at all. The neighbours were faint wi’ the hoonger; and so, before the worst came, we left all that was dear and came here.”

“How many of you came, Annorah?”

“Nine, miss, if we consider our uncles and cousins. We did not come altogether; brother John, who is dead, and uncle Mike, came first. And a fine chance to work they got directly, miss; and then they sent money to pay the old folk’s passage. Our hearts gathered coorage and strength at once, miss, and we thought, shure, the great troubles were over. But the next vessel brought the bad news for us, and we forgot the glimmer of hope we had; for it was our own father dear who was dead o’ the cholera.”

“Poor Annorah!” exclaimed Annie pityingly.

“Poor indade! But soon came the money for the rest; and much as we feared the deep wathers, the hoonger still pressed on us, and the sickness was every day striking down the stoutest, and so we all left Ireland but Bessie.”

“Did you like the passage across from Ireland?”

“No, indade.”

“Were you sea-sick?”

“No, miss. But we came in the steerage; and a crowded, dirty place it was. The dirt was not so bad, for in the ould counthree it oftentimes gets the betther o’ us; but the men were either drunk or ill-natured, and the women quarrelled, and the young ones were aye cross or sick; and a bad time they made of it all.”

“Did you come directly here?”

“No; we stayed where we landed for seven weeks, till we got word to our cousin.”

“And since you have been here, Annorah, what have you been doing? Have you been to school?”

“No; the praste forbade.”

“Poor thing! Then you cannot read?”

“How should I know reading, I’d like to know? Who would teach me that same?”

“Many good people would like to do it, if you would like to learn.”

“I’m ower knowin’ for that, miss,” replied Annorah, with a glance which betrayed that she was rather suspicious of Annie’s good intentions. “It’s a mighty pity that readin’ was contrived at all, for it’s the books that makes the black heretics o’ us. ‘Let alone the books and the readin’,’ said Father M’Clane to me last evening, ‘and confess to me faithfully all that ye hear in the grand Protestant family, an’ all will go well wi’ ye, Annorah,’ says he, ‘now and for evermore.’”

Annie laughed pleasantly. “And so you are to play the spy and the tattler; and however kindly we may treat you, you are to report all our sayings and doings to the priest? I don’t believe, Annorah, that you can be mean enough for that, if you try. I thought the Irish people were too generous to act so low a part.”

“An’ so we are, shure. Sorra a bit will the praste get from me about you here.”

“If he were a good man, a noble, honourable man,” said Annie, “do you think he would ask you—”

“He’s the praste!” interrupted Annorah, her eyes flashing; “the praste, is Father M’Clane. An’ ye mind to spake well o’ him, it’s nought I’ve to say; an’ the tongue is a heretic’s that would spake ill o’ him, and he laving the ould counthree to stay for our good in this haythen land. An’ the books an’ the readin’ were for the like o’ us, would he not be the first to bid us welcome to the same? Och, it’s a good man and a holy is Father M’Clane, say what ye will, miss.”

“I have not called him otherwise,” said Annie, much amused by the Irish girl’s warmth. “I only asked you, or tried to ask you, if he would be likely to require you to tattle and to be a tell-tale, if he were so good as you describe him?”

“It were jist putting before me eyes the maneness of the man. Is that nothing at all, and he a praste?”

“Well, well, Annorah, we will say no more about him now. I am tired, and must rest. You won’t mind being still a while?”

“Poor little thing!” said Annorah; “ye’re pale as a lily. Is there a dhrap o’ anything ye would like, and then slape a bit?”

“I will try to sleep.”

“But ye cannot kape still. The pain is shure too great. Let me carry you about a little.”

“No, no; it would tire you,” said Annie, who in her spasm of pain really longed for so novel a method of changing her position.

“At least, let me thry it for once,” urged the girl, whose Irish sympathies were powerfully awakened by her young mistress’s evident suffering; “jist for once, darlin’.”

Annie offered no further resistance, and, as Annorah bore her light form carefully up and down the room, experienced a feeling of relief that inspired her with warm gratitude toward her uncouth attendant.

“Ye’re light as down, honey,” said Annorah, as she met Annie’s anxious, inquiring look.

Satisfied at last that she was really no heavy burden, the weary invalid soon dropped asleep, with her head on the Irish girl’s shoulder. Mrs. Lee opened the door and looked in.

“Whist!” said Annorah, in a low, impatient whisper. “Kape quiet, will ye, and let the poor lamb slape!”

Mrs. Lee hardly knew whether to be amused or provoked as she, the mistress of the house, obeyed Annorah’s imperative gesture, and withdrew softly from the apartment.



CHAPTER III.

ANNORAH LEARNS TO READ.

In a very few days Annie was intrusted to the sole care of her young Irish nurse, who served her with the most affectionate attention. Mrs. Lee often came to sit with her suffering child, but Annorah alone performed the tender offices of the sick-room. Rough and uncouth as she was, she readily adapted herself to the services required; and no power on earth could have persuaded her that Annie could be so well taken care of by any one else.

“It naded a dale o’ contrivance, to be shure,” she said to her mother one afternoon, when, Annie being asleep, she ran home to ask after the family, “or I would be well bothered with all her pretty talk o’ books, and taching me to read and write; but she, poor darlin’, shall say whatever she plazes to me.”

“An’ if she spake ill o’ the praste and the holy Church, how then, Annorah?” asked Mrs. Dillon, eying her daughter rather curiously.

“Blessed little good can we say o’ Father M’Clane, whin we spake truth, as ye know, mother dear; and it’s not to be expected o’ her to tell lies for his sake.”

“Does she spake o’ the Catholic Church Norah?” asked her mother.

“Never at all, mother; so make yer heart aisy. She spakes to me o’ meself, and the wickedness in me heart; and when she leans so lovingly on me shoulder, and raises her clear eyes to the blue sky, or watches the bright sunset, and spakes so softly to me o’ the beauty o’ a holy life, I feel all the betther and patienter meself for hearing the good words. She says, mother dear, as how it is depravity that makes me so often angered and wrong; and how that Jesus Christ, the Son o’ God himself, died to save us and cure us o’ our sin. It would do yer own heart good, could ye hear her; and there’s nought wrong in it at all, ye see.”

Annie’s influence grew stronger and stronger, and not a day passed without some precious truth from her lips finding a place in the heart of her attendant. It was many weeks before Annorah yielded to her persuasions, and commenced learning to read. The pleasant summer days had come, and they were often abroad in the fresh air together, Annie in her low carriage, which was easily drawn by her young nurse.

Down in the valley behind Mr. Lee’s house there was an old mill, long since deserted and unused.

This was a favourite resort of Annie’s, and it was here that she taught Annorah to read, during the long summer afternoons.

At first Annorah was listless, indifferent, and often suspicious that all this attention to her education boded no good to her old religious prejudices. But she could deny Annie nothing; and after a time, as her confidence in the piety of her gentle teacher increased, she began to feel a deep interest in the truths taught.

In her anxiety to please her invalid charge, she made rapid progress in reading, and before the end of the summer could write a few plain sentences. She began to love knowledge for its own sake; and many a pleasant hour did she spend, when Annie was asleep or weary, in reading the easy lessons selected for

her. But she was careful that neither her mother nor the priest should suspect her progress in learning, and as she still went regularly to “confession,” it was easy to keep her secret from them. Annie was often not a little puzzled to know how she managed to elude the vigilance of the priest.

It was a beautiful autumn afternoon, when the air was just cool enough to be refreshing, that, with Mrs. Lee’s permission, Annie and her nurse sought their favourite seat by the mill-stream. Annie had been thinking more than usual about Annorah’s progress in religious knowledge, and wondering how, with the light and wisdom she had received, she could still cling to her old superstitions. A great change had taken place in her temper, which was now usually controlled; her manners had gradually become more gentle; but the radical change of heart that Annie so longed to witness, did not yet show itself.

“Tell me, Annorah,” she said, after the usual time had been spent in reading, “does Father M’Clane know that you can read yet?”

“Not he, indade.”

“Does he not question you?”

“Not exactly. He says I spake better English, and that shure it is because I live where it is well spoken.”

“What did you say to that?”

“I said. ‘True, your riverence.’”

“I’m afraid that is hardly the truth, Annorah. If anything has improved your language, it is your reading.”

“To be shure. But is it not because I am with those who spake English well, that I’m learning to read? So it was the truth, after all.”

“Not the whole truth, Annorah.”

Just then Annorah turned, and saw the shadow of a man on the sloping rock at the left hand. Her first impulse was to cry out, but the fear of alarming Annie, and her own natural courage, prevented her; and she soon thought she could detect in the shadowy outline a resemblance to Father M’Clane. “Och, then, the murder’s out,” she thought; “the mane creature has been listening, and faith now he shall have a pill that will settle his stomach intirely.—What were you saying, Miss Annie?” she asked aloud, turning towards Annie’s carriage.

“I said that you did not tell him the whole truth.”

“Small matter for that. It was all he asked for, and it’s better plazed he is than if it were more. He’s a lying ould thing himself, any way!”

“Why, Annorah?”

“Ye may well open yer eyes. Did he not tell me last Sunday that you, miss, with your sweet voice and comforting ways, were jist a temptation placed in me way, by the ould inimy himself?”

“I, Annorah? What does he know of me?”

“Nothing at all, savin’ that ye are a saint, and he an ould—”

“Stop, stop, Annorah. We must not speak evil of any one. I hope that you were civil in your reply.”

“Civil! indade I was. I said, ‘Ye should teach your flock better than to tempt honest people.’ ‘It’s gettin’ impudent ye are,’ says he; ‘ye’ll be turnin’ heretic next. You must be seen to and taken care of,’ says he. ‘Bad luck to ye!’ says I; ‘when ye sees me two eyes light me to confession again, ye may take care o’ me and welcome.’”

“And shall you not go again?”

“Never again.” Annorah saw the shadow raise its hand threateningly. “No, indade. Where’s the use o’ telling all ye know to an ould creature like him? Doesn’t the blessed Book say that no man can come to the Father but only through Jesus Christ? An’ shure, the great Father in heaven is angered to see me kneel down before that biggest o’ scamps, when I should be praying to himself. I’ll do it no more.”

“I am glad to hear you say so, Annorah; I do so hope,” said Annie, as the affectionate tears stole down her thin cheek, “that you are beginning to learn in the school of Christ. But, my poor girl, you will meet much opposition. I am afraid that your family will join with the priest in opposing you.”

“Let them. I’ll fight them all with pleasure—more especially the praste.”

“But fighting is not the way to make them think well of the religion of Jesus. He was mild and gentle, patient under abuse and persecution; and he must be your pattern, if you desire to please God. You must pray to him, Annorah, for a new heart, so that none of these angry feelings will trouble you.”

“Is it the new heart, miss, that makes you so sweet and patient?”

“If I have any goodness, Annorah, it is because God has changed my old heart, and made it better. It is his grace that enables me to suffer without complaining; and it is his love, which I feel in my heart, that makes me calm and happy in my greatest pain.”

“Then I am sure,” said the girl earnestly, forgetting for a moment that she was overheard. “I will never rest a day at all, till I get that same done for me. But mayhap he will not be so willing to look upon me.”

“In his holy Book we read that he is no respecter of persons, and that whosoever cometh unto him he will in no wise cast out.”

“Why, then, I can coom as soon as the grandest. *How* shall I coom?”

“I will tell you how I came to him. I studied his holy Word to learn his will, and I prayed often that he would give me his Spirit to teach me the way to him.”

“An’ did he?”

“Yes. In a little time I began to know more about myself, and to see how much I needed a Saviour; and then I saw how willing Jesus must be to save me, having died for me as well as for others; and so, in a way that I can’t explain, I was led to give myself to him, and I soon found peace in believing. He will teach you, Annorah, and lead you right, if you earnestly seek him. Look at the sunset clouds. Did you ever see such gold, and crimson, and purple before? But the sunset is not half so bright and beautiful as the true Christian’s prospects.”

Looking at the sunset reminded Annorah that it was late for her charge to be out. A very slight rustle in the bushes behind her, recalled what she had strangely forgotten, in her interest in the conversation. She took up a large stone and threw it among the bushes.

“What is there, Annorah?” asked Annie, in alarm.

“Only a sarpint, miss.”

“Well, let us hasten home. Mamma will be anxious.”

After they left, the dark form of a man rose from behind the green knoll where they had been sitting, and moved slowly along the bank of the stream, down the valley. It was Father M‘Clane.



CHAPTER IV.

THE PRIEST MEETS ANNORAH AT HER MOTHER'S COTTAGE.

Biddy Dillon had just finished a large ironing for one of the families in the village, and having placed the clothes-frame where the dust from the open fire-place could not fall on the fine starched linens and muslins, she began to set her table for tea, at the same time counting over the gains of the week. Not a trifle in her calculations were the wages of Annorah, who came regularly every Saturday evening to add her contribution to the family fund.

"It's a good child she is gettin' to be, and a pleasant-tempered one, too," said Mrs. Dillon to herself; "it's made over intirely, she is, our Lady be praised!"

She began to sing the burden of an Irish ditty, but the broken-nosed tea-kettle over the fire beginning to sing too, she commenced talking again.

"Heaven send it mayn't be throe, but it does look like the heretic's doings. She were like a brimstone match, or like gunpowder itself, at home, and tender-hearted as a young baby besides. Shure, it's a mighty power, any way, that has so changed her. I can't jist feel aisy about it, for it's Father M'Clane will find out the harm of her good spaches and doings."

The words were hardly out of her mouth when the priest entered. The storm on his brow was not unnoted by Biddy, but she respectfully set a chair for him in the cleanest part of the room. She was not quite so easily terrified by priestly wrath and authority as she had been in her own country; for she had the sense to know that the ghostly father's malediction did not, as in Ireland, entail a long course of temporal misfortunes upon the poor victims of his displeasure. But she had not yet acknowledged to herself the doubts that really existed in her mind in regard to the truth of the Romish faith; she still clung to the errors in which she had been brought up, and feared the effect on her eternal happiness of Father M'Clane's displeasure. So it was with a beating heart that she awaited his time to address her.

"Do you know that your daughter is a heretic?" was his first question.

"Indade, no, yer riverence," replied Biddy.

"An' what sort o' a mother are you, Biddy Dillon, to stand still and look on while the wolf stales the best o' yer flock? You might have known that heretic family would lave not a stone unturned to catch her at last. And so she can read—"

"*Read!*" interrupted the astonished woman.

"Yes, read! And it's the heretics' Bible she has read, too,—and all through your fault. Mighty proud ye have been o' all the fine housekeeping ways she has learned, and very thankful, no doubt, for the bits o' could victuals from the big house; but where's the good now? Ye may thank yourself that she will lose her sowl for ever."

Mrs. Dillon started and turned pale as the door softly opened, and Annorah herself, unobserved by the priest, came in. He went on: "Do you call her better, the pestilent crather, when, from her first going to the

grand place on the hill, never a word about them has been got from her at confession? The obstinate crather!”

“I came to your riverence for spiritual good,” said Annorah, now coming forward and laying a fat chicken and sundry paper parcels beside her week’s wages on the little table by her mother’s side. “I came for spiritual good, and ye thried to teach me to tattle. It’s a mane trade intirely, lettin’ alone the maneness of sich as teach it.”

“Annorah!” exclaimed her mother, “do you dare to spake in that way o’ the praste himself?”

“I mean no harm, mother.”

“No harm!” repeated Father M’Clane, turning fiercely toward her. “You won’t cheat me with words like these.”

Annorah tossed her head scornfully and sat down opposite the priest, who on his part seemed far less desirous to carry on the war since her arrival. The cottage that he occupied belonged to Mr. Lee, and judging that gentleman by his own heart, he feared that an unfavourable representation of the case to him might either increase his rent or turn him out altogether. Besides, he was not unlike blusterers, and could denounce the erring with greater ease when they stood in awe of him. That Annorah felt neither fear nor reverence for him, it was easy to see. So, smothering his wrath, he began, to the great surprise of Mrs. Dillon, to address the girl in his most coaxing tones.

“Come, come, Annorah,” he said, “let us be friends. It’s me that’s ould enough, and willing too, to be to you in place o’ yer own father, Heaven rest his sowl; but he’s gone to a better counthree than this sinful world. An’ yer own good, child, is what I think on in spaking to you of Miss Annie and the heretics generally. It’s not for meself, shure, that me prayers go up at the could midnight hour whin ye’re all sleeping in quiet. It’s not me own troubles that make me dream o’ Heaven’s wrath, but it’s me care for yer sowl, Annorah, and for the sake o’ yer gettin’ saved at last.”

“Hear that, Norah, child,” said her mother. “Who else ever fretted themselves for yer good? What would become o’ ye, an’ Father M’Clane gave ye up entirely?”

“Your riverence must stay till I draw the tae and fry a bit o’ the chicken,” added Bidy, as the priest rose to take his leave.

“No, thank you,” he replied; “I must not sit down at ease. Small rest is there for me when the wolf is in the fold, and the flock is in danger.”

He took leave quite cordially, but when he was gone, Bidy turned, with a shadow on her round face, to speak to her daughter.

“An’ what’s this ye’ve been doing, child? Is it me own ears that have heard o’ yer Bible-reading and railing at the praste? What’s coom to ye now? Didn’t I warn ye against their heretic ways? An’ ye’ve been and fallen into the dape pit as aisy as a blind sheep. Och! for shame, Annorah Dillon! Why do ye not spake? What can ye say for yourself?”

“Mother,” said Annorah, “how often you’ve said, when Larry O’Neale’s good luck has been tould of, that it was the larnin’, shure, that did it all! An’ when we were over the great water, you said, ‘How nice and comfortable would it be an’ we had one in the family like Larry himself, to send back the news to ould friends, when we got safe here.’ Do ye not mind, mother dear, how often you’ve said that same since?”

Well, now, I've been and learned what ye wanted so much; and first cooms the praste and makes a big fuss, and then you, mother, spake as if I had thried to anger in the room o' plasing ye. I'm sure I've thried to plase you all I could."

"So ye have, mavourneen; so ye have," said Bidly, her voice softening as she turned to look at the chicken and other things that Annorah had brought. "It's not yer mother, honey, that has a word to say against you; but when Father M'Clane talks o' yer being a heretic, it angers me. This Bible that he frets about, what is it, Norah?"

"It's God's truth, mother, that he has given to teach us all; and a brave book it is. Father M'Clane has one himself; and what frets him is, that the heretics, as he calls them, can read it for themselves and find out God's will; for only the praste has it with us."

"Well, then, an' the praste tells us the same, it saves us a world o' bother, shure."

"But if the praste is not a good man, he can tell us whatever he likes; and how do we know what is God's Word? Now, mother, in all God's Word there is never a bit about confessing to a praste, but a great deal about praying and confessing to God himself. But, you see, if all our people knew that same, sorra a bit o' money would go to the praste's pocket in comparison to what he gets now. It's that, mother dear, that makes him so afraid we shall learn. He can't get the money from those who can read God's Word for themselves."

"Are you sure it's all throe?" asked Bidly, her eyes wide open with astonishment.

"It is the truth of God. An' it's this same learning that's got out of the holy Book that makes the difference between Protestants and Catholics. They go to the Word itself, an' we take on hearsay whatever the praste tells us. An' there is no word in all the Book, mother, about praying to Mary the mother of Jesus, or to any of the saints. Everybody is invited to pray straight up to God himself."

The girl's downright heresy, and her contempt for the mummeries of the Romish communion, troubled her mother. But what could she do? The change for the better in the child's temper had prepared her to look favourably upon the change in her religion. She listened to Annorah's continued account of what she had learned from the Bible with the greatest interest, feeling every moment more and more disposed to accept its teaching, and less and less disposed to blindly submit to the priest. Annorah stayed till a late hour with her mother, repeating over and over again the truths so interesting to herself, and obtaining permission at last to bring the Bible itself on her next visit. She was strictly cautioned, however, to bring it privately, lest Father M'Clane should hear of it, and, in Bidly's language, "kick up a scrimmage."

There were more ideas in the old woman's head than had ever found room there before, when, after Annorah had gone, she sat down by herself before the fire. She was both ambitious and imaginative, and long vistas of future greatness opened before her, all commencing with the wonderful fact that *her* child could read and write.

"An' it's not all a queer drame," she said; "I'll hear her for meself coom next Saturday Och! what a row it will make an' Father M'Clane, and Teddy Muggins, and Mike Murphy get wind o' a heretic Bible being brought to the place! But I'll hear and judge for meself, that I will; an' if the praste be right, small harm is there to be shure; and if he be wrong, the better for me poor sowl, and a saving o' money."



CHAPTER V.

PHELIM BRINGS BAD TIDINGS TO ANNORAH.

Annorah's troubles were not ended by the unexpected encouragement received from her mother. Her brothers and sister, and Irish acquaintance generally, soon heard that she no longer went to mass or to confession; and great was the uproar among them. The unsparing rebukes of Father M'Clane, whenever he met with any one supposed to have any influence over her, soon fanned into life not only a vehement hatred of the Protestants, but a bitter feeling of enmity toward the poor girl herself. Those who had been most cordial now either passed her in sullen silence, or openly taunted her upon her defection; and the very children in the lane hooted after her, when she made her usual weekly visit to her mother.

Annorah often found these things very hard to bear. Her quick Irish blood was up with the first insulting word; but she sought for strength from above to control it, and no outbreak of passion was suffered to mar the sweet lesson that her patience and kindness toward all was insensibly teaching.

She was getting ready for her usual Saturday evening's visit to her mother's cottage, when her attention was attracted by the low whistling of a familiar Irish air in the yard below. Looking out, she observed her lame brother, Phelim, making signs for her to come out. A little alarmed lest some evil had befallen her mother she hurried out to meet him.

"What is it, Phelim? What is the matther, dear?"

"Matther, do you ask? Well, the matther is, that ye're not to coom home till ye're sent for. Are ye not ashamed to make such a row?"

"I don't know what you mean. Sit down, Phelim dear; you're over weak to keep standin' so. Does the new liniment no help ye at all? And ye must carry home the money to mother, and the tea, and the sugar, and some nice warm woollen stockings that Mrs. Lee showed me how to knit for yerself, darlin'; and Heaven grant that it's no a bad turn o' pain ye will get in yer bones by cooming to tell me. There's a cranberry-pie that Mrs. Lee was to send for your own self, Phelim dear; it will relish better than our mother's plain cooking."

The thought of eating the dainty so thoughtfully provided, produced a choking sensation in the boy's throat, as if it had there come into a collision with his wrath against heretics. But he said nothing, and Annorah went on:—

"I've been making some caps for mother; but ye're no able to carry so many things at once, poor fellow."

Still Phelim did not speak, but he gazed earnestly into her face. The moon was up, and he could plainly see the traces of tears on her cheek, and the sad but loving expression of her eyes as she returned his gaze.

"An' it's the Protestant religion that makes you so good and kind, Norah," he said at length; "our Lady help me, and I could just be a heretic wi' ye!"

"It's little I know yet o' the truth, but, O Phelim, it's a lovely way to heaven; and the swate, blessed feeling that fills up the heart when I pray straight up to the Lord Jesus Christ himself, is better than to have

all the diamonds in a queen's crown. It makes me so light and happy; so contented intirely. It quiets the bad temper into perfect peace; and I love, as I never dreamed of doing before, all my friends and enemies too. It's little I know yet, Phelim, but all the Gould in the world, and all the world's hate too, shall not hinder me from learning more o' God's wonderful way to save sinners. But hurry home now, Phelim, mavourneen; the raw night air is no good for ye."

"They may say what they will, Norah," said the boy, "but I'm sure I will love ye for ever. An' ye'll tache me to get those heavenly feelings, I'll jist follow the road ye have taken. I've plenty o' time, as ye know."

"Do ye mean, will I teach you to read?"

"Yes."

"I'll speak to Miss Annie about it. Hurry home as fast as you can. Good-night, and God bless you."

With an affectionate kiss they parted; and Annorah went slowly back to her young mistress's room.

"How is this, Annorah?" asked Mrs. Lee, as she entered. "How happened you to return so soon?"

"I have not been home, an' ye please, ma'am."

"Are you not going to-night?" asked Annie, raising her head from her pillow, and noticing, with a little anxiety, the unusual expression of her attendant's face.

"It's Phelim, my brother, miss, has been here, and it's a house full o' company there is at home."

"And they want you to spend the holy Sabbath to-morrow in visiting them, I suppose."

"No, Miss Annie."

"What then?" asked Mrs. Lee, after a moment's silence.

"Nothing to speak of, ma'am. Leastways nothing to trouble ye about."

"But I can see that it is something that troubles you, Norah," said Annie, taking the rough hand of Annorah in hers, and drawing her nearer. "Is it something that you would rather I should not know?"

"Indeed no. But it's loath I am to add my bit troubles to yours, when ye suffer yer own so patiently. It's only that all my relatives, and the praste, and the Catholic neighbours, are waiting for me to come home, to bring me back to the ould Church by force. An' Phelim, poor boy, came to tell me to keep away. It's worse he'll be for the damp air; and it's angry they'll be for my staying away."

"Ah! Annorah, my dear nurse, I was afraid that rougher times awaited you. I was afraid they would persecute you."

"But they haven't yet, Miss Annie."

"Perhaps it is not what you would call persecution, but it is sad to have those we love turn against us. You must trust in God, my poor girl. He will give you grace to bear it all."



CHAPTER VI.

THE CONFESSIONAL—AN IRISH FROLIC.

Great was the uproar in Bidy Dillon's cottage when it was found that Annorah was not coming to make her usual Saturday evening visit to her mother.

Preparations had been made by Father M'Clane for holding a regular confessional; and an hour before sunset, he had taken his seat in the little darkened chamber, behind a table on which four tallow-candles were burning, with an uncertain, flickering light.

It had been decided in the council of relatives and friends that Annorah's only chance of salvation lay in speedy confession, and it was very reasonably supposed, that could she be brought back to that Popish duty, a great point would be gained in the way to her perfect restoration.

It was, therefore, no affectionate, loving circle that had now assembled to "bear a hand" in Annorah's restoration to the faith. One after another went reverently on their knees up the short, steep stairway, and came down lighter in purse, and, as the priest wickedly taught them, absolved of all offences, but swelling with wrath against the poor girl whose coming was so long delayed. And when, at last, it became apparent that she would not come, a storm of abuse was poured upon Bidy, who, it was evident to all, did not cordially join in their violent measures.

Now, Bidy Dillon had too much of the national character to sit down quietly and receive their abuse, and soon a regular quarrel ensued, which would have speedily become a fight, but for the descent of Father M'Clane into their midst, and his imperative command that each one should sit down quietly and "hould his tongue."

"Whisht! whisht! Of what are ye thinking, ye silly gossoons? Will ye bring down the peace officers upon ye, and take out the bit o' the night in the prison, instead o' drinking me health, as ye may, and me helping to do that same? Arrah! Why should ye glower and snarl at each other, like a kennel o' mad puppies, when it's the brave frolic ye may have together? It's the soft looks and the fine words ye must use, an' ye would win the young heretic back; ye may fight over her till the great day o' all, and it will be but a sorrowful waste o' the powther, barrin' the swate chance ye are losing now o' a comfortable frolic. Arrah, now, Dennis darlin', a sup o' the whisky for me, a thrifle sthrong, an' ye plaze. It's a could night to be out wi' an empty stoomach."

"Stay till the morning, father," said Bidy, coming up to him with an anxious face; "we cannot kape peace an' ye do not bide wi' us; the frolic will be all the better an' ye stay to the orderin' o' it,—and the best bed is waitin' yer riverence's convanience. There's Sandy and Mike will fight an' ye lave, and Katy there is ready to tear out the eyes o' big Nelly Murphy. It's quarrelling they've been the whole blessed day. Bide with us, lest the dear childer who is the cause o' it all should be kilt and murdered intirely, an' she sthrays home to-night."

She spoke in a low voice, and he replied in the same tone, drawing her back from the crowd, who were all talking together.

"Look here, Bidy Dillon," he said; "the girl must lave that grand house and come home to live here with

you.”

“Lave Miss Annie, do ye mane, sir?”

“Small hope for her sowl an’ she do not.”

“And few are the pennies I can bring to yer riverence when the child has no wages to bring home o’ a Saturday. Sorra a hap’orth to spare will I find; it’s no me two hands alone can find bread for the mouths o’ all, and—”

“Stuff and nonsense!” interrupted the priest; “there’s many another place can be had for a sthrong, likely lass like her. Good servants are not over plenty, and she can be better placed.”

“But where, I would like ye to tell? It’s in a Protestant family she must be, an’ she goes out to service at all.”

“Yes; but they’ll let her alone in some houses. Sorra a bit do the most o’ them care what becomes o’ the sowl, an’ the work be done to their liking. Our Lady be praised! it’s to the far counthrees that the Protestant missionaries are sent, and the silver is given; for one-half o’ the pains taken wi’ the poor crathurs who work in their kitchens would have ruined us all.”

“Yer riverence spakes throe, to be shure,” said Biddy; “but for all that, it will never be a bit o’ use to thry to make a good Catholic o’ Norah, now that she can read the big books and talk so bravely herself. An’ it were to be the savin’ o’ her life, she would never confess to a praste again, or take the holy wafer from his hands. But if ye would take it aisy and lave it to me, and persuade these meddlesome boobies to mind their own particular business, and throuble us no more, it’s meself would be sure to bring the handsome sum to yer riverence when I come to confession. Contrariwise, you see, and you kape fussing, and they kape fussing, it’s all loss it is to ye, and no gain.”

The priest’s countenance brightened perceptibly. He seemed much impressed with Biddy’s view of the case, and was not slow to perceive its worldly wisdom. So, after addressing the waiting company to some purpose, he left them.

But Biddy sat thoughtfully in a corner, with her lame boy. She had, in her conversation with the priest, cunningly hit on an expedient to propitiate him for a time, but she was ill at ease. She could not at once throw off the chains of teaching that had bound her all her life; and so dim was the light that she had received, that she dared not yet follow it.

“Oh, then, it’s a jewel she is, core o’ me heart, Norah dear!”

The last two words were whispered so loud that Phelim heard them, and he said, “I’ve seen her to-night, mother.”

“Who? Spake aisy, mavourneen.”

“Our Norah.”

“When?” questioned his mother, with an anxious glance at the unheeding revellers.

“Afther dusk. I thought ye would like her to kape away to-night.”

“Now blessings on ye for a handy callant as ye are,” said Biddy, patting his shoulder approvingly. “An’

how is she?"

"Well as ever, mother, and kind-tempered and good too. A power of good things she has sent, and they're safe hid in the cellar. The money is in me coat pocket, mother. Shall I give it ye?"

"Not now. Kape it till all be gone. Was she sorry or mad, Phelim?"

"Mad? Not at all. Sorry? I don't know at all. Her voice was all courage and kindness; but I saw big tears on her cheek, for all that."

The mother and son sat silently looking into the fire for a few moments. At last Phelim spoke. "Mother," said the boy, "ye'll not have them abuse her and torment her, just for changing into such a dear crathur?"

"She's a heretic, lad."

"What o' that? She's good, any way," said Phelim stoutly. "I would I were a big man. We'd see who would throuble her then. It's a thrashin' they'd get, an' it's manners they'd learn, and no charges made for the teaching."

"Whisht, lad! it's careful and sly we must be. An' do ye not bother yer poor head wi' yer sister's new notions. It's a nation o' throuble I'd have with a pair o' ye at once; and ye're no earning money, Phelim, boy, to buy off the praste. Kape a still tongue, lad, an' ye bite it in two; an' don't go for to meddle wi' matters concerning yer sowl. The praste an' yer poor mother will kape a sharp look-out; an' it will go hard, shure, if between us ye are not saved at last."

"But, mother, where is the harm if I look for meself a bit? Who can see Norah, so gentle and loving, so careful o' you and me, so pleasant to every one, and not want to know more o' the way she has taken?"

"Yes, yes, lad; but have ye no sense at all? What if ye have been tould a secret, can ye not kape it the same? Now mind, once for all; ye're not to know it at all, if Norah brings home the Word o' the Lord to read to her ould ignorant mother (it's a swate voice she has), and ye shall hear the big Book as well; only mind, Phelim, acushla, ye're to know nothing at all, let who will spake to ye o' the same."

"Yes; but, mother, what if I myself learn to—"

"Hush!—Is it o' me ye are spaking?" asked Bidy, turning to a cluster of people who had drawn near them. "It's no hearty I feel to-night, and poor lame Phelim is kaping me company. Is it room for the dance ye are wanting? The other is the roomiest, and the floor is the plainest."

Hurrying out with ready good-will to assist in the needful preparations, Bidy soon removed any suspicions that might have been entertained in the minds of any of her neighbours of any leaning on her part toward heresy.



CHAPTER VII.

BIDDY DILLON BECOMES A “HERETIC.”

Several months passed quietly by. It was winter, and the heaviest snow that had fallen within the memory of that personage so universally known and respected—namely, the oldest inhabitant—now lay upon the ground; and all in town and country who were partial to the exercise of skating could enjoy it freely. But the severe cold confined the delicate invalids to their heated rooms, and fair Annie Lee again found herself shut up to the tiresome routine of sick-room pleasures, only varied by intervals of suffering. The pleasure, however, predominated. She seemed almost to forget her pain and increasing languor in her unceasing efforts to instruct her young nurse.

Annorah, on her part, thirsted for knowledge, especially for the wisdom that cometh from above. She improved, too, rapidly enough to satisfy a less partial teacher. In the varied arts of housewifery, and in the more intricate use of the needle, she had also become quite expert, and, to use Mrs. Lee’s own words, “was quite a treasure in every part of the house.”

Little lame Phelim came for an hour each afternoon to Miss Annie’s room to be made a “schollard, shure;” and every Saturday evening found Annorah, with her Bible, seated by her mother’s fireside, reading, and in her own earnest but uncouth manner expounding the truths she read.

One Sabbath evening in March, Father M’Clane set out for a walk to Mrs. Dillon’s cottage. His prospects and reflections had been of a grave and sad character throughout the day, and his threadbare coat and lean purse had been more than usually suggestive of the great truth, that all earthly comforts are fleeting and transitory.

For the first time Biddy had that day absented herself from the Catholic chapel. Annorah had lately added to her Scripture reading, “Kirwan’s Letters to Archbishop Hughes.” She read it to her mother whenever a spare hour enabled her to run home. Biddy had been greatly interested in the appeals and arguments of her talented countryman, and deeply impressed by his life-like delineation of the follies and superstitions of the Romish ritual.

“It’s rasonable he is intirely,” she said, “and a bright son o’ the ould counthree, blessin’s on it! It’s him who spakes well o’ the poor ruined crathers, and praises us all for the natural generous-sowled people we are. He knows us intirely, Norah dear. Shure he’s a wonderful man and a bould, let alone the thure son o’ ould Ireland, for doing the beautiful thing. Read us one more letther, mavourneen, before ye are off, and lave the book here. Mayhap Phelim will spell out a morsel or so when the Sabbath even is coom.”

“You will not go to confession to-morrow, dear mother?” said Annorah.

“Not I,” replied Biddy firmly.

“It goes to my heart, mother, that the money we earn so hardly, and which should be kept to comfort your old age, should go for nothing, or worse.”

“I will do it no more. Make yer heart aisy, honey. Never a penny o’ mine will the praste hould in his hand again.”

“He will visit you, mother.”

“An’ what o’ that? Let him coom. He is welcome an’ he minds his own business, and only dhraps in for a bit o’ gossip; but an’ he interferes in me private consarns, it’s soon he’ll find himself relaved o’ all throuble on account o’ us.”

Annorah saw that there was no reason now to fear that her mother would be overawed by the priest; but she still lingered anxiously. Her mother saw the shade on her face, and asked,—

“What is it, Norah? Are you in throuble?”

“Do not quarrel with him, mother,” replied the daughter.

“Let him be dacent, and it’s ceevil treatment he’ll get; but no man shall browbeat me on me own floor,” said Biddy, in a tone which declared the firmness of her purpose.

It was on the night succeeding this conversation, that Father M’Clane visited the cottage. As he approached the house he paused at the unusual sound of a voice reading. It was Phelim imperfectly spelling out to his mother and a few of the neighbours one of the letters of Kirwan. The priest, who was not remarkably well versed in the books of the day, did not know the work, but supposed that it was the Bible to which they were so profoundly listening. His face grew as dark as the night shades around him.

“I’ve caught ye at last!” he exclaimed, as, without ceremony, he burst into the room. “This tells the story. It’s not that ye are ill in bed, or hindered by the rain, or the could; it’s because ye are heretics all, that ye shun the confession and the holy mass. Do ye know what the Church has power to do wi’ the like o’ ye? Arrah! it was the heavenly and not the mortal wisdom that made the hot fires o’ purgatory for such. Small help will ye get from me when the flames are scorching ye. Never a mass shall be said for a sowl o’ ye, unless ye repent at once.”

“And what call have ye to spake the like o’ that,” said Biddy, “and me sitting peaceably by me own fire wi’ the neighbours?” She spoke in a low, uncertain tone, for his sudden appearance had startled her. A hush had fallen on the little assembly, and signs of terror flitted across the faces of the most timid, as the familiar voice of the priest recalled their old Popish fears. He was not slow to perceive this, or to take advantage of it.

“And who taught yer lame boy to read at all? Who brought the heretic Bible into yer house? And who gathered the poor neighbours together to hear the false words that lead to perdition? Answer me that, Misthress Dillon,” said the priest in a tone of anger.

Biddy did not reply, though she had quite regained her usual courage.

“I’ll ask ye a plain question, Biddy Dillon, and I want a straight answer. Will ye, or will ye not, give up these heretic doings, and stay in the communion o’ the holy Church?”

“An’ it plaze yer riverence,” replied Biddy, no ways disconcerted, “yer blessed saints are nothing to me; an’ I shall do as I plaze.”

“Hear the woman! Do you hear the bould blasphemer?” he exclaimed.

“An’ what if they do hear? It were a sore pity they should be sthruick deaf to plaze ye,” replied Biddy, her eyes flashing with excitement. “I would ye were in ould Ireland, or, for the matter o’ that, in purgatory itself.”

“We would—” said the priest.

“No doubt o’ it. But it’s here I am, at yer service,” interrupted Bidy.

“Yes, and it’s here ye’ve been bought for a wee pinch o’ tae and a few poor, lean chickens. Sowl and body ye’ve been bought, and a mighty poor bargain have the blind purchasers made o’ it.”

“Plazing yer riverence, ye know nought o’ what ye are saying, and small throuble ye’ll make wi’ yer idle words. It’s not a turkey, duck, or hen could buy Bidy Dillon. Ye’ve tried it yerself, father, and so ye know.”

“It’s a black heart ye have,” said the priest, whose courage was hardly equal to his anger, and whose valour speedily cooled before resolute opposition. “It’s blacker than ink ye are, Bidy Dillon, with the wicked heresy.”

Like most Irish women, Bidy was well skilled in the art of scolding, and among her neighbours was considered rather more expert in the business than themselves. When angry, abusive epithets seemed to fall as naturally from her tongue as expressions of endearment when she was pleased.

“A black heart, did ye say?” she cried, rising and facing the priest, who involuntarily retired a step from her; “the same to yerself! An’ ye were bathed in Lough Ennel, and rinsed in the Shannon at Athlone, it would not half clane out the vile tricks ye are so perfect in. A black heart has Bidy Dillon? An’ ye were ducked and soaked over night in the Liffey mud at Dublin, ye were claner than now? A black heart? An’ yerself an ould penshioner, idle and mane, stirrin’ up a scrimmage in an honest woman’s house, and repeating yer haythenish nonsense, an’ ye able and sthrong to take hould o’ the heaviest end o’ the work! Are ye not ashamed? What are ye good for?”

“The saints preserve us! what a tongue the woman has!” exclaimed Father M’Clane, making a futile effort to smile, as he turned his face, now pale as death, toward the company. “But I have no time to stay longer. I warn ye all, my friends, to kape away from this accursed house, and to turn a deaf ear to all that is said to ye here. Your souls are in peril. Ye are almost caught in the snare. Ye should run for yer lives before ye perish entirely. I shall remember you, Bidy Dillon.”

“In course ye will. An’ ye show yerself here again, barrin’ as a peaceable frind or ould acquaintance, ye’ll find yerself remimbered too, honey.”

There was a silence of some minutes after the priest left the house. It was broken by the most timid of the party.

“Afther all, Bidy, my heart misgives me. Of what use are all the prayers on the beads, the Hail Marys, and the penance, the fasting from meat on Fridays, or even the blessed salt o’ our baptism, if we anger the praste, and he refuse to give us the holy oil at the last? What will become o’ us then?”

“What can a wicked ould praste do to help us? It’s God alone can strengthen us then. I wouldn’t give a penny for the oil. It’s a betther way, darlin’, that God has provided for us. It’s a brave story that Phelim is waiting to read to us. There’s thruth and sense in it, too, ye will find.—It’s a fine counthree is this, Masther Barry, and a free,” added Bidy, turning to a stout man, who, with scarcely a whole article in his apparel, was lounging in the shade of a corner.

“Thru for ye,” he replied,—“though it’s little I get out of it, barrin’ the sup o’ whisky wi’ my supper.”

“But ye might—the more shame it is. Ye are weel-conditioned and hearty. It’s no the counthree is to blame, neighbour, nor Katy indade. She works night and day for ye an’ the childer. Ye are better here than over the sae.”

“Oh, then, I don’t know. When I came to this counthree, I had never a rag to me back, an’ now, faith, I’m nothing but rags. A fine, illigant counthree!”

“Lave the liquor alone, Peter Barry, and ye may have the best of the land for yerself. An’ ye would give up the dhrinking, a better lad could not be found, nor a handsomer.”

“It’s too sthrong for me. It’s many a day have I given it up for ever, and been drunk as a beast in an hour. But to-night, says Katy to me, ‘It’s the heretic Bible as is read at Mrs. Dillon’s has a cure in it for weak sinners like you, Peter dear.’ So I came to hear a bit o’ the Bible, an’ ye plaze.”

So Kirwan’s Letters were laid aside, and a New Testament brought out. Phelim read very poorly, and was often obliged to spell over the long words, and did not always succeed in giving the correct pronunciation; but no fault was found by his eager listeners. He read how Christ healed the leper, and poor Peter Barry found in the story a word of encouragement for him. He read of the Saviour’s gracious compassion for the hungry multitude; and his ignorant auditors praised the divine Being who so sympathized with mortal infirmities. Phelim was often interrupted by remarks or approving comments, but these in no way diminished the interest of the sacred story.



CHAPTER VIII.

ANNIE'S DEATH—ANNORAH'S PROSPECTS.

On every pleasant evening Biddy Dillon's cottage was thronged by those who came to listen to the Word of God. It was in vain that Father M'Clane opposed these meetings. His threats and arguments, once so potent, seemed now but to lessen his power. He even secured the services of a neighbouring priest, and with him visited each Irish family in succession, coaxing and flattering where his authority was not acknowledged. But, alas for him and his prospects! he could do nothing with the people.

The Protestant clergyman of the village, when he heard of the interest felt in lame Phelim's reading, readily came to their assistance, and joyfully read and explained the divine lessons. As their knowledge of the right way increased, their impressions of its importance to them personally were deepened, and Annorah soon had the happiness of seeing not only her mother and brother bowing at the foot of the cross of Christ, but many others earnestly seeking the salvation of their souls.

The little Irish neighbourhood had been named New Dublin. It stood quite by itself, a thick belt of wood and the narrow mill-stream isolating it from the large village, where Mr. Lee's residence stood. Nothing but the smoke, which in summer as well as in winter is ever pouring from Irish chimneys, revealed to a visitor the existence of their pleasant hamlet. Still it was not so far retired but that, when a wake was held for the dead, the noise of the revelry seriously disturbed their quieter neighbours; and when a row ensued, as was often the case, the distant uproar alarmed as well as annoyed the timid women and children. But no one thought of interfering. The wealthy owners of the iron-works and factories in the vicinity were glad to secure their labour, because of its cheapness, and never troubled themselves about an occasional noise, if the general interests of their business were not neglected.

There were not wanting those who pitied their low estate, and who would have sincerely rejoiced in their elevation; but until poor invalid Annie Lee began to instruct Annorah, no one had dreamed of winning them, by self-sacrifice and kindness, to a knowledge of the truth. Annie herself, while patiently explaining over and over again what seemed to her as simple and plain as possible, little imagined the glorious results that were indirectly to grow out of her feeble efforts. But God watches the least attempt to do good, and fosters the tiniest seed sown; and Annie, without knowing it, was sowing seed for a plenteous harvest.

But while the good work prospered, she herself was rapidly ripening for heaven. She knew that she was hastening to a better land, even a heavenly; and she strove to improve every moment of the time that remained, in efforts to give stability to Annorah's religious feelings. Many were the conversations that they had together on the condition of the poor Irish people, and countless almost were the directions that Annorah received in regard to the best methods of winning their love and confidence. Young as she was, Annie had learned that all efforts to benefit the unfortunate or ignorant are vain so long as the cold shoulder is turned towards them. She had proved in Annorah's case the magic effect of loving words and sympathy.

As the spring advanced, Annie grew weaker. The mild air seemed to enervate rather than to brace her system, and she grew daily more emaciated. Her paroxysms of pain were less frequent, and she suffered most from languor and drowsiness. It was apparent to all but her fond parents that her days were

numbered. They watched over her with the tenderest affection, hoping when there was no hope, and persuading themselves and each other that she would rally again when the ripe summer brought its gentle breezes and beautiful blossoms.

“She is so fond of flowers and of the open air,” said Mrs. Lee to Annorah, when, after an unusually restless and painful day, Annie had fallen asleep at last, and both left the room to breathe the fresh evening air. “When the weather gets settled so that she can let you draw her little carriage down by the mill-stream again, she will brighten up and get stronger. It is enough to make a well person ill, to be shut up so long.”

“Ye know best, shure,” said Annorah, in her grief resuming her national accent and brogue—“Ye know best, but it’s thinner and weaker she’s getting, and is a baby for weight in me arms. Och! the dark day it will be for poor Norah when she looks her last on that swate angel face!” And the poor girl burst into tears, and covered her face with her apron. After a few moments she went on to say,—“It’ll go hard wi’ ye all, Mrs. Lee: ye’ll miss her dear ways an’ her heavenly smiles; she is yer own blood, were she not an angel intirely. But oh, ma’am, she’s been to me what no words can tell; and the short life o’ me will seem without end till I go to wait on her above. Oh, what’ll I do without her, when the whole world is dark as night?”

Mrs. Lee could not reply, for she, too, was weeping. There was something in Annorah’s desolate tone that went to her heart, and inspired a pitying affection for the plain-looking girl by her side, which she would once have thought impossible. She began to comprehend the mystery of Annie’s caressing manner to her young nurse.

“Annorah, my poor girl,” she faltered at length.

“Ah, ma’am, in all me troubles, and when I was wickedest, was it not her voice that was full and sweet with the pleasant encouragement? Oh, core o’ me heart, acushla, what’ll I do? what’ll I do?”

“We must trust in God, Annorah. If he takes her from us, it will be for the best, and we must learn to say, ‘His will be done.’ She will leave us her lovely example to guide us, and we shall not forget how she strove to do good. We shall be lonely; but is it not selfish in us to wish her to stay here and suffer? God knows what is best for us all.”

It was but a little time that they were permitted to hope. Fair Annie Lee’s appointed work was done, her mission of love was accomplished, and she was ready to depart. Shut up by her protracted illness from all the ordinary paths of usefulness, she had found out a way to work in her Saviour’s service. Long will it be ere her gentle acts of kindness will be forgotten, or her precious influence cease to be felt by those who knew her.

She died suddenly, perhaps unconsciously at last. Annorah had placed her couch so that she could see the beautiful changes in the rich June sunset; and when she returned after a moment’s absence to her side, she found that, with a sweet smile of joyous triumph on her lips, she had fallen asleep in Jesus.

Annorah, although greatly refined by reading and association with educated people, and especially improved by the happy influence of true religion, yet retains enough of the characteristics of her nation to make her an acceptable visitor in the humblest cottage in New Dublin. It was long after the death of her young mistress before she regained her usual cheerfulness. But time, the great healer of sorrow, has

gradually softened her grief, and made her cherished memories of Miss Annie, like beautiful pictures, very pleasant to look upon.



Transcriber's Note

Minor typographic punctuation errors have been corrected without note.

The frontispiece illustration has been moved to follow the title page.

There is a large amount of dialect in this book, which all remains as printed in the original text. This includes some variable spelling, e.g. crather—crathur, plase—plaze.

Page 55—Sharron amended to Shannon—"... and rinsed in the Shannon at Athlone ..."

A table of contents has been added to this version of the e-text, for ease of navigation.

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