

# The True Witness,

AND

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## THREE BIRTHDAYS.

### A CHRISTMAS CAROL.

BY ELEANOR C. DONNELLY.

(From the Philadelphia Catholic Standard.)

### PART THIRD.

#### III.—(CONTINUED.)

Miriam hid her face in her hands and felt the sweet calm within her heart increase every moment.

— Ad firmandum cor sincerum  
Sola fides sufficit? —

When they came out into the quiet street a little later, Mr. Alby said softly:

"I have asked for you a grace, my Miriam. May it be quick in coming!"

She looked at him, pale, but with a smile of singular tranquility:

"If by lifting my finger," she said, slowly, "I could turn you aside from the path you have chosen, dear Ernest, I would sooner die than do it. And if God ever gives me the grace to be a good Catholic, I hope he will give me with it the grace to imitate you in my poor degree."

She added, with averted head, and in a smothered, broken voice:

"— to be a sister of charity."

#### IV.

The Terrace was brilliant with lights that Christmas evening; and Barbara's guests in the full tide of merriment and mirth. Public obstacles and private misgivings to the contrary, the entertainment was proving a success; and Barbara, in spite of her vexation, was forced to give Cyril Murdoch his due, and admit that she could not have got along very well without him. He was a whole host in himself. Tableau after tableau had been successfully executed and applauded under his management: and each time, in the pauses between the falling and the rising of the curtain, lively gossip went on among the guests over Mr. Alby's defection of Rome. Miriam's unaccountable serenity, and Cyril Murdoch's marriage; speculations on the young minister's motives and his chances with his blonde fiancée; coupled with *ou dits* as to the beauty, blood and position of Cyril's bride. If the latter had been the favorite wife of a Sultan, she could not have been more jealously secluded. She had kept her room all day, and been excused from dinner; but Cyril promised if her headache was better that she would take part in the closing tableau and join the guests at supper.

"Headache!" muttered Barbara, as Cyril strolled away after making this announcement; and a servant came to tell her some one wanted to see her in the library. "It is nothing but airs. If she had the headache and the heartache I have to-night,—she might stay up stairs for a week, aye, for a year!"

In the dim library she found Mr. Alby equipped for traveling, but looking calm and happy.

"I came to say good-bye," he said cheerily. "Maybe I ought not have disturbed you when you were making merry with your guests; but I am leaving in the midnight train, and I have not a minute to spare."

Barbara looked at him with moist eyes. So slender—so slightly-built, but with such a strong light of manly resolve, of sacrifice made, and victories achieved—shining out of his thin, intelligent face!

Never before had she realized how dear to her he was—this upright, gentle young man. Never before had she realized how wide was the gulf which had opened between them; how complete the divorce from the many delightful privileges and congenial interests which they had shared so long and so familiarly together. She could not speak, but held out her hand.

"I did not ask for Miriam," he said, softly, "because I would spare her the pang of parting. We have a perfect understanding between us; and God will surely requite her noble resignation. For his sake, as well as for your own, my dear Miss Barbara, I beg of you never to thwart God's work in her soul."

"She will be the next to go, I suppose," said Barbara, drearily. "One by one they drop away from me. First Pet—then you—, her own voice choked.

"Dear Pet!" cried the young man, with shining eyes. "Good, courageous, noble Pet! in God's great mercy, one of the instruments of my conversion—of my salvation. Had she been less brave, less resolute, I might have faltered in my hour of trial—I might have gone on, (Heaven forgive me!) deceiving myself and others to the bitter end!"

He paused with a tear glistening on his lashes,—then pressing warmly the hand he held, he said in a broken voice:

"For your many kindnesses to the poor young minister who failed so often and so unworthily in his duties—may our Lord Jesus bless you, Barbara, in a way which you have not sought or known. Good-bye."

He was gone. And Barbara went back, like one in a dream, to the lighted drawing-rooms and found the curtain just falling on Miriam, as *Evangeline*. Truly for her—

"All was ended now, the hope and the fear, and the sorrow, All the aching of heart, the restless, unsatisfied longing, All the dull, deep pain, and constant anguish of patience.

"Only one more tableau," said some one near her.

"Yes; and Cyril's wife is to take part in it. I am dying with curiosity," said Lucy Murdoch.

"Die in a better cause," whispered her sister: "I dare say she is some French aristocrat who will keep us all at a distance. Cyril always had the oddest tastes."

Barbara sat listening to it all with a queer oppressive feeling, as if she had the nightmare; and when Miriam came to ask her some question about the supper, she answered at random, marvelling at the same time, in a misty way, how calm her sister looked.

Oh! if the evening was only over and the guests gone—that she might give up this acting, and hide her misery in her own quiet room!

After what seemed to her an interminable delay, there was a buzz of expectation all over the saloon. The guests settled themselves in their chairs in mingled curiosity and complacency, the little bell rung, and the curtain slowly rose.

"*St. Cecilia and Valerian!*" cried the footman, appointed to announce the tableau; and a charming picture was revealed.

The skilful artists had adroitly chosen the moment when the Pagan nobleman discovers for the first time the Christianity of his newly-wedded bride: and the drapery and grouping were dramatic beyond words.

"In thy bridal chamber,  
Like Saint Cecilia,  
Thou shalt hear sweet music,  
And breathe the fragrance  
Of flowers immortal!"

Cyril, as *Valerian*, in the rich costume of a Roman courtier, stood in an attitude of dignified questioning surprise; one hand resting lightly on his bride's shoulder; the other, touching with easy grace, the hilt of his jewelled sword.

And a handsome, irresistible pagan he looked! The tunic of scarlet velvet slashed with silver, sat easily on his manly, well-proportioned figure—his plumed cap lay at his feet—and a chain of gold glittered on his breast, under his long, curling beard.

But the *Saint Cecilia*—cynosure of all eyes? The whole assemblage bent forward breathlessly, to catch a glimpse of her face.

But in vain. The bride of Valerian—the bride of Cyril—was deeply veiled?

Her richly flowered robe of white brocade flowed away from her in shining waves and lay like a snowy river behind her; but over head and face alike—over the corset-waist which fitted closely to her majestic figure, and was studded thickly with seed-pearls—over the wide, graceful sleeves which fell back from her jewelled wrists, and hung like folded wings—over, in fact, the charming *tout ensemble*, a veil of delicate gauze descended to her feet.

But so exquisite was that mysterious statue—so perfect the pose of her half-averted head under the yielding veil, that a murmur of subdued admiration ran through the crowded room.

While they whispered—while they gazed—Cyril's arm was slowly, gently lifted; Cyril's hand was laid upon the envious gauze—and with one quick movement the shimmering mass lay behind her, and in the blaze of lights—the BRIDE stood unveiled!

Lovelier than of old in her vivid blushes—fuller, maturer—but with the sweet, familiar smile upon her lips, and the well-remembered light shining out of her wonderful grey eyes—

"Pet!" screamed Barbara.

"O darling!" cried Miriam.

"My wife!" said Cyril, triumphantly, as he put her into their arms.

And a scene of glorious confusion followed which baffles description—the wildest impromptu tableau of the night.

When the first joyful outburst was over:

"Married!—and to Cyril, after all!" sobbed happy little Barbara, oblivious of the by-standers.

"This is surely the merriest Christmas of our lives!"

"And *Saint Cecilia's* happiest birth-day," said Miriam, archly, with her arms round Pet's waist.

"Yes, God be praised!" cried Cyril, drawing his wife tenderly towards him—"and a joyous ending to a year of many trials, but of many blessings! Have you forgiven me, sister Barbara, for marrying the pretty foreigner, after all?"

"Good-for-nothing fellow? Do you deserve forgiveness, after keeping me on the rack all day? My only wonder is, that so fair and dear a saint would ever become the bride of such a remorseless pagan!"

"Speak," said Pet; and Cyril struck an attitude:

"Listen and admire, friends and sisters, how the romance of our lives has outstripped the reality of our tableau. *This Saint Cecilia!*—and he laid his hand caressingly on Pet's charming head, and looked over it wickedly at Barbara—"not only converted her Valerian before she married him, but bids fair (thank Heaven!) to bring the rest of her pagan relatives, after him, into the ONE TRUE FOLD!"

(THE END.)

## DICK POOLE'S JUMP—AN IRISH STORY.

Dick Poole's father came of a stock, the Poole's of Poolgara, of hard drinkers and hard riders. It need scarcely be said that Poolgara was in Ireland, and that the system of management pursued by the owners was such as to reduce the dimensions of the estate, until, when it came to the hero of this tale, there was little left of the ancestral acres. But Dick Poole cared naught for this. As long as he had the privilege of fishing and shooting over the old place (and the new comers never refused him) he let the world wag and saw the property slide from him with the equanimity of an impecunious philosopher.

The consequence was that Dick disposed of farm after farm of his estate, until at length nothing was left him but the old house, which he stuck to, and an old retainer, Dan Doherty, who clung to his fortunes with a fidelity which might be described as melodramatic. Poole, of course, from his habits, was not a welcome guest among the country families, though they universally admitted his right to consider himself of their caste. He kept up, however, a custom of visiting the officers who were stationed at a small garrison town in the neighborhood; and it was at their mess, to which he was invited, that the circumstance arose, the sequel of which rendered his name a household word throughout the province.

During dinner Poole conducted himself well enough. He was fortunately placed next a quiet, sucking ensign; but when the claret was disposed of, when the Major left the room, and strong waters were called on, Poole laid himself out, as was usual with him, for a hard night. A few of the men, seeing the rate at which he went, calculated on putting him under the table; but before Dick had shown the slightest token of undue exhilaration, several of his entertainers were talking thickly and laughing loudly. Hunting, shooting, and swimming stories were exchanged with a crescendo of mendacity on the part of the narrators as the night advanced.

"Talking of swimming," put in Poole, "do you know the cliffs at the seaside of Poolgara? I'll bet any man I'll jump of the highest part of those cliffs, and carry another fellow on my back."

A universal burst of laughter, and cries of "Take you up, old boy! How much can you book?" greeted this insane challenge.

When the noise had somewhat subsided, Lieut. Browne, the senior Lieutenant of the regiment, produced a betting book, and said to Dick: "If you are serious, Poole, for a hundred you don't do it."

"Done!" replied Dick at once; and it was fixed then that the performance was to take place on the following Sunday.

For a wonder, Poole walked off steadier than many of his hosts could on that night. Lieut. Browne expressed well in to win; "for if the fool would be mad enough to attempt such a thing, there is no one living would be idiot enough to go on his back," thought he. Next morning Poole told Dan Doherty how he had enjoyed himself at the barracks, and then quickly mentioned the bet, as if he had made nothing of it. Dan for a few moments could not speak, so much was his horror and surprise; at last he managed to stammer out, "O Master Dick, Master Dick, whatever d'ye mane be it? Is it out of yer senses ye are, intirely?"

"No, you old goose, I'm not out of my senses," replied Poole. "I want to win a hundred pounds; and what is more, Dan," he went on coaxingly, "you must help me to win it."

"Begorra, thin, I won't!" bust out Dan with a rebellious energy. "I've served you, man and boy, many a year; but hand or part or fut, so help me—"

"Look here, Dan, I don't intend to do it at all, and still I intend to gain the wager. We want it, as you know, badly."

"God help us, 'tis thrue for you, sir, we do."

"Well, here's my plan. We'll be on the ground; you'll get on my back" (Dan made a forcible gesture of dissent), "and just as we seem about to start, the police will be on the spot to stop us. Do you take?"

"You mane that we are to put them up to it. Is that it, sir?"

"Yes, of course."

"But thin, won't the hot be a draw, sir?"

"No, it won't. Do you think I'd make such a wager without taking care that I should have an advantage over these gay boobies?—Leave it to me, Dan. Follow my directions, and you'll find everything will be right. I'll go into the town myself to-day and speak to the Head Constable."

The eventful morning arrived, a cold grey morning it was, in July. The officers were all on the ground looking over the cliff, which was fully from ninety to a hundred feet above the sea, and wondering whether Dick Poole would have the courage to carry out his wild enterprise. Dick exchanged greetings with them cordially, and brought forward Dan as his *compagnon du voyage*. That individual had some misgivings touching the order of proceedings; and when Dick preemptory ordered him to take off his clothes he showed decided symptoms of his courage oozing, like that of Bob Acres, from his fingers' ends. Poole, however, whispered a few reassuring words in his ear. "Besides," reflected Dan, as his teeth chattered with the fright and cold, "I've tould the poliss meself, for fear of any mistake. I wonder they're not here already."

Dan prolonged his unrobing as much as possible; but at length he stood trembling *in curru*, and before he could distinctly realize the situation he found himself on his master's back. Glancing over his shoulder in mortal terror, he saw the glazed caps of the police approaching.

"Are they coming, Dan?" whispered Dick, softly.

"Yis, master, dear yis; only hould on for a minute."

"Are they very near us, Dan?"

"Quite close, yer honor," responded Dan, now becoming easy in his mind.

At this moment a constable ran forward, breaking from the officers, who tried to intercept him. But what was Dan's terror when Dick clutched him firmly by the legs, and then with a shrill "Whaup!" like the war shout of an Indian brave, gave a header literally into space over the cliff!

Dan says he found himself going down under water almost as far as he had fallen from land. The place was several fathoms deep; on their rising to the surface Dick grabbed his comrade and bore him safely to a boat which was lying under the precipice prepared for the event.—So Dick Poole won the hundred pounds and Dan Doherty was none the worse.

## THE BRIDAL RING.

### A STORY OF CAHIR CASTLE.

(From Legends of the Wars in Ireland, by Robert Dwyer Joyce, M.D.)

The site on which Cahir Castle is built was formerly a *dun*, or fort,—a structure which was formed of woodwork and earthen embankments. The present castle was founded, it would seem, by one of those bold Norman adventurers who came to our shores in the train of the Earl of Cliepstow, or Strongbow, as he was more familiarly called. It stands upon an island rock which divides the waters of the Suir, and during the several wars that raged in Ireland since the invasion, was always a place of great strength and importance. It belonged, since the beginning of the fourteenth century, to the powerful house of Ormond; for we find it then in possession of James Butler, son of James the third earl, by Catherine, daughter of the Earl of Desmond. During the wars of Elizabeth and those of the succeeding reigns, it changed hands frequently, and stood several gallant sieges, the relation of which would be far too long for the limits of this story. The ancient Irish name of the town of Cahir was *Cahir Dana-uascaigh*; that is, the circular fortress of the fish-abounding fort.—One of the incidents connected with the military history of Cahir Castle is told in the following story:—

In a corner of a solitary churchyard some short distance from Cahir, there lies a portion of an ancient tomb, namely, the upper half of a limestone slab, which is now almost completely hidden from the eye of the curious visitor by the rank and luxuriant growth of docks, nettles, and other weeds that clothe the silent dwellings of the dead around. If you raise it up, and rub the moss carefully from its timeworn face, you will be rewarded with the sight of the following portion of an inscription:—

"Heere lieth ye bodye of John de Botiller,  
who was shot.  
Alsoe ye bodye of his Wife Mary de Botiller,  
who died when he died.

Their youlthe was Love,  
Their courtshippe was Love,  
Their marriage-dale was Love,  
Their wedded life was Love,  
Their deathe was Love,  
And ————

What the remaining portion of the inscription was will most probably remain unknown forever: for the fracture occurs at the word "And," while the other half of the slab is lost. Many an hour's toil the search for that lost fragment of sculptured limestone cost us: but it was all of no avail: and the history of the personages whom the above quaint words commemorate would perhaps have remained in obscurity till the end of time, were it not that we happened, some years ago, to meet Brian Tierney, of Templemary, as fine and jovial and

stalworth, and withal as venerable, a specimen of a *seachie*, or story-teller, as you would find within the four seas of old Ireland. Brian Tierney's relation is far too long to come within the limits of such a short tale as this must necessarily be. Stripping it, therefore, of some of its ornate flourishes, and a great number of incidental episodes, we shall proceed to relate the thread of the story according to his version.

About a mile or so to the south-east of Cahir Castle, there stood, on a high crag over the Suir, a square tower, or peel-house as they would call it in Scotland; which tower was for a long time the dwelling of Walter Ridenford, an ancient retainer of the great house of Ormond. The tower was one of a chain of similar buildings, which, with their high bawn walls and strong gates, stood at the distance of a few miles from one another towards the south and west, in a semicircle beyond the great border fortress of Cahir, and acted as advanced posts through which an enemy would have to pierce before he could attack the strongly-situated central castle. The tower to which we allude was called Tig-na-Sgiath, or the House of the Shield, from a rude representation of that defensive appurtenance of a warrior, which was sculptured over the sturdy archway that led into the bawn. It was a strong place, and especially so during the time it was occupied by the brave old castellan whom we have named above. Walter Ridenford, or Wattie Stem-the-Stream, as he was called along the borders,—by which we mean that strip of debatable land which lay between the territories of the two great and rival houses of Ormond and Desmond,—was one of the most eccentric men that ever struck morion on head to follow the banner of his master on fray or foray. At the time of our story, he had attained to that respectable age which generally precludes a man from engaging in the rough and dangerous occupations of war. But time seemed to have had but little effect upon the iron frame and hardy spirit of Wattie-Stem-the-Stream; for he was still one of the most quarrelsome, and at the same time most formidable, of all those retainers of the house of Ormond who inhabited that dangerous and troublesome district lying along the south-western banks of the Suir.

Many a single combat he had fought, and many a foray he had ridden, in every one of which, by some good chance or other, he had been successful; and this, we need not say, caused him to be regarded as a personage of no small consequence by the various senechalls, castellan, and other people of note and authority for many a mile round. Wattie had married late in life; and his wife, dying soon after, left behind her an only daughter, who was dear as the apple of his eye to the old warrior, and who, about the period at which our story commences, was nearly seventeen years of age.

Mary Ridenford was a beautiful and gentle girl; and, when we say that much of her, it is enough to indicate the fact that her hand was sought in marriage by many a young cavalier of the borders. But to all those, when they ventured to speak upon such a delicate subject to Wattie Stem-the-Stream, that grim old warrior made the rather ambiguous answer, that no one but the best man in Ormond would get his daughter for a wife. This oracular response, it seems, instead of decreasing, added considerably to the number of young Mary Ridenford's suitors. There was Gibbon of the Wood, from the banks of Funchoon, who gave it out that he would cheerfully do battle with sword and axe—if that was the meaning of old Wattie Stem-the-Stream's answer—against any competitor for the lady's hand; there was Donat Burke of Ruscoo, who swore, that, as he had lost his heart, he did not care a straw about losing his head for her sake; there was Raymond Grace, of Burnfort, who made oath to his confidential friend, that, along with putting his heart's blood in jeopardy for the sake of gaining her affections, he would willingly throw his lands and castle into the bargain; and there was a host of others. But the rivalry at last seemed hottest between Gibbon of the Wood and the young castellan of Cnoc Graffon, whose name was John de Botiller, or Butler, and who, besides being a distant cousin of the Earl of Ormond, was also accounted the boldest horseman of the border, and the best and truest hand at sword-play, pistol-mark, or deft tricks of dagger in time of war, and also in every athletic amusement on festival days on village green and by fairy well. One day John de Botiller received intimation from one of his daltins, or horseboys, that Gibbon of the Wood had just paid a visit, on matrimonial subjects intent, to the House of the Shield. This information was riot, of course, very welcome to the young fiery castellan of Cnoc Graffon. With a dark brow he began revolving the subject in his mind, and at last took his horse, and rode away for the purpose of paying a similar visit to Wattie Stem-the-Stream. He found that worthy sitting by his castle-gate, grimly contemplating a certain pass in the far-off range of mountains, where, once upon a time, he had the satisfaction of seeing a detachment of the Desmond soldiers cut to pieces by the followers of his ancient lord and master, Thomas the Black, Earl of Ormond. Now, the young castellan of Cnoc Graffon