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AN IRISH BOY'S ADVENTURES. CHAPTER I.

About thirty years ago, in a small room, in the town of Waterford, three persons, an elderly man and woman, and a boy, were seated round a fire, on a dreary December evening. The room was scantily furnished, and the few articles in it were poor in appearance. On the walls were two small, colored prints, one representing the Madonna, the other St. Joseph. Over the mantel-piece was a roughly-framed pencil sketch, bearing the initials, "P. B.;" and above this was a blank, clean space on the wall, which showed where a large picture had hung. On a small table, in a corner, lay a few educational works, some drawings of buildings, and a copybook; and beneath it lay two sets of stonemason's tools. It was plain that the owners of the room had been coming down the hill lately, and had parted from some of their possessions by the way.

"God knows, it isn't my wish, Mary; you know well I don't like to have the old spot, if it could be helped: but what are we to do? This is the third week we're out of work, and I see no chance of getting any either. Peter Butler said in his letter, that if Phil there, and me, was in Bradford, we'd be employed at once, for they're always buildin' there. You could stop wid your sister till we wrote, and then you could join us agen."

"Yes, mother, cheer yourself up," said the last speaker's son, a lad of sixteen, with black animated eyes, and a bright intelligent face, "it's only for a week or a fortnight, and then, please God, we shall be all together once more."

"Well, dears," said his mother, drying her eyes, "it may be all for the best; God grant it. I don't like to be puttin' myself in your way, Martin," she continued, addressing her husband; "but somehow or other, I can't get over a foolish feelin' I have that something wrong will happen if you leave me."

"Tut, woman dear, never mind that. Well, will we go on Monday, then? You know there is no time to be lost, Mary."

His wife gave consent with a sigh, and it was arranged that the father and son should sail for England, and seek employment at Bradford, leaving the mother with her sister in Waterford.

For some years Martin Byrne had worked at his trade of stonemason, and had enjoyed moderate prosperity. But about a year before the time at which our story opens, things began to go ill with him. Work became slack in Waterford, and when his employer failed in business, he found it almost impossible to get work elsewhere for himself and his son. It is needless to quote the old proverb. Ill luck came not alone in this instance. His wife's health, which had always been infirm, grew worse than ever; and the doctor's fees drained him of whatever little money he had saved.

About this time an acquaintance in Bradford wrote to him, informing him that stonemasons' work was plentiful, and well paid for there, and advising him to go thither with his wife and son. Martin Byrne, as we have seen, thought fit to take Peter Butler's advice, and in the beginning of the second week of December, father and son had applied for, and obtained work from, Mr. Chumley, one of the principal builders in Bradford.

At the time of the two Byrnes' arrival, the people of Bradford had among them an unwellcome visitor: the scarlet fever, in its worst form, was making dreadful havoc among the poor. In that quarter of the town in which poverty compelled our two friends to take up their abode, many families had been attacked, and the greatest dread was entertained of contagion. Seeing that disease was in Bradford, Martin Byrne wrote to his wife, suggesting that she should remain in Waterford till he and his son had earned sufficient to buy some furniture, and the scarlet fever had disappeared from Bradford. He received in return a long letter containing his wife's expression of sorrow for being unable to rejoin them, accompanied by such lengthy cautions as affection prompts, to take great care.

One evening, nearly a fortnight after this, the father and son were walking homeward after work, the former talking cheerfully of the prospect of a speedy reunion with his wife.

"Yes, Phil, if we only had another pound saved, we'd be able to have her among us agen."

"I wish she were come, father; I wish she were come," said Philip. "But, father," he continued, looking anxiously at him, "what makes your face so red? You don't appear to be warm, for I have seen you shiver more than once this last half-hour."

"Oh, it's nothing, child; but this sharp wind blowin' in my face," replied his father, who was unwilling to attribute the illness he really felt to a serious cause.

His son made no answer, but a dull, heavy foreboding of evil entered his mind. When they sat down in their lodgings, instead of bustling about among the other lodgers, as was his wont, Martin Byrne seated himself close

by the fire, whose heat appeared insufficient to warm him. Philip moved uneasily from one part of the room to another, pretending to be busy among his books, but really occupied in stealing fugitive glances at his father, upon whose face a deep flush had gathered, as he bent shivering over the fire. At length he caught the mournful eye of his son fixed upon him, and, placing his elbows on his knees, and letting his head sink between his hands, he sobbed out, while the tears streamed through his fingers, "O Blessed Lord, look down on my poor wife and child."

His son ran towards him; and, embracing his feverish head, endeavored to soothe him, while one of the lodgers hastened to the house of the doctor.

Martin Byrne rapidly grew worse. He lay tossing restlessly on his bed that night, sometimes raving about his wife and son, with whom he thought he was conversing; sometimes imagining himself to be at work. The morning found him calmer, but much weaker. His son, who had watched beside his bed through the night, then brought to him the priest, Father Stevens.

"I'll make my confession to you, father," said the sick man—"I'll recommend my soul into the hand of God, for I feel I'm goin'." It's soon and sudden, glory be to God."

"Oh, father," said Philip, "don't give way to sad thoughts. You're strong enough to get over it yet, please God; and you'll soon be at work with me agen."

The dying man shook his head.

"No, a channuv, he said mournfully; "no, Phil, dear, we'll never work together any more."

Philip's eyes filled with tears, but he yet hoped that his father's strong constitution would overcome the disease.

In the meantime, the priest had laid by his overcoat and hat, and was bending gently over the bed. "Now, my son," he said soothingly, when Philip had left the room, "try to turn your eyes away from this poor world which I see you are soon to leave, and fix them upon the great one that you are going to."

He anointed him after confession, and departed, leaving him more tranquil than he had been since his seizure by the fever on the evening before.

The doctor called twice during the day, and administered medicines; but Philip, who had eagerly watched his countenance since his entrance, saw him, after attentively looking upon the sick man for some time, shake his head hopelessly. More than once during the day Martin Byrne made a feeble effort to talk of his wife to his son. He directed him to inform her gently of what had happened; and expressed his bitter sorrow that he could not see her on his death-bed. He was proceeding to speak of the way in which Philip might best provide for her after his father's death, when the doctor, who was in the room, and who noticed how the effort was wearing away his patient's little remaining strength, forbade him to proceed. Delirium came on him again in the evening, and he continued to rave wildly during the night. He lingered on till the evening of next day, when he appeared conscious that his last struggle was nigh, and he sent once more for the priest. Father Stevens at that time had more work in the pestilence-haunted dwellings of the poor than his worn frame could bear; but he delayed not a moment to accompany our friend's messenger. He had come several times on the day before, although he had only promised to repeat his visit once. The truth was, that he liked to attend the fervent, poor Irishman, in whom he found more simple and earnest piety than he had often met with. When he entered, the father was lying calm and motionless, and had just addressed Philip, who knelt by the bed side.

"Phil," he said, in a tremulous voice, "never wilfully, do harm to any man. By God's grace, I never knowingly injured anybody, and He is pleased to grant me quietness now. Blessed be His name!"

His son broke out in unexpressed lamentations.

"Oh, father dear," he sobbed, "are you going to leave me?"

"Don't cry, asthore," said his parent. "Don't cry. I'm going from you, Phil dear; but the good God will be a better father to you. Tell your mother, he continued, the tears flowing down his own cheeks, "tell her that I died thinkin' of her; that I died hopin' to meet her in heaven, and to meet you there too. Poverty and sickness will never trouble us near the throne of the great God, Phil. I can't say much more to you, my poor boy," he said weakly, trying to place his hands on his son's head. "May God bless you, dear, and keep you; may His blessing be for ever about you; and now may He have mercy on my poor soul."

He stopped, exhausted; and the priest, advancing, began in low, solemn tones to direct the dying man's thoughts heavenward. Martin Byrne held the clergyman's hand as firmly as he could, and listened to him attentively, with his eyes closed. Immediately after, devoutly receiv-

ing the Holy Viaticum, he said, faintly—"Good bye, Phil; kiss me before I die."

The weeping boy pressed his lips with intense affection to the fevered ones of his father, and continued to utter broken exclamations of grief. "Now, my son," said the priest, "let nothing take your thoughts from heaven."

He arranged the scapulars on the breast of the dying man, who feebly moved his fingers as if to assist. Something like a smile overspread his worn face as he said, in a barely audible voice, "Vaura Dhealish! (dear Mary) lead me to your dear Son."

They were his last words. He lay, with his eyes upturned, grasping the bed-clothes with the firm, convulsive gripe of death; his face still wearing the quiet, happy expression I have mentioned. The priest placed his hand on the heart of the corpse, and said to himself, as he withdrew it, "Blessed, indeed, are the dead that die in the Lord."

Then, gently drawing away Philip, who was addressing his dead parent in wild terms of affection, he said, soothingly, "Henceforth, my dear boy, you must look up to God as your father; and returned to read the prayers for the dead."

On the following day Philip, Peter Butler (who had found out the Byrnes a few days before) and two fellow-workmen, bore the body of Martin Byrne to Bradford Cemetery. Philip stayed after the rest had gone, and then sat down on the grass near the grave, where he remained, lonely, sad, and heedless of the cold and mist, till night came on. On his return home, he sat down with a heavy heart to write a letter to his mother, describing his father's death and declaring his intention to set out at once for Newcastle, where lived a maternal uncle, who was very fond of him.

On the morning of the next day, while he sat with his head between his hands in the little room where his father died, Mrs. Clark, his landlady, entered. She was a thin, elderly woman of cold, unpleasing manners.

"Good morning, Mrs. Clark," said Philip, gloomily, rising his head.

"Good morning, sir," she replied, with a deep sigh. "Mr. Chumley has just sent me to say that, for fear of you bringing the fever among the workmen, he'd rather that you'd not go back."

"I expected as much," said Philip, with a toss of the head. "However, I have an uncle in Newcastle, and I intend to go to him and ask him to get me some work till I earn enough to enable me to return with some money to my mother. The funeral of my poor father has left me with very little. Even if Mr. Chumley had not sent at all, I should have had no wish to remain in Bradford any longer. It has been a sorrowful place to me," he added, his voice trembling.

"Ah!" sighed Mrs. Clark, shaking her head, "it's a weary world, young man, as my poor John used to say, I don't think you paid for last week's washing, did you, sir?"

"No," coldly answered Philip, handing her the money. He immediately made preparations for his journey—simple ones enough. He knelt and implored the protection of God, put a crust into the breast pocket of his jacket, and stepped into the street. He was proceeding to walk briskly off, when, turning his head for a last look of the house in which his father died, he saw Mrs. Clark running after him. She beckoned to him to return, and he followed her into the house, noticing, as he did so, that her manner had greatly changed.

"Mr. Byrne," she faltered, "these is hard times, and they make us poor people hard-hearted. But I once had a bairn myself," she continued, growing more agitated, "and I couldn't bear to see you going away like that; so I just called you back to ask you to take this little paper of bread and meat with you, and to give you your washing money back again." And she put her apron to her eyes.

"May God bless you, Mrs. Clark," said Philip; "may God bless and reward you."

He bade her good bye, shaking her hand warmly, and she followed him to the door and watched him till he was out of sight.

Instead of taking a northerly course, Philip chose the eastern road in the direction of York. He knew that there were several towns on it, and so he hopped to get odd jobs in some of them, and so make his way on to Newcastle. It was his only chance, indeed, for his stock of money was exactly thirteence pence halfpenny. Although it was the 23rd December, no snow had fallen in or near Bradford for some weeks, and the ground was hard and firm beneath his feet. He heard a village church clock strike one, as he neared the eighth-mile stone from Bradford, and he sat down to rest himself, and to eat some of the bread and meat which he had received from Mrs. Clark. He wondered why it was that he felt somewhat languid and had less appetite than usual. His throat, too, was so sore that he spoke with pain. He had intended to seek for

work in Leeds; but, when he had walked the remaining two miles of the road, and had entered that town, he found himself so weary and ill, as to be unable to carry out his purpose. The truth was, that the confined, unwholesome air of his father's room and the loss of rest he had sustained, combined with the sharp wind on the road, had wrought upon and temporarily enfeebled his frame. After reaching Leeds he entered the mean-looking little 'Turk's Head, in a small street, and having there ordered a bed, threw himself upon it. The rest, with a basin of hot gruel, which he took that night, greatly refreshed him, and in the morning he thought himself strong enough to proceed upon his journey. Instead of remaining in Leeds, as he had intended, he breakfasted on the last pieces of Mrs. Clark's bread and meat, paid to the landlord the shilling he asked for (and far less nor it ought to be," he said) and set out for York, hoping to arrive there early in the afternoon. But he had overrated his strength. He found himself obliged to travel on very slowly, not being able to walk much more than a mile an hour. Towards the end of the day, however, he grew much better; and it was well for him, indeed, for he saw with despair the darkness come on when the towers of York minster were still nine miles away. At half-past eight he had entered the suburbs of the fine old city, and soon after he passed under the grim, black portals of Micklegate Bar, and found himself in the busy streets of York on Christmas Eve, hungry, friendless, houseless, and without a penny in his pocket.

CHAPTER II.

Merry crowds of working people were thronging round the bright and gaily-ornamented shop-windows, or talking and laughing on the footway. Well-muffled ladies were sweeping grandly out of great shops, attended to the door by obsequious shopmen. It was market night, and poor thinly-clad women were trudging homewards through the snow, laden with heavy baskets, or with penny bundles of holly and ivy; their faces wearing an expression half of pleasure, half of anxiety,—pleasure from the happy thoughts that the glorious festival never fails to bring with it, and anxiety, from the fear that they had ventured to make greater purchases than their small means would allow.

Infirm old men, who felt very uncertain as to whether or not they should ever see another Christmas, stood watching boys, who were either shutting up one another's eyes with snow-balls, despite policemen, or doing their best to break their own and other people's bones by making slides on the flags. There were few men or women in the crowd, however, who had not a brighter look than usual, and Philip could not avoid wondering, as he jostled through them, whether or not there were any so miserable as he. Had he spent his last three halfpence during the day on a mug of milk and two biscuits, and he was becoming painfully aware by this time that he had a stomach. To seek employment was out of the question; he had no means of getting food or shelter; and he trembled at the thought of passing the night in the snow-covered streets. With a sinking heart he constrained himself to make his first essay in begging; but the people appeared to think that the numbers of more noisy and apparently more needy beggars in the streets were more in need of relief than the quiet, shame-faced lad who scarcely made his request heard. However it was, Philip's repeated trials were unsuccessful; and when at last a policeman told him roughly that 'he couldn't be blocking up the passage like that,' he gave up the attempt in despair. He wandered about the streets with a slow, hopeless, aimless step, till eleven o'clock, when most of them were almost deserted. He stared in the faces of suspicious policemen who stared at him, till he was tired of staring. He watched solemn interviews held with lamp-posts by unsteady persons, who had been taking a foretaste of Christmas excess. He tried to find diversion in observing the few knots of pretended females— young fellows in women's dress—who were out to make a night of it. Soon even these had disappeared, and the silence in the streets was broken only by the moaning of the wind, or the tread of a solitary policeman on his beat.

While wandering about, cold and wretched, Philip suddenly found himself before the cathedral. Although he was too miserable to be very much disposed to admire the magnificent building then, he yet turned mechanically into the minster-yard, and let his eyes wander slowly over the vast pile, which, dark and majestic, towered up against the sky, its beautiful sculptures now and then revealed by the crescent of the moon, when it broke out from the black clouds that overspread the heavens. Philip passed for a few moments before the grand east window, through which the moon was now shining, and gazed lazily up at it with his hands in his pockets. He was not, as I have before hinted, in the mood for reflecting on anything but his own troubles, yet, as he looked upon the lonely old place, he could

not help making a rapid contrast between the appearance of its interior on Christmas-eve three centuries ago, and its present desolate, gloomy aspect. No chanting of Christmas hymns at midnight Mass, no devout adorers, no bright lights streaming through the beautiful stained glass;— these had all departed; and the light that then played on the deserted pavement, was somewhat like the worship carried on within—a rather cold and cheerless one. The sound of footsteps behind him, and the cold, disturbed his thoughts, and, turning with a shiver, he saw two men walking sharply by him, conversing in hurried, earnest whispers. He stood in the shadow cast by a high wall, and was not noticed by them. Too much oppressed by cold, hunger, and drowsiness to heed them, he turned into a dark old arched doorway in the cathedral wall, somewhat sheltered from the wind, and, putting his back to the door, abandoned himself to his miserable thoughts. While they were wandering sorrowfully to his mother, he began to doze. Awaking soon after, with a dull, confused noise in his ears, he heard the loud bells of the minster chiming twelve o'clock. Folding his benumbed hands, he said, fervently, while the tears stood in his eyes, "Oh, good Lord Jesus, born in cold and misery yourself on Christmas day, pity and help your poor creature."

He had scarcely whispered his petition, when he heard the voices and saw the figures of the two men who had passed him near the east window. There was something in their looks that led Philip to the strong suspicion that they were out for no good purpose; and since the deep shadow of the arch completely concealed him, he watched them narrowly, without their being aware of his presence. One was strongly-built, ill-looking ruffian, with his neck swathed in a large neckcloth, and his eyebrows overshadowed by a cap. The other was tall and sinewy, and likewise wore a cap, with an old velvet shooting-jacket, and a thick muffler. The first appeared to be replying to some objections which the other had raised.

"We'll have to wait long enough afore we get such another chance. They've been in bed for a couple of hours, and there ain't even a sarvent lass in the house; the one they have 's got leave. The waits won't be round for a good bit yet, and there's no peeters about. I've got the ladder and tools, and I know the room he keeps his money in. Time I did; I've watched him long enough."

"Come on, then," said the taller one; "sooner it's over the better. Owd hunks," he added, with a chuckle, "he'll not expect such lucky birds as us this mornin'." I'll tell you what, tho', Mister Nathan, mind, it's to be fair halves."

Before Philip, who was now wakeful enough, could hear the reply, they had moved away. He came quietly out of the archway, and watched the two dark figures, clearly visible against the snow, till an angle of the cathedral hid them from his view. Forgetting at once cold, hunger, and fatigue, and possessed by a strong exciting desire to prevent the projected villainy, Philip set out in pursuit with the stealthy, subdued energy of an Indian. The moon was now completely hidden, and by walking in the shadow of buildings he contrived to keep the objects of his pursuit in view, without being himself observed. He saw the short one dive swiftly into a dark courtyard, and bring thence a ladder; while the other turned about, and gazed keenly into the night.— Philip's heart beat strongly, and he stood, immovable as a post, in a dark corner. He had the good fortune to remain unseen, however, and he continued to follow them with the same cautious swiftness. Soon after they passed out of the minster-yard, and, crossing another street, entered Little Stonegate. Quickly hobbling over the slippery stones after them, fearing every moment that they might turn their heads and discover him, Philip warily took the left side of the above street, while our two scoundrels walked quickly down the other. Every house in the street was dark and silent, for all were occupied by sober shopkeepers, who invariably retired to rest early. Philip saw the burglars, as he now knew them to be, stop when they had proceeded a short distance; and, guessing that they would look keenly about them before executing their purpose, he quietly retired up a dark passage. His expectation was well grounded, for he heard from his hiding-place the almost inaudible foot-fall of one of the burglars on the snow; as he passed and re-passed the entry. Cautiously coming out, he saw the shorter one plant his ladder against the wall of a house, and prepare to mount to a second story window. The house in question was, evidently, the habitation of a wealthy tradesman. It was old and had but two stories, like many others in the same old street; but it was much higher than modern two-story houses, and covered a large extent of ground, being unusually broad and long. Quaint old wooden ornaments were placed along the roof and around the little windows that rose out of

it, and, carried looked grimely black with age.