

HER IRISH HERITAGE

BY ANNIE M. P. SMITHSON

AUTHOR OF "BY STRANGE PATHS"

CHAPTER II

HER MOTHER'S PEOPLE

The Blakes lived in a large old-fashioned house in Rathmines, and on this bright September morning they are gathered round the breakfast table discussing a letter from Clare Castlemaine, the contents of which their father had just made known to them.

"So she will be here in two days. It is well we have a spare room ready. If Molly Dixon had come for her holidays she would have been rather cramped."

This was from Mary Blake, the eldest girl of the family; she was now twenty-seven and since her mother's death, thirteen years ago, had been her father's right hand—the stay and support of the motherless household. Indeed she was so completely unselfish that she was apt to be put on one side as a matter of course by the younger members of the family; they all loved her of course,—it was to Mary they had gone with their childish griefs and tales of woe, and it was to Mary they still went in any doubt or trouble, but the thought that Mary herself would ever need a bit of cheering up or amusement never entered their heads; and this was mostly her own fault, for she had a habit of effacing herself at times, and also the management of her father's large household on their rather limited means absorbed most of her time and attention. But two members of the family valued Mary at her true worth, and those were her father and her brother Tom.

"Of course she will have to be given the best bedroom and the best of everything, but I expect she will not think much of this establishment after her lovely London house. I suppose she will have lovely frocks,—what a pity she is in mourning!"

And Nora Blake sighed; she was a pretty piquante little thing of nineteen, the butterfly of the family. She was employed as typist in the office of a large city firm and did her work well, but during her off time and holidays Miss Nora enjoyed life in her own way, and indeed altogether she generally managed to have what she called "a good time."

"That's like you, Nora! always thinking of what you will put on!" remarked her brother Pat, a medical student of twenty-three, studying hard for his final these days and not too sweet-tempered in consequence.

"Of course she will be thoroughly English in every respect," said Shamus, a tall young fellow of twenty-five, with a very handsome face and splendid grey eyes. "I don't suppose we will ever make anything of her from an Irish standpoint!" Shamus was a keen Gaelic Leaguer, and cared for little else.

"For Heaven's sake don't start cramming Irish down her throat the minute she arrives!" said his sister Bride.

Mary, but as she read it once more a smile broke over her face. "It's a nice letter!" she said softly, "and she seems lonely, poor soul! I hope she will be happy with us—we must try to make her feel at home."

The breakfast room was in the basement at the back of the house—a long, low-ceilinged room with two windows to the side and glass door opening on to some stone steps which led up to the garden. A fair-sized garden too for a suburban house and well cared for—Shamus Blake saw to that for he was devoted to gardening, and spent a good deal of his spare time, when he was not engaged in work for the Gaelic League, in planting and transplanting, hoeing and digging. Through the day he was hard at work in his father's office for he was destined to succeed to the solicitor's practice, and strange to say, although he was a bit of a poet and an idealist in many ways, still he gave every promise of becoming a clever lawyer.

The kitchen was on the other side of the passage to the breakfast room, a little further down the corridor, and thither Mary Blake now betook herself. Sarah, the old servant who had been with them for many years now—since before Mrs. Blake's death—looked round as her young mistress entered and her face brightened. She was devoted to all the family, but especially to Miss Mary. The Blakes kept one other servant, a strong young girl who did most of the upstairs work, answered the door and could wait at table when necessary. Mary had trained Maggie, for she had come to them when very young and ignorant, but was now quite capable; still Mary helped a good deal herself; she was fond of house-work, and also had a special gift for fancy cookery, making the most delightful cakes and puddings easily and with little outlay.

"Sarah," she said, advancing into the large old-fashioned kitchen, "Miss Castlemaine will be here on Thursday, so I will want Maggie to help me this morning to clean out the spare room—I want it to be extra nice because English, and no doubt, very particular, for she has been used to a beautiful home in London."

Sarah stood in her favorite attitude with arms akimbo. "Do ye tell me that now?" she replied with the out-spoken freedom of that Irish retainer. "Well! Miss Mary dear, if the house that's good enough for *any* English lady, no matter had she the wealth of the Ingies themselves—well 'twould be a queer thing!"

Sarah had not taken kindly to Clare's advent, but Mary knew the old woman so thoroughly that she could nearly always coax her into a reasonable mood. She smiled now as she replied, "Yes, that may be so Sarah, but we want to show this English young lady that we poor Irish can have nice homes and dainty rooms too—so I am going to take Maggie this morning and have a real turn out upstairs. But if you are very busy Sarah and want help, get Mrs. Murphy in for the day."

"Ah! not at all Miss Mary dear! I'm not that cold and stiff yet, thank you to God. There's as much work in me old bones as there is in many a young whippet snapper going the rounds these times!"

the youngest, the little cripple, was her dearest—her baby. "Yes, dear, I think I am a little late today. Have you had your breakfast? and did you sleep last night? I hadn't time to come to you sooner, but I know Ursula was with you this morning."

"Yes, Ursula brought me a cup of tea before she went to Mass—about half-past six—because she knew I had a headache last night, and I have had my breakfast since, so you see I am not neglected. And now, Mary darling! sit down if you can spare a minute at all and tell me all about Clare—a little bird told me she was coming on Thursday," and the cripple girl's face was all alight with eager sympathy as Mary sat down in a low chair beside her bed and after reading Clare's letter aloud fell to discussing her approaching visit with this the youngest of her flock.

She had been baptized as Angela, but no one ever called her anything but Angel—and if ever the name suited anyone in this poor world, it suited Angela Blake. Seventeen years of age, she had been delicate from her birth and now suffered from a bad spinal curvature and also shortening of one leg. She could get about with a crutch fairly well at times, and had her wheel chair also, but there were times when she could only manage to get to the sofa in her own room. But a grumble or a complaint was never heard from Angel's lips; she was always bright, always cheerful, and full of interest in the doings of all the others, the comings and goings of these strong healthy ones who were able to go in and out as they pleased and could run and dance and play tennis! Angel often wondered wistfully what it must be like to be strong and straight—but there was no place for envy in her unselfish soul.

She listened now, full of delighted interest as Mary spoke of their new cousin, wondering what she was like—was she pretty? and would she be good-tempered, or would she be proud and hard to please? "I like her letter, Angel," said Mary, "she has gone through such a hard time lately—first the death of her father and then to lose her fortune, and she was brought up to consider herself so wealthy. We must try to be good to her for she will feel strange amongst us all at first. Angel, you will help me to make her feel at home, I know—won't you denier? And now I must leave you to dress for I have a lot to do."

The day passed all too quickly for Mary, and she was fairly tired that night when she found herself at last sitting down for a quiet chat with her father and Tom. They three were alone. Shamus was at a Gaelic meeting. Bride attending one of her numerous committees, and Pat and Nora went off on pleasure bent, while Ursula was upstairs with Angel.

Mr. Blake lay back in his arm-chair, enjoying the luxury of old slippers and an old pipe; Tom was deep in various plans and drawings scattered over the table, and Mary was engaged in what was a very usual task for her—darning the family's socks. "Father," she said presently, "tell me about Clare's mother. She was your youngest sister I think? And how did she come to marry a man so different in character and religion to all that she had been used to? It seems so strange in every way!"

up in that faith. We had previously ascertained that the man himself would not entertain for a moment the thought of becoming a Catholic—he was a most pronounced Agnostic.

He paused again and was silent so long that Mary said softly, "Well! Father?" "Well, he refused—refused absolutely; said any children of his would not be baptized and would be instructed in no religious dogmas, but that when they were of age they could judge for themselves on religious matters. Of course your Uncle Pat and myself thought that would end the affair once and for all and we wrote to Ursula to come home at once. The next letter told us that she had married George Castlemaine."

Mary gave a little exclamation, and Tom moved slightly, leaning forward on the table. "Yes," went on Mr. Blake, "they were married at the Registry office and afterwards at a Catholic Church—for which," he added reverently, "I thank God. Ursula was just of age, we had no legal control over her religion and she was quite completely infatuated with this man. She wrote asking my forgiveness which I could not deny, although I was shocked and hurt beyond words. After her marriage we did not correspond very frequently—she had her own life to live now and it was a different one from ours. I think at first she was quite liberal about her religion and allowed her full freedom in the exercise of her religious duties. It was all right till the child came, but after that I don't think my poor sister knew what happiness was. She wrote to me about that time and her letter was heart-breaking—you can imagine the feelings of a Catholic mother when she looked at her child and knew that it must grow up without the help and comfort of our holy Faith—when she realized that she might never teach her little daughter her first prayers or train the little soul for Heaven. She gave the child private baptism herself—so she told me in one of her letters, and I think she would have managed to have a priest perform the ceremony later, only that she died as you know rather suddenly—within a short time of Clare's birth."

"Then Clare is baptized, father?" "Yes; at least as I told you—by private baptism. But she knows absolutely nothing of the Catholic religion—she has received no religious instruction at all."

"How strange, father! I can hardly imagine such a queer state of things. Oh! I wonder what she will be like?" "A queer mixture, I should say," said Tom, speaking for the first time.

"Yes," agreed Mr. Blake, as he knocked the ashes out of his pipe. "Yes, Tom, a queer mixture as you say. Still I will be glad to see the girl for her mother's sake, and I know I needn't ask you all to be as kind as possible to her—she has gone through her own share of trouble lately! And now I think I'll be off to bed for I am tired and sleepy."

THE STORY OF A HERO

By Myrtle Conner in St. Anthony Messenger

They were the guests of His Lordship, the bishop—Father Darcy, and a young visiting priest, Father Norris, by name. "I heard a story the other day," Father Darcy was saying, "about the heroic conduct of a young missionary priest in the midst of a western mining camp, which proves that the spirit of the early Christian martyrs is not yet dead, but lives even today, often springing up in the most unexpected places."

The bishop nodded with a smile. "Go on," he said. Father Darcy's stories were always interesting. "I'm sure that Father Norris would like to hear it, too, having, himself, had some experience in the missionary west."

"Then," said Father Darcy, turning toward the younger priest, "you will appreciate what the western like to term the 'local color' of the story, or what, I understand, the film folks like to refer to as the 'location,' for this is a regular wild western story."

"I'm sure I shall enjoy hearing it," said the younger priest. "Stories of the west are always interesting to me."

Well, the camp was like all the other mining camps, and had the customary 'bad-character' man in it, a notorious all-round villain sort of a fellow, exactly according to type. They called him 'Gil,' which appears to have been a diminutive of Gilbert, though no one seemed to know whether that was his first name or his last. However, there was no doubt about his character role of 'bad man.'

Foreign element, probably," suggested the bishop, "a trifle reminiscently, it may be." "I didn't learn his nationality," returned Father Darcy, "though he may have been of foreign element, as you say. Irish, perhaps—since this is a story of the Faith," he added, directing a smile toward the younger priest. The bishop was notably of Irish extraction.

the lady—Lally, as she was called—was when she had ventured to suggest that, as there was a Methodist minister conducting a missionary drive in those parts, might it not, therefore, be an acceptable time to have the sanction of religion placed on their union. Gil's response,—though he was known to be very gentle with her usually,—had been to shut off her pleading abruptly by striking her full across her mouth.

"No?" exclaimed Father Norris. "It seems to have been true," returned Father Darcy. "And while she, after the habits of her sex, had, no doubt, shed copious tears over the matter, it didn't apparently diminish her love for the reprobate. She continued in her unfeeling devotion to him in spite of his stinging indifference to her wishes."

"Women are like that," commented the bishop; and had he been less than a bishop, he might have added, "and only the Lord can understand them."

"Gil had a lot of friends though," continued Father Darcy. "You see, out there, standards of human glory differ from ours; and Gil's record for general wickedness and total disregard for man and the law, alike, had really only served to win him a great deal of prestige in those parts. He was looked upon as a kind of leader among men; and he had quite a following,—a great many, no doubt, because they feared him, but more, it seemed, because they admired him."

"Are they really like that, out west?" inquired the bishop of Father Norris. "I fear some of them have been given a bad reputation," returned the younger priest. "So much modern fiction, and western film stuff, as Father Darcy says."

"This doesn't seem to have been greatly exaggerated, though, as I get the story," said Father Darcy. "You see it was one of those places which might have been classed as being of the 'utmost parts of the earth,' the Faith having reacted it, as then, only in promise,—the poor bishop never having been able to visit it himself, and never having had any priest to send there, until this one I am going to tell you about."

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TO BE CONTINUED

TRUE JOY

How sad it is to know that so few of the whole human race have in their hearts that joy of which St. Paul speaks. Why do they not possess it? It is either because they are leading a life they should not, or because they are totally ignorant of the possibilities of any joy save what the world can offer, coming into their souls.

