

THE RETURN OF MARY O'MURROUGH

BY ROSA MULHOLLAND

Author of "The Tragedy of Chris," "Nanna," "Omors," etc.

CHAPTER VI

THE REMOVAL OF OWNY

Shan on his way home had to pass Father Fahy's little shanty.

The priest's house was a thatched cottage with a narrow path leading to it, shut off from the road by a small wooden gate. You walked straight into a little, earthen floored kitchen, off which were two small rooms. The Father's private apartment was one of the latter, with a boarded floor, a table covered with books and papers, a blue check-curtained bed in the corner, a shelf for books, two tiny windows placed so that neither could be opened when the storm beat on the other side of the house, and a flagged hearth for the turf fire.

Father Fahy was growing old as a curate, and would probably never be a parish priest. His cure was at the difficult and remote end of the parish, and he had no wish for a change, for his heart had taken root in these scanty pastures and in the fissures of these grand rocks. He had seen a good deal of missionary work in the world before coming to Killelagh, and was the more pleased with the peace and innocence of his now long accustomed surroundings, in the midst of which he hoped to end his mortal life.

He came out of his little gate as Shan approached, and stood expecting him; a spare figure, somewhat stooped, with a face which in repose was slightly austere, but benignant in its frequent smiles.

"I'm waiting for you, Shan. I'm going up to see your father."

"It's good of y', Soggarth Oir. Will y' take a seat?"

"Thank you for a lift, Shan. It was a little message I got. Your father's not so well. Don't be frightened. It isn't going to be much, I think."

Shan was silent a moment from shock. Then he spoke:

"My father's not what he was. The years is beginnin' to be hard on him."

"None of us are getting younger," said the priest, "but please God he'll not be leaving us yet awhile."

Shan urged his horse, and the cart soon arrived at the little farm of O'Wyn Sullivan. It was about the last of the better class holdings in the mountain direction, and a glance showed that fostering care had long been at work to improve it. The new close thatch, the trim fence, the climbing rose on the sheltered wall, told a tale of their own of which Shan was the hero, and his love for Mary the romance.

A big sheep-dog came out to welcome them into the kitchen. An old woman putting turf on the fire turned and curtsied to the priest.

"He's middlin' now," she said, "but the turn he took was a'most his last."

O'Wyn was lying on his bed, but spoke and welcomed his son and the soggarth.

It was a little weakness I took," he explained, "an' I'm over it, thank God. All the same, I'm glad to see your reverence comin' in."

"Well O'Wyn, that's good news; but now that I'm here, you'd better make the best of a good opportunity. I'll do y' no harm to be fair an' square with God."

"It's thrue for y' Father, but I'd rather have a little longer to think about it."

"None of us can count on a minute, O'Wyn. And you haven't a whole mountain on your conscience. It won't take you any quicker out of the world to settle up your affairs with the Almighty."

After a little more encouragement O'Wyn agreed to make his confession, and Shan left him alone with the priest, and went out and walked about the fields that had cost him so dear, thinking his own thoughts.

O'Wyn's sins were not heavy ones, but every fault was dwelt on with scrupulous exactness. The thing that troubled him the most was mentioned last, and after the confession was all over he returned to the subject with anxiety.

"Y' see, Father, as I told God in yer presence, it's weighin' on me a little that I was a bit too hard about sendin' Mary to America. The time's gone over, an' the farm isn't bought out yet, an' maybe won't be ever. An' I would have liked to see Shan's childer about my knees—"

"It's a pity, O'Wyn—it's a pity. You know I was against her going."

"I know y', Father; but, what could we do? The pair o' them might ha' gone together, an' Shan's mother an' me to the poorhouse. An' now she has the little place to come back to, an' they're young still. Could y' do nothin' to hurry up them that has the sellin' o' the farms?"

"They wouldn't mind me O'Wyn."

"They're askin' too much money, an' we can't give it."

"Why need you wait to have the farm bought before Mary comes home?"

"See that now! Maybe we needn't. But it's a kind of a pride we have to bring her home to what'll be our own. When she did go, it's what she has a right to expect to come back to."

"She will have a little money, I suppose, after her years of industry?"

"Of course she will. But that'll be wanted for stock, an' to make a good beginnin'." The debt to buy the

farm'll be enough of a load on our backs—"

"Well, O'Wyn, I think you have been a little over careful. Prudence is an excellent thing, but trust in God is better. And now, take my advice, and let Shan write at once to Mary, and tell her to put her foot on the next boat and come home to Killelagh. It will be better than regretting and lamenting the past."

"It's thrue for yer reverence. It's what I was thinkin' a couple of hours ago, when I thought I was off. But some way, I would like a little longer to think about it all, now I'm better. A few more months is not goin' to make so much of a differ."

"I'm afraid you're a hard man, O'Wyn. I hope that little bit of pride of yours won't make a delay for you in purgatory. Now that you're better, you have time to put things right before you go. It's what I sometimes think, that Mary's a great deal too good for either you or Shan."

"Is it Shan, Father? Is it the boy that worships the very thought of her?"

"Well, O'Wyn," said Father Fahy laughing, "I'm glad to see you're so much better, anyhow, and able to argue your points the same as ever. I'll see you to-morrow, and in the meantime, think of what I said to you."

He went out and found Shan waiting for him in the field.

"The old man is not going to leave us yet," said the priest, "but his mind is uneasy. I think you and he would both be happier if you would send for Mary at once, and have her sitting there between you."

Shan's face lit up. "Is that what he was sayin' ty y', Father?"

"He said it, and he went back of it. But I hope he'll say it to you again."

"If he does, he'll go back of it again. He's set on havin' the place bought out before he'll see me married."

"I'm afraid you'll both be sorry for it some day, Shan."

"Why would I be sorry, Father. Isn't Mary as thrue as the stars? An' things'll all be settled about the land, they tell me, in six months or a year at farthest."

"Do you mean that you yourself are willing for a longer delay, as your father is?"

"God knows I'm not," said Shan. "But I'll tell y' what it is, Father. When Mary brings home her hard earnin', I'd feel a sort of a shame if I hadn't the place to offer her as a kind of a balance against it."

"I see. I see. Well, God send you both happiness! Mary's the best girl I ever christened in Killelagh, the sweetest and the bravest. She was a mother to her own mother when she trouble came, and to the brothers and sisters that died, and she's worthy to be a mother of children of her own, if God will give them to her. I don't want to say a word against the others, but Mary's the best."

Shan's face was radiant, listening.

"I could say more to the back of that, Father," he said.

"Well, well, say it to herself, here soon, Shan."

"You're not thinkin' ill o' me, Father, after all my strivin' to get Mary for my wife?"

"I'm not, I'm not. You've been as true to Mary as Mary has been to you. But don't be losing the race when the winning post's in view. I'll come to see your father again in a day or two. No, no, put up the cart and go and look after him. I'd rather have the walk home this splendid evening, and I have a bit of my office to read on the way."

The priest's walk home was through what might be called the most beautiful bit of Ireland, if other visions did not rise before one to dispute the statement. Nowhere is there a more continuous stretch of absolute loveliness and striking grandeur, made up of mountain and valley, lake and river, and scattered woodland. That mingled tenderness and sternness of expression which is the great charm of Irish scenery is hardly more impressive anywhere than here; and, for colouring, the grave greys and violets, the solemn purples deepening to black, of the mountain crags and sides, the fantastic fringes of granite and tawny brown, the sprightly greens of the fields and pastures that bring their golden irises and star daisies to the wayfarer's feet, all these have a peculiar brilliance and softness in the dreamy and luminous Southern atmosphere.

The sun was setting as Father Fahy closed his breviary, and walked on meditatively through the glamour of the after glow transfiguring heaven and earth. The priest's heart was sad as his eyes rested on one after another of the little cots and cabins, and saw them shining into the glory, their gables caught rose-red and golden, looking as though each little dwelling might be the very home and secure haven of some young man and woman, whose what security were possible here? In almost every house there reigned the woe of impending separation. The coming autumn movement of a wholesale emigration was already casting its shadow before it, was creeping round every homestead, and would settle on every poor thatched roof as surely as the night would in a few hours blot out the splendor of the declining day, and plunge the hills and the valleys and the woods in darkness.

The young were going and the old staying behind. Killelagh would soon be depopulated.

The Father's memory was busy with visions of forty years ago, when he came to this mission. He re-

called the warm welcome of generous souls, whose joys and sorrows had become his own. How many brave young pairs he had married before yonder rude altar; what a number of babes he had christened at the worn font, now men and women hastening from their hills and glens to the cities of America, there, perhaps, to unlearn the lessons of purity and faith which he had labored to teach them. Could nothing be done to stop this fatal exodus? He, who loved them, was impotent. Those who did not love them were pitiless.

When the old who were left weeping on the lonely hearths had joined those others in the near God's Acre, and wept and pined no more as despoiled of love, who would build new homes where? decaying ones had stood? What magic would accomplish the return of the flock by the old mountain passes? Would children's voices never more mingle with the piping of the wind around Killelagh?

He himself would soon lie, like the rest of the old, under the cross now shining in the twilight with a lingering glimmer reflected from the Western sky.

Long after that day of release had dawned when his would drive home the goats to be milked, and gather the red foxgloves on the banks, when the children would be all gone?

"The stranger from a foreign land would not endure life in these fastnesses, would not live in them and love them in contentment with poverty. The habits of prosperity would not thrive on this poor soil so near the bed-rock of the mountain. The stranger would come and look around him, and hasten away again."

"A land," he would say, "only fit for a picture! None but savages could live in it."

Yet God's children have lived in it! said the old priest with tears.

The savages are those who are driving them out of it.

And the old, who were so generous, are growing hard, and cold, and niggardly, refusing their blessing to the natural desires of the young they have nurtured.

O God, show forth Thy face, and save Thy faithful children!"

CHAPTER VII

"I WOULDN'T HA' LET HER GO"

The next evening, Tom Donohoe was at work shoeing a horse when Bess Dermody came into the forge, and stood aside watching the iron glow and the sparks fly, while the big hammer rang its music; until the horse was shod and the owner of it finished his gossip and departed with his business done.

Then she came forward into the room, lit her pretty face looking fretted and her eyes swollen with crying.

"Oh, Mister Donohoe, you're Miles' father, an' I'm ashamed to look at y' after the trouble he's been gettin', an' all through me!"

"Never say the word! Yer a girl that has courage! My sowl, but Miles can take care o' himself, and I'll back him to take care o' you as well. Sure a bit of a row will do neither of yez any harm."

"You're not goin' again us?" said Bess.

"Not a vein in my body but is for yez."

"God bless y'! Miles has a good father! Oh, what's come over my mother at all, at all?"

She's a good mother, if she would let herself alone. To think of her hankerin' after the likes o' Foxy Flynn for a girl like you. If y' take my advice, y'll marry Miles at wast and no more about it."

"I couldn't marry without my mother's blessin'," said Bess. "But I can wait till God sends us some thin'."

"Oh, I warrant y' will! Such waitin' an' waitin'. By my faith, I didn't wait long before I married Miles's mother, but of course I hadn't the bit o' land to be comin' between me an' her. We worked hard together, an' we've never been wantin' for the bit or sup."

"Why didn't y' give Miles yer trade?" asked Bess. "My mother hits it up that he's nothin' but a laborer."

"Miles didn't like it. He has his own notions. An' I have another son that likes it. Of course he's a laborer, an' so am I. An' isn't yer mother a laborer, feedin' pigs, an' fightin' with wind an' rain, workin' the flesh off her bones to pay the rent? Why didn't yer mother let Anne Bridget marry the decent boy that could have got work nearher home, but went to America in disgust at bein' looked down on? If she wants to keep the little place and have gran'-childer in it after her, why does she provoke a neighbor's son, and get him put in the lock-up, an' a bad name sent before him to Dublin Castle, tacked to a string o' lies to make money for the polis that is tired kickin' their heels in Ballyrogin?"

The bang of the hammer which served Tom Donohoe as a mark of interrogation at the end of his sentence did not alarm Bess as it might have alarmed her mother. The blacksmith's mind was running on the same lines as her own, and it was a relief to the girl to hear him express the thoughts which loyalty to an affectionate mother forbade her to utter.

"She doesn't look at it that way, she doesn't," said Bess. "But seein' how things is goin', an' the big emigration startin' out in a month or two, I'm thinkin' of goin' myself to

earn a little money for Miles, the way Mary O'Murrough did. We might earn between us, there an' here, what would buy us a little house an' a cow, an' a couple o' fields."

"If you go, I think Miles 'll be with y'."

"I wouldn't marry him without my mother's blessin'. I love him thrue, an' I'll stick to him thrue. But my mother 'll have to give her consent before we stand up before the altar."

"An' will she give y' her blessin' to go out on the world like a stray bird?" asked the blacksmith.

"She'll think it'll part us; but it won't," said Bess.

"Here's himself!" said Tom Donohoe; and Miles walked in. He had just been over at Flynn's shaking hands with Foxy.

"Look at this girl here, cryin' about y'," said the father to the son with a proud glance at the square shoulders and the well-set head of the boy "he thought good enough for a princess, let alone the daughter of Mrs. Dermody."

Ab, sure she needn't said Miles softly. "This woman's givin' a bit o' trouble to me good, 'F'd ha' stayed in the lock-up a week for the pleasure o' seein' the crestfallen looks o' Serjeant Hourigan when the madrole came back."

"There's nothin' can be proved against you," says he to me.

"Thank you for the news," says I. "Myself could have given it to y' handy, an' saved yer me the walk."

"Don't be impertinent, sir," says he, an' remember that the polis has their eye on y', an' yer down as a bad lot on the outrage-list."

"Thank y' Serjeant," says I. "A good turn is never lost, an' maybe y'll be paid back for this, some day or other."

"Then he out with this book, an' put me down for intimidation; an' I laughed at him, an' went out of his place—an' I whistled 'Harvey Duff'."

Bess made a despairing exclamation and began to cry.

"Stop that, asthoreen! There isn't a ha'porth o' harm in the whole transaction. They can't shake an outrage out o' yer pockets when y've ne'er a wan about y'."

"If this thing goes on, the pair o' y'd better head for America," said the blacksmith.

Bess's tears flowed afresh. She was the joy and comfort of her mother, whom she loved with a tender, daughterly affection, and the thought of going from her, never to see her again was terrible. She could speak of emigrating when she knew that Miles' father was against it, but the proposal coming from him overwhelmed her.

"There, now, I thought y' were wantin' to go," said the blacksmith, "with yer mother's blessin'. An' in such a case she could hardly refuse it, seein' she's nothin' else to give y'."

Bess was silent, except for her weeping.

"Bess," said Miles, "what are y' thinkin' about? What are we goin' to do?"

"I said to my mother, that why wouldn't she hold out her han' to y', an' take us both, an' let you work for her as well as for another; an' myself to work on for her as I'm always doin'?" Anne Bridget's good, an' she does a lot, out an' in, but she's quiet in herself, an' my mother doesn't make much o' her. My own way is to keep a bit of heartseasiness about the place, an' she'd miss me horridly."

"An' what did she say to that?" asked the blacksmith.

"Oh, she said somethin' about no man comin' to push her out o' the little place my father an' her worked so hard to get. If me an' Anne Bridget didn't marry into another man's land, she'd leave her own to us to live on respectable as she could."

"Misthine Dermody's roots is in the ground," says she, "an' I won't have any other man's son comin' diggin' them up."

"An' then she sat at the fire an' cried, an' wouldn't taste her cup o' tea; an' my own eyes are boiled in my head with the day's cryin'!"

The men were silent for a few moments, while Bess sobbed. Then Miles said:

"There's work many's the place nearher home. All'd be well if y'd take courage to make a run for it."

"I'll never marry without my mother's blessin'," reiterated Bess.

"Well, avourneen, dhry your eyes, an' take heart o' hope. We'll wait on a bit yet, an' see what'll turn up for us," said Miles cheerily. "I'll go on with the job at Ballyrogin all the buildin' o' the new poorhouse, an' I'll be up an' around here a Sunday."

"I wish to God I could marry the pair o' yez myself this minute, here at the anvil, if it was a thing that I had to hammer an' old horse's shoe into a ring!" said Tom Donohoe, but yez know yer own business best. An' here's a good man with a little pony to get a shoe on him; so be off with yez, an' take yer walk before the night gets dark."

Miles and Bess went out of the forge, and took their way across the fields.

"It's what I was sayin' to your father," said Bess, as they stood among the golden irises in the red sunset; "that I would go away like Mary O'Murrough, and earn money to come home with. But I don't know how I could do it. I haven't the courage to go away over there without either you or my mother."

"If I had been Shan, I wouldn't ha' let her go without me," said Miles.

"My mother says it wasn't his fault. He had to stay with his father on the land to keep all to

gether for better times. An' Mary had no mother to leave, an' nobody belongin' to her."

"I mind seein' her before she went," said Miles. "I declare but it was her that had the beauty! She was a grand crature, every bit of her!"

"An' she'll soon be comin' home now with her money saved," said Bess wistfully. "I wish to God I was doin' the same. Will y' come in now with me to Mrs. Mulquin's, to see how they are? I hear some of the girls is goin'."

Mrs. Mulquin's house was a mere cabin compared with Mrs. Dermody's snug little cot. As Miles and Bess drew near the open door, a sound of sobbing was audible from within, and crossing the threshold they saw the mother and two of her daughters sitting on three stools, crying with their heads together.

Mrs. Mulquin raised her eyes at the sound of footsteps.

"Oh, come in, come in!" she said. "God forgive our foolishness when Ellen's will to part us! Kate an' I've Jane have made it up for America."

Bess, with her heart full of her own trouble, joined in the weeping, and Miles stood with his head bent, as if in a sacred presence.

Bess soon recovered herself.

"Why would y' be goin', girls?" she said. "Miles is always sayin' that there's work nearher home."

"Where is it, then, Bess? Would y' point it out?" asked Kate sadly.

"My Jim writes to me from Dublin that the poor 'll be atin' each other in the winter, for the want of work," said Mrs. Mulquin. "An' the boy that went to Liverpool says the towns is all the same. The girls know nothin' about service in a gentleman's house, an' I'll never let them go harvestin' or hop-pickin' to England, to lose their goodness."

"Is America good?" asked Bess.

"It's big enough to have everythin' in it, good and bad," said Mrs. Mulquin. "There be to be goodness in it, or it wouldn't have Mary O'Murrough in it all these years back."

TO BE CONTINUED

THE CROSS OF THE O'KELLEYS

The soft summer breeze on this Sunday afternoon was fragrant with the odor of pine and fir as Anna O'Kelley walked down in the path thickly carpeted with needles, across which the sunlight flickered and danced, to the small wooden chapel in the clearing. Her niece Eileen, a restless little sprite, accompanied her. Reaching the door, Anna gave a gentle push and to her delight it opened.

The chapel was but a temporary affair for the convenience of the Catholic visitors at the summer resorts near by. Many visited this town of Granby, on the Maine coast, and here Anna O'Kelley had come to spend the summer with her brother and his family at their summer cottage.

She was pleased to find she could enter and say a few prayers, as it was closed during the week, and sometimes immediately after Mass on Sunday. To-day Father Burns had not returned at once to his own town, ten miles distant, and the chapel would be open until he was ready to return. The place was cool and quiet, and so soothing after a week of fun and excitement that she felt inclined to spend the afternoon there in prayer.

She finished her Rosary and began on some special prayers for favors received, when Eileen began to get restless. She gave the child her Rosary beads to keep her quiet; but after a while the child tired of these and began walking up and down, going into the different pews and picking up the prayer-books which had been left in the benches.

A few moments later she wandered outside and spent the remainder of the time running in and out until her young aunt was ready to return home.

Anna was just closing the door when she missed her Rosary beads and then remembered that she had given them to the child.

"Eileen, darling, where are auntie's beads?" she said.

Eileen ran back into the chapel and returned with the beads, but as Anna took them in her hands she felt a thrill of alarm, for the small silver cross was gone.

"Eileen," she cried, "what did you do with auntie's cross?"

Eileen was frightened and began to cry.

"Didn't do nothin' with it."

Anna saw that if she was to get any information she must keep calm; so taking her small niece by the hand she led her into the church.

"Now, dear, show Aunt Anna where you put the cross," she said gently.

Eileen went straight to one of the pews.

"It combed off and I put it in this book."

There were several prayer-books about and Anna examined them all, but no cross appeared. She searched up and down, inside and outside of the chapel, but her labor was fruitless. Then she knelt in one of the pews and prayed, with a sob in her throat, that she would find the missing cross.

It was near supper-time when she at last gave up the search and started wearily for home. The scent of the pines, the flickering shadows across her path and the roar of the sea in

the distance were lost upon her, for her heart was heavy with the shadow of her loss.

Granny O'Kelley had given her the cross. It was a family heirloom.

"It's an Irish cross, given me by the O'Kelley himself," the white-haired old lady had said proudly as she placed it in her granddaughter's hands a few hours before the Angel of Death had summoned her, "and when I'm gone, child, it's to be yours. It's blessed for a happy death and it has brought me many a blessing. I give it to you with my blessing and the blessing of those before me."

The family at the cottage were much concerned over her loss, especially when they saw how badly she felt about it. Continued questioning of Eileen elicited the information that she had put it "in the birds' nest."

"Try and not think about it tonight Anna," her brother comforted her, "and to-morrow we will make a systematic search."

But the systematic search failed to bring the cross to light.

"The little rogue hid it carefully," was the comment of her father, but one by one they came to the conclusion that she had dropped it somewhere, perhaps among the pine needles and really did not know where she had lost it.

"Keep up your courage, Anna; we'll hear of it before the summer is over," John O'Kelley cheerfully assured her.

At the post office, on trees by the path leading to the chapel, in the hotel office, at the boat landing—anywhere that there was a good chance of being seen—he posted notices offering a reward to the finder for its return. But the summer passed and it was not found.

Day after day Anna knelt and offered a prayer to St. Anthony, begging his intercession for the finding of her beloved cross. Sometimes the tears came unbidden as she thought of the little old lady who had given it to her. "Poor Granny, to think I had it so short a time, and she brought