

THE BLAKES AND FLANAGANS.

BY MRS. JAS. A. SADLER. CHAPTER X. A FAMILY PARTY AT TIM FLANAGAN'S.

The greater party of that eventful Thursday was spent by Mrs. Flanagan and her two trusty friends, Mrs. Reilly and Mrs. Sheridan, in making preparations for the evening festival.

Their joint experience in the culinary art was called into requisition, and the result was highly creditable to all concerned.

One made cakes, another tarts, another custards, jellies and blanc mange, Ellie and Susan helping every one in turn, wherever their services were most needed.

"Now mind and come early this evening!" was Mrs. Flanagan's parting charge.

"And, Sally! tell Tom not to forget his fiddle!—he does, he'll only have the trouble of trotting back for it."

"Well! isn't she the kind, sociable, friendly creature!" said Mrs. Sheridan.

"What you say is true enough, Jenny dear," observed her friend; "they're credit to the old stock."

"In his young days!" replied Mrs. Reilly, with strong emphasis.

"Oh I never mind, another time will do as well; I'm afraid Daniel and the children must be getting hungry by this time."

"Well, evening came at last, and with it came all the friends and connections of the Flanagans.

"Here comes Mrs. Blake," said Mike Sheridan, "moving under a heavy, but majestic, air of authority."

"I'm not sure whether I can dance a reel or not, but I think I can; so I'm willing to try."

"The dancing pairs who simply sought renown, by holding out to sire each other's wain."

"What an animating sight!" observed Margaret O'Callaghan, as Edward took a chair near her.

"What a beautiful sight!" said Margaret, "would you ever suppose he could dance a reel like that?"

"I have great pleasure in recording my sentiments of approbation," added Fitzgibbon.

"I think he ought to be the very last man to speak in favor of mixed schools—rather anti-Catholic schools," observed Tim.

"I never saw him," replied the other, with a quiet smile.

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From the May-day pastime shrinking, he shares not the merry laugh.

"There's a spell in the air they play, And the old man's eyes are dim.

The song was ended, and all present were enraptured with the pretty air and the simple, touching words, not to speak of the masterly style in which it was sung.

"Do you know," said Edward, "that that song always reminds me of poor Mr. Lanigan, now dead and gone?"

"I can't tell why, but so it is, I can just fancy the good old man leaning on his oaken staff."

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away, and no one was sensible of the lapse of time. But,

"Never does Time travel faster Than when his way lies among flowers."

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roads full of splendid carriages and prancing horses—ah, it was sad to give up the Carnival!

"Nino and Ninetto were like small foster-children to this one child, who, but for their merry frolics, would have had no playmate on the Campagna farm."

"But Fra Paolo did not teach the lambs lessons, Francesco rather envied them the freedom from learning Latin, and repeating dull verbs, though he looked like a little angel as he stood with folded hands to recite his task, with silky lashes curling on the crimson of his cheeks, and lips as red as a lovely flower!"

"But Pietro was a laborer on the estates of the Buonamonte family near the mountains—the wide plain stretching away from the Apennines in the east to the blue Mediterranean on the south, from mountain-peaks to seascapes, with the Tiber and great Rome on the north—and he came down from the healthy air of the hills, in the spring, with other peasants who worked the lands near home."

"Yet the plain had a fascination that had already won Francesco's heart. Almost every one else grumbled because of its loneliness. Yes, there was a tall Englishman, an artist, who came often, and once had even lingered till the red sunset set the sky aflame. He talked to the boy in a friendly way."

"Do you know this place was once full of cities, with thriving farms between, and that crowds gathered on the great Roman street—the Appian Way—all the time, crossing these 'out-time' marshes without fear?"

"Like a mist of fine gold dust," said the artist, looking at the sunshine on the plain; "but sometimes it is wrapt in a purple haze, quite as beautiful."

"What is that?" asked the Englishman. "The wollen collar the Pope wears. It is marked with crosses, and means he is a good shepherd of his flock."

"Brigitta had told him a beautiful story of our Lord when He was a little Babe, of how He was the Good Shepherd of all the world, and of how the shepherds came to worship Him. A shepherd lad came also, bringing his one pet lamb as a gift, the only gift he had in his power to bring; and he hours Divine Child, though but a few hours old, held up His hand and blessed both."

"The kind Englishman soon became acquainted with Nino and Ninetto as well as their little master, and begged to paint their portraits. With Francesco's, of course, with the others, only he was too wise to let the boy think of his own picture at all."

"Now see you, dear signor, has not Nino a tiny black spot on his nose? Ninetto's is pure white; and look you, how he loves to be petted, while the Nino frisks and capers contentedly."

"It will be laid for a night on St. Peter's tomb," said Francesco, his eyes shining.

"I think I shall call them St. Peter's Lambs. As the Englishman spoke a shadow fell across the ground, and looking up they saw the young lord of Buonamonte, whom the Englishman already knew."

TWO LITTLE LAMBS OF THE CAMPAGNA.

Nino! Ninetto! The little Italian shepherd with dark, liquid eyes showered on his two lambs a hundred soft caressing diminutives of the Italian tongue, with its musical intonations that are so sweet to hear from a child's lips!

"No wonder little Francesco loved his twin lambs. Many scattered flocks grazed near his father's, but no merrier or fatter lambs ever frisked around their mild ewe-mother than these; no fleece so soft, thick, and white as theirs, none so free from burr or bristles, none so proud as he watched their contentful playfulness, and the eager wagging of their fat tails, as they nursed, or that he loved them, when, in answer to his endearments, both turned their comical, narrow little faces to him, with a soft, quivering, 'Baa! Baa!'"

Francesco declared—though no one except his father Pietro, an old shepherd, believed him—that they had different expressions and different voices from the other lambs, and thus he could know Nino and Ninetto anywhere!

"All sheep are alike," said good old Fra Paolo, and for the first time in his life Francesco dared to be vexed with the kind Father, nor would he reconcile until the good Father told the boy that since their fleece was so fine they might be chosen for the two lambs blessed by the Holy Father himself on St. Agnes' day, from which the Sisters of San Lorenzo shear the wool that is woven into the pallium, or precious collar, with long ends, worn by the Pope and the Archbishops in their holy ministry."

Francesco's beautiful eyes grew wide with delight and wonder, as the old man went on to tell him of the beautiful ceremony. He had seen pictures of the dear St. Agnes with her little lamb cuddled close to herself. On her feast he knew the lambs would be carried first to the old church of St. Agnes on the Nomentan road, there to be blessed by the abbot while all the wax tapers shone like stars, and the incense made the air sweet as a forest of cedars, and the voice would sing all the time—like angels in heaven—the "Agnus Dei!"—the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world!

It was as in a dream of innocent rapture that Francesco went to sleep that night. He had not heeded the Mauma 'Gita's' reproachful voice: "Then no Carnival for the lambs this spring! The lambs' wool was to buy his clothes, father."

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