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THE CHISSELER'S CRUCIFIX.

(Florence Bain Seymour, in Sacred Heart Review.)

The last low rays of the setting sun, Red with an autumn glare, Fell through the studio window Upon objects rich and rare.

They touched with celestial glory The chalice of gold— The work of the master chiseler— Original and bold.

But they lingered with tender radiance On a cross of rich, dark wood, Upon which hung a silver image Of the crucified Man-God.

Before it knelt the chiseler— And marked with an artist's eye Each faint line and detail— Who some chance flash might give No sorrow, nor word of prayer On his lips nor in his heart;

The thing was wood and silver, Though a triumph of his art. Those lips spoke, often, curses Or blasphemous, ribald song, And his sin-stained soul nor knew nor cared.

For the difference 'twixt right and wrong.

'Twas the marvel of all who knew him, How a hand so stained with crime Could fashion with wondrous power Works so exquisitely divine.

Tonight some strange attraction Kept him kneeling there alone, The room grew dim and solemn, The workmen all had gone.

As he gazed on the silent Figure, The cold lips seemed to move, And in tender, pleading accents So gently to reproach.

"My son, as you kneel there watching Has your heart no love for Me? My love was for My life for these!

"When you gaze on My mangled body, On My bleeding throat-crowned head, On My features with pain distorted, Is all feeling within you dead?"

"Can you think of that cruel scourging And no compunction feel? Of that awful crucifixion?"

"Ah! men's hearts are hard as steel.

"My child, I have loved thee always— Before the skies were made At sight of one tear of repentance. Thy sin from My sight would fade.

"Give, then, one word of sorrow For My outraged love and pain Tell Me in My bitter passion My blood was not shed in vain!"

The chiseler's head bent low— A sob shook his averted frame— The grace of heaven had touched him, And the tears of contrition came.

"My Jesus, my sins are so many; But Thou saidst—and it must be so, Though my sin be red as scarlet, They shall be made whiter than snow!"

"My God, and My Father eternal! Forgive me, for love of Thy Son. His voice from the cross pleads before Thee And the soul of Thy servant is won."

THE BLACK FINGER

BY M. T. WAGGAMAN.

(From the American Messenger of the Sacred Heart.)

CHAPTER II.—(Continued.)

And crouching down by the grate fire, that was the one cheap luxury of these coal-ribbed cliffs, Eric felt the generous glow warming his chilled blood, supplying his stiffened limbs, bracing his quivering nerves into life and strength again. In a few moments the priest stood before him no longer a gowned recluse, but a vigorous young athlete booted and equipped for crag and cliff.

"All ready," he said briefly. "Do you feel warm again, warm and strong enough to start?"

"Yes, yes," said Eric, springing to his feet, "there's no time to wait; I can keep the bridge now, no fear."

"Take the lantern, then," said Father Paul, flinging the leather strap that held the bulb, eye around his companion's neck and lead on to my boy, and may God guide us both for it is a fearful night."

On they pressed, up the white mountain side, but the glow of the light swinging around Eric's neck seemed to cleave the darkness like a star, all bewilderment and fear were gone. Up the great trackless waste he led, boldly and steadily, while Father Paul strode on behind, not together sure of his guide, we must confess, but willing to take all risks for the chance of saving that soul whose cry had reached him out of the very depths of despair.

On and on, over rock and ridge and chasm, up heights that seemed to lose themselves in cloudy obscurity, Eric's lantern went chattering while his young voice rang out in warning and guidance: "Keep to the right, and guidance: a steady, steady, steady, over these rocks, hold to me

hand, it's a bad step here, keep to the right." Had Father Paul's errand been a less solemn one, he might have imagined himself bewitched by some mountain elf, who was leading him into pitiless wastes from which he could never escape. But borne upon the young priest's breast, under the sacramental veil, was One, whose presence banished all light fancies. One, whose count seemed, as of old to still the tempest, for as they passed on, the wind that had swept the heights an hour ago, sunk sobbing into the gorge; the clouds he had torn a rend, swept off in broken masses to the south, and a wan moon looked down like some pale, grief-stricken face—and with a shrill shout Eric bounded to the top of a rock and pointed forward. "We're here," he said, "there's the bridge! Dan is lying, mister, come or come on—"

And springing forward himself like a young roe, Eric stood breathless, but triumphant at Dan's side. Dan lay struggling in a death agony, whose terrors God alone could know.

"I've brought him, Dan; I've brought the priest to lift the curse off you; you'll be better now, I've got the priest."

"The priest, the right one, is it?" gasped the old man, as his eye fell on the silken figure at the door; then like a strain of forgotten music from a far off past, came Father Paul's blessing, as he crossed the wretched threshold: "Peace be to this house, and all who dwell therein."

"Aye, aye, lad, ye've got the right one," panted old Dan, "raise me, lead me, spake. I's in the jaws of hell me blackened soul is this night, Father. Bend closer, in God's name, and let me spake while I can—"

Seated on a rock without, Eric waited, Boar's head upon his knee; lean faithful old Boar, who knows as much as his young master of the divine ministrations of love and mercy when working such heavenly wonders near.

"It's a lifting the curse and it won't do for us to see, Boar; ever I'd bet Pringle lets no one cast an eye on her when she's working off a spell. 'An' it was the bad curse that lighted on poor Dan this day; it was well I got across the Beagap in time for him that could lift it. 'An' priest that he is, he's a decent kind o'body, though the boys tell bad stories of the likes o' him. Mike Murtagh says they make black nigger slaves of you if you listen to them, 'nd they've holes in the ground where they bury you alive, and free to roast you like so many sheep. It was a queer bit of a place where I found him to-night; you and I'd steal down some time, Boar, and take another look at it, when no one is by. It's not like a meeting-house," continued Eric, stroking his companion's long ears in an unusually meditative mood. "It minds me more of the Pine glade, in the hollow, when it's summer time, and the moss is wet and the birds singing in the tree tops."

"'An' I wonder was it a statue, or what was it that stood there in the red and white gown, with the kind smiling face? Shure, I thought at first he was real; me eyes was so blind and me head so dizzy I thought he was real and a calling me out of the darkness and storm. Whisht, eh, 'at is it?"

"You can come in now, my boy," called Father Paul, from the doorway, "your old friend wants you."

And Eric springing up, followed by Boar, entered the hut, where the moonlight falling full upon poor old Dan, uplifted on his bearskin pillow, showed his face livid indeed with the death agony, but strangely altered. The fierce lines of despair had relaxed, the wild gleam of the eyes softened; it was as if the dark tide through which he was struggling had been suddenly stilled into peace.

"Down on your knees, lad," he whispered hoarsely, "God forgive me for it, Father, but he knows no more of howly sign or prayer than the bats at his side, but I'd have him see and know I'm not dying in the—devil I've lived."

And Eric knelt down and stared in dull wonderment, while the last solemn rites were administered, and absolved and anointed, the dying sinner was united to his God. He listened uncomprehending, while Father Paul recited the sets of thanksgiving to which the livid figure that strove to echo them had been so long strangers.

There was a moment's pause, as the priest concluded, then old Dan spoke with difficulty: "Bend closer to me, lad, closer, for I've something to say to you. There's was black fear on me soul yet, an' it is for ye, ye that I've let grow up like the help and the bear cub. Lis'en, it's me last word, ye're to go wid the good Father here, and do as he bids you when I'm gone."

"Gone!" echoed Eric. "Gone! Shure you're not going now, Dan. Han't he lifted the curse from you? ye are better now."

"Bether! Yes," answered Dan, hoarsely. "Bether, God be praised for His mercy. But the curse—the only ye can lift what's left on me soul. It's me last word to ye, lad. He'll take ye; go wid him."

"With him! The priest, d'you mean! No, no; don't ask me that, Dan; don't ask me that," cried Eric, passionately.

"I'd, I do! it's that, an' nuthin' else. Will ye lift the curse, or live it on me where I go? Will ye go wid him that will take ye in God's name, or—"

Dan's speech failed him, and he could only gasp and struggle and wave his gaunt arm, tremulously, in dumb appeal.

"Promise what he asks, my boy," said the priest's low voice in Eric's ear. "Let the poor soul depart in peace."

"Then, I will; I will, Dan," sobbed Eric, shivering with awe. "I will do whatever you ask me."

"Y'er hand on it," panted the dying man. "Your grip." And he held out his hand for the one pledge recognized by his lawless class. Eric met the icy grasp that tightened in his young hand, sending a chill through every vein. Then the grip relaxed, there was a shudder, a long-drawn breath, and Eric's wild cry was echoed by Boar's howl. Poor Dan was dead!

"Murderation!" was old Tim Connor's breathless exclamation, when, in the gray twilight of the dawn, Father Paul met him hobbling down the pit road, to open the chapel, over which Tim had kept faithful watch these ten years.

"Shure, 'an' it's niver that devil of a Dan Rourke yer rivenance man—him on Roker's Ridge?"

"The same," replied the priest. "He died, by God's mercy, a humble penitent, last night."

"Dan Rourke, it is?" repeated Tim, in bewilderment. "And yer rivenance went to him, up beyond, in the black night! The Lord save us!"

"I wish the poor man to have Christian burial," continued Father Paul. "Let Ryan and Tracy go this morning and see to it, and, if possible, have him brought to the church. It will be a good example."

"To the Church, it is?" gasped Tim. "The Church! The Church! I reprobate! I mane, God be merciful to him. Dan Rourke brought to the Church! We'll try it, sur, as you bid." But Tim thought it best to conclude his sentence by a shake of the head, more eloquent than words.

Ryan and Tracy, two sturdy, elderly men, went on their mission of charity somewhat reluctantly. Dan's character was well known—his leadership in one of those lawless leagues banded together by fierce oaths and dark, heathenish rites, strongly suspected.

The two men reached the hut only to find it empty, while nailed by a dirk to the door was a bit of paper bearing the rude scrawl:

"Waked in Secret. Let them come who know. Let them watch who dare."

"Faix, and ye may believe we made quick tracks home when we saw that," said Tracy, with an uneasy laugh. "It's the devil's own wack Dan Rourke, will have this night, yer rivenance, and neither law nor gospel can stop it, for where they've tuk the poor corpse no living crathur dares tell."

"But the boy?" said Father Paul anxiously, "the boy that poor Dan begged me with his last breath to save; have the scoundrels taken the boy too?"

"Is it Eric Dorne?" asked Ryan. "Bad Luck to him, for the wildest young devil that ever run the air. Aye, they've tuk him too, yer rivenance and they'll kape him, ye can wager that."

And as the days passed on, Father Paul was constrained to believe Ryan was right. To search for his lost charge would have been as useless as dangerous, for with the night came snow, a mountain snow.

Hour after hour it fell in the gray, blinding storm. Cloud seemed to meet crag; all landmarks vanished above; around, below, all was alike—a white blank, save for the swirling, noiseless, feathering flakes. There were scarcely two-score worshippers at the next Sunday Mass, but even through that little band went a perceptible thrill as Father Paul's announcement rang out through the strange noontide twilight.

"Your prayers are requested for the repose of the soul of Daniel Rourke, of Roker's Ridge, who died, by the grace of God in the bosom of His Church, last week." It was a battle gaze, calm and fearless, as all who heard it knew.

"Bogorra! and his rivenance caught the wolf by the throat thin," commented Tracy as he passed out of the church.

"Aye, and he'll growl," was the significant reply of his friends, "ye can wager that."

So at least the young priest was thinking this Sunday evening as he sat in the little room, that served both as a study and a bed chamber. In fact this miniature presbytery was a part of the chapel's plan, and, small though the apartment was, its grained ceiling of natural wood and Gothic windows, gave it a picturesque dignity. Father Paul had broken the tender ties of a luxurious home at his Master's call, and there were gentle touches, here and there, even in this delicate cell, that told he was not forgotten by the dear ones he had so sternly and bravely left. The Madonna over the chimney-place was a masterpiece, the ivory crucifix in his oratory had been an artist's life-work, the great rug before the fire—sole bit of luxury in the barely furnished room—was the pet of a huge grizzly, shot by a roving brother and valued only for that reckless Nimrod's sake.

All else, the narrow cot, the plain desk, the toilet service, were the simple outfit of a soldier's ready to march at the word of command.

"Bidad, this is the murdering weather entirely," said old Tim Connor as he hobbled into the room with a box of coal that he tumbled upon the open grate with a thunderous crash that startled Father Paul from his reverie.

"Were you speaking to me, Tim?"

"I was only saying this was the murdering winter, sur, and this the unholy place for a fine, scholarly gentleman like your rivenance to be left in. Not thirty craythurs at the blessed Mass this morning; faix it went agin me to rowl out the pulpit for ye to waste your warrds and your breath on thim, wid Norah Maginnis and Mary Finnegan saying their bades like the best floss through the sermon and Mike Lanahan nodding off to sleep under these sodding coals. Faix, if it wasn't for the howly altar before me I'd have fetched him a crack that would have opened both his eyes and his ears."

"And yet my sermon was very short, Tim," said Father Paul. "I don't think I preached ten minutes. It was simple enough, I am sure, for a Sunday-school to understand."

"Sunday-school is it?" said Tim, disagreeing to a greater grievance, for before Father Paul's coming, Tim, who had been left as custodian of the little chapel by its founders, had contemplated himself catechist as well, and gathering the little ones around him every Sunday had instructed them to the best of his ability. Tim's theology might not have stood the crucial tests of the school, but his faith and zeal were beyond question, and the efforts which he had liberally dispensed to dull or refractory pupils made his teachings doubly forcible. On Father Paul's arrival, he had proudly delivered a meagre twenty-four young catechumens to his pastor for more legitimate instruction. But it rankled just a little, so he relieved his feelings by:

"Sunday-school is it, sur? Shure ye might as well close the doors in'three. The young devils fly from the church now as if the spotted fayer was inside. They've turned wild as March hares."

"I fear I am the 'fever' they dread," said Father Paul, sadly. "They have been made afraid of me."

"They have, yer rivenance," and Tim, who was kneeling before the grate raking down the ashes, gave an oracular nod. "It's lies that is skerring the poor innocents and nothing else. D'dn't I catch Pat Noonan the other day, and threaten not to lave a whole horse in him if he wasn't up at church this morning, and the young omdhann burst from me, with the screech of a wildcat and left half the tail of his jacket in me hand. And N'ra Kelly, that had the Tin Commandment glib as a B C, barrin' the fairs, which was too long for her, and the Tin Beatitudes as well—"

"Eight Beatitudes, Tim," corrected Father Paul, representing a snail. (To be continued.)

CHAPTER III. STORM-BOUND.

For a week the white storm raged pitilessly. Gorges were filled and sharp peaks rounded, rock and chasm masked. He would be a bold traveller indeed who dared venture now over these white wastes, veiled in treacherous drifts, where want and sin and death stalked unchecked, for the great shafts stood black and silent, the roar and belch of forge and furnace were stifled, and hundreds of souls, desperate men waited in rebellious idleness for their employers to accept their dictates.

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Table with columns: Day of Week, Sun, Mon, Tue, Wed, Thu, Fri, Sat. Rows for months and days.

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