

GUILTY OR NOT GUILTY.

By T. W. POOLE, M. D., LINCOLN, N.Y.

CHAPTER I.

The village of Mertonville was a place of some local importance...

It you ask me for further particulars regarding it, I can only tell you that it resembled hundreds of other villages...

That, at least, was my candid opinion of it, at the time this story opens...

But the people of Mertonville thought differently. As they saw it, their village had superior claims...

It was in the heart of a fine agricultural country. It was a favorite place for yearly "fairs" and autumnal "shows"...

As it is with one of this very class that these pages are most intimately concerned it is necessary to present him, in a few words, to the reader...

Neil McCoy was, at the time referred to, of less than middle age, of medium height, of plain and simple manners...

This reputation was in no way diminished, as the years went by, and the young merchant found himself at the head of a prosperous business...

Now Miss Jennett was not only handsome, but fairly accomplished, and being an only child, would inherit the proceeds of her father's investments...

Every human being is subject to such influences. Happy he who is enabled to turn them to good account...

The immediate result of this gossip whether true or false, was to enhance still further the reputation of the merchant...

But alas for this man's good reputation! As the shadows cast by clouds sweep across the country...

Let me say, at once, that no trickery in business was laid to his charge. He had betrayed no trust...

Mertonville was what is called evangelically religious, to which its four church edifices bore ample testimony...

I feel a delusion in intruding upon the privacy of the lovers, or of laying bare to the cold scrutiny of the reader...

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An atheist or infidel?

Now I am not saying that Mertonville was not an intelligent, nineteenth century community...

Thus when it became whispered about that Mr. McCoy was displaying tendencies towards "Romanism"...

Neil McCoy was about the last person in the world, apparently, of whom such a thing could be predicted...

Mr. McCoy, indeed, had rarely, if ever, entered a Catholic Church...

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"IS IT WELL WITH THE CHILD?"

"Yes, I had a letter from Father Byrne, telling me of her death. I thought you would have written."

"I had so much to see to, both at home and here at the office, and then I thought Father Byrne could do it better than I."

"The wealthy merchant moved easily in his chair. There was a look of inquiry, almost stern, in the keen blue eyes of the young priest who sat facing him at the other side of the paper-laden table..."

"The Key of Heaven!" cried Jennett, as her eye fell upon the title page. "My! what a name for a mere book!"

"Turning over the leaves, one by one, their eyes fell upon 'Acts of Faith, Hope and Charity,' 'Daily Prayers' and other devout exercises."

"See here," said Neil, pointing with his finger, "nearly all these prayers end with the words, 'through our Lord Jesus Christ.' You would not have expected that, would you, now?"

"To receive a priest, I suppose," Mr. Ransome started; a flush of anger rose to his brow. He was not accustomed to being spoken to so curtly, and he answered haughtily:

"My wife, unfortunately, is in a disposition to receive a Catholic clergyman. Many Protestants share the same prejudice."

"Does the prejudice extend to all Catholics or only to the priests? Why did she then become your wife?"

"I do not want to intrude on you or your home in any way. Give me a straight answer to a straight question and I shall go my way and leave you in peace..."

"I would not mind saying the first part of it myself," said Neil. "I had Mary, the girl I was engaged to, whose feet we hope to meet in heaven, in the name of the Holy Mother Church, whose unworthy children we are, I ask as Eileen asked the Shuennans of old, 'Is it well with the child?' Can you give me the answer she gave the prophet?"

"Your silence tells me all, and it is bitter to know. It is not well with the child of Catharine's parents, who is being brought up either a Protestant or in utter indifference. Ah! that last shall tell; it is in indifference. In the name of the dead mother, since you admit no other claim, I call on you to give that child her birthright. If you will not, give her to me and I shall see that she is brought up as Eileen's child should be. You may have other children now; keep them and give me this one. If you like to contribute to her support, you may; if not, my scanty means must suffice, but my poverty will give her what your wealth denies—the knowledge which leads to life eternal."

"But Mr. Ransome had recovered his self possession. He rose and walked to the door. Before opening it, he said in a voice vibrant with repressed passion: 'My child remains in her father's house. Your zeal has made you forget yourself. I must beg you to leave my affairs alone in the future. I have the honor to wish you good morning.'"

"The door was wide open now, and the clerks in the outer office could hear any further converse. Father Doyle was defeated; he could not go, but he said in a low voice: 'You will not hear me, but there is a voice to which you cannot close your ears. Man, you may defy with impunity, but not God—to Him you must answer.'"

"He was gone, and Mr. Ransome, conscious of the curious looks of his employees, summoned his head clerk and plunged into matters of business. But try as he would, he could not dismiss the thought of the unpleasant interview of the morning, and vague misgivings crossed his mind as to his carelessness to his motherless child."

"Thus in the evening, after dressing for dinner, he passed at the head of the grand staircase, hesitating as to whether he should go to the drawing room or to the nursery. With a half laugh he turned and passed down the long corridor to the children's quarters. It was so seldom he went that way that he was not sure of the rooms, when the sound of a low sob fell on his ear. The corridor ended in a large bay window overlooking the garden, and there, on the window seat, he could dimly discern a little form. Something in the pathetic droop of the head stirred his heart strangely; he knew it was Eileen."

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PROTESTANT CONFSSIONALS.

The sensation caused two or three weeks ago in Allegheny, Pa., by the Rev. Dr. Stocking of the Universalist Church, is unabated. In his regular Sunday sermon the reverend gentleman defended auricular confession, and advocated the establishment of the confessional in Protestant churches...

"I am persuaded that if this practice was taught and observed in our Protestant churches, there would be less immorality among the ministers and church members. There would be fewer instances of ministers alienating the affections of some parishioner's wife, less contention among church members concerning administration and discipline, etc. If all were under solemn obligation to confess their faults, there would be less wickedness in our Protestant churches. I know of nothing that would tend to produce a better state of moral purity than the obligation to make confession of individual faults among the ministers and the brethren, unless it be to emphasize the great fact that there is no escape from the consequences of one's sins, either in this world or in the world to come."

Which is all very well in theory. The difficulty would be to find ministers that Protestant penitents could confide in. Their apprehension would be well-founded, if the minister was a dissembler. Besides, it is too much to expect people to go to confession when there is no hope of absolution. We can assure Dr. Stocking that very few Catholics would confess their sins to a priest unless they were persuaded that he possessed through Christ, the power to absolve them. Our separated brethren would be loath to emphasize the great truth that there is no escape from the consequences of sin than to advocate the practice of confession—Ave Maria.

"I did not know him; her shorn head rested peacefully on the pillow, and she babbled unceasingly. He drew back from the bed, appalled, bewildered, when a name, falling from the fevered lips, went like a knife to his heart—"Mother! Mother!" He turned away, sick at heart. The nurse touched his arm.

"She was writing to you, I think, before she was so bad, and to her uncle, I wanted to post the letters, but I could get no address."

"Her uncle! Oh, accusing words—"Is it well with the child?" He moved suddenly to the door, the light of resolution in his eyes. Her uncle should come to her.

He rang up the priest with whom his brother in law had said he was staying. Yes, Father Doyle was still there. Who wanted him? "Stay, he will come and speak to you."

"No, no, give him the message only. Eileen is dying, I fear. Ask him to forgive all and come at once."

"Then he went back to the dimly-lighted room and sat where he could see the fever flushed face. The slow minutes lengthened into an hour, and yet he had not come. Perhaps he would not, or perchance they had mistaken the address."

While he thus sat in sorrowful thought he felt a hand on his shoulder, and, looking up, saw Father Doyle. In silence he clasped his hand and led him to the bed where the little sufferer lay. In broken words he told of her finding the letters in her mother's old desk, and the longing for the about was indeed, but, please God, I'll turn over a new leaf. Stay with me, Bernard, and help me."

"I will, and if God so please, we'll have the little maid up and about very soon."

But though he spoke hopefully, he was far from feeling at all sanguine. Still, the child had youth on her side; it was possible she might recover.

Mrs. Ransome shrank her white shoulders disdainingly when she heard of the new inmate of the house, but her husband's stern glance checked the jeering words that rose to her lips. After all it made little difference to her, for Father Doyle spent his time in the sick room or in the garden, and she scarcely ever met him.

When the fever left her, Eileen's delight was unbounded to find the dear uncle she had longed for was indeed alive, and loved her more even than she had thought. With his gentle words long forgotten prayers came back to her mind, and the remembrance of her heavenly mother, whose name her mother had taught her baby lips to say. So it was a happy child that lay so white and weak on the bed, where she had so often shed the bitter tears of loneliness. Her father with her so often, and the dear uncle nearly always, but now I know I used to have an angel I wrote to him. I wish he was alive. How long ago did he die?"

"Of course, I know. You would have told me about him if he were alive, and then he loved me so he would come to me."

"Loved you?" "Yes, he did; he always said it in his letters, and I learnt one bit because it made me feel—oh so—I can't tell you—but as if I must have my own dear mother again."

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