

A Sister of Mercy. (Died October 18th.)

BY MARY FERLING.

"He breath his bed sleep," thus said The Holy Scripture. Ah, indeed, 'twere well If the sweet words a message sweet might fall To soothing hearts, and raise their drooping Faith.

In the Lord's love—to be a blessed troop Of love, and hope into a heart most broken.

Like to a lily or a dewy rose Was this young life, a lily snowy white In its virginity, and rose bright

No earthly lover but the King of Heaven, This wise, young virgin like the blessed seven.

Lifting her thoughts to higher things above, She fled the joyous world, above each ear Set her hands that she might never hear The earthly noise of an earthly love.

Her small feet chose the path that leadeth higher, Unto the Throne of Him, her son's Desire.

To train Christ's little ones in ways of grace This young nun lived; to shadow in her name

She bathed but higher, good, and some fair day

MOONDYNE.

BOOK FIRST.

THE GOLD MINE OF THE VASSE.

BY JOHN BOYLE O'REILLY.

VIII.

THE KING OF THE VASSE.

He said the bright fire of mahogany wood, and slowly advancing to meet the strangers, was a venerable man—an aborigine, tall, white-haired, and of great dignity.

It was Te mana-roa (the long-lived), the King of the Vasse.

Graver than the sedateness of civilization was the dignified bearing of this powerful and famous chieftain.

Behind the aged king, in the full light of the fire, stood two young girls, dark and skin clad like their elders, but of surpassing symmetry of body and beauty of feature.

They were Koro and Teparu, the grandchildren of Te mana-roa. Startled, timid, wondering, they stood together in the intense light, their soft fur barks thrown back, showing to rare effect their rounded limbs and exquisitely curved bodies.

The old chief welcomed Moondyne with few words but with many signs of pleasure and deep respect; but he looked with reverent displeasure at his companion.

A long and earnest conversation followed; while the cunning eyes of the sergeant, and the inquiring ones of the young bushman and his sisters followed every expression of the old chief and Moondyne.

It was evident that Moondyne was telling the reason of the stranger's presence—telling the story just as it had happened—that there was no other hope for life—and he had promised to show this man the gold mine.

Te mana-roa heard the story with a troubled brow, and when it had come to an end, he bowed his white head in deep thought.

After some moments, he raised his face, and looked long and severely at the sergeant, who grew restless under the piercing scrutiny.

Still keeping his eyes on the trooper's face, he said in his own tongue, half in soliloquy, and half in query: "This man cannot be trusted?"

Every eye in the group was now centred on the sergeant's face.

After a pause, Moondyne simply repeated the words of the chief:

"He cannot be trusted." "Had he come blindfolded from the Kosgrah?" continued the chief, "we might lead him through the pass in the night, and set him free. He has seen the hills and noted the sun and stars as he came; he must not leave this valley."

The old chief uttered the last sentence as one giving judgment.

"Ngaru," he said, still gazing intently on the trooper's face. "The young bushman arose from the fire."

"He must not leave the pass, Ngaru." "Without a word the young and powerful bushman took his spear and wammams, and disappeared in the mouth of the gloomy pass."

Te mana-roa then arose slowly, and, lighting a resinous torch, motioned the sergeant to follow him toward a dark entrance in the ironstone cliff that loomed above them.

The sergeant obeyed, followed by Moondyne. The men stooped to enter the face of the cliff, but once inside, the roof rose high, and the way grew spacious.

The walls were black as coal, and dripping with dampness. Not cut by the hands of man, but worn perhaps in ages past by a stream that worked its way, as patient as Fate, through the weaker parts of the rock.

used something unknown to such as he. On them at that moment lay the great but acceptable burden of manhood—the overmastering but sweet allegiance that a true man owes to the truth.

It does not need culture and fine association to develop in some men this highest quality. Those who live by external, though steeped in their parrot learning, are not men, but shells of men.

When one turns within his own heart, and finds there the motive and the master, he approaches nobility. There is nothing of a man but the word, that is kept or broken—swept as life, or unstable as water.

By this we judge each other, in philosophy and practice; and by this test shall be ruled the ultimate judgment.

Moondyne had solemnly promised to lead to the mine a man he knew to be a villain. The native chief examined the bond of his friend, and acknowledged its force.

The word of the Moondyne must be kept to-day. To-morrow the fate of the stranger would be decided.

They proceeded far into the interior of the mountain, until they seemed to stand in the midst of a great plain, with open sky overhead, though in truth above them rose a mountain.

The light was reflected from myriad points of spar or crystal, that shone above like stars in the blackness. The air of the place was tremulous with a deep, rushing sound, like the sweep of a river; but the flood was invisible.

At last the old chief, who led the way, stood beside a stone trough or basin, filled with long pieces of wood standing on end. To these he applied the torch, and a flame of reinous brightness swept instantly over the pile and flicked at the darkness above in long, fiery tongues.

The gloom seemed to struggle with the light, like opposing armies, and a minute passed before the eye took in the surrounding objects.

"Now," said Moondyne to the sergeant, raising his hand as sweeping it around—"Now, you are within the GOLD MINE OF THE VASSE."

The stupendous dimensions of the vault or chamber in which they stood oppressed and terrified the sergeant. Han dred feet above his head spread the shadow of the tremendous roof.

He gazed at the awful blackness of the cyclopean walls. From these he scarce could turn his eyes. Their immensity fascinated and stupefied him.

Nor was it strange that such a scene should inspire awe. The vastest work of humanity dwindled into insignificance beside the immeasurable dimensions of this mysterious cavern.

It was long before consciousness of his purpose returned to the sergeant; but at length, withdrawing his eyes from the gloomy stretch of iron-stone that roofed the mine, his glance fell upon the wide floor, and there, on every side, from wall to wall, were heaps and masses of yellow metal—of dust and bars and solid rocks of gold.

IX.

A DARK NIGHT AND DAY.

The old chief led the way from the gold mine; and the strangely assorted group of five persons sat by the fire while meat was cooked for the travellers.

The youth who had escorted the white men from the outer valley was the grandson of the chief, and brother of the beautiful girls. Savages they were, elder and girls, in the eyes of the sergeant; but there was a thoughtfulness in Te mana-roa, bred by the trust of treasure and the supreme confidence of his race, that elevated him to an exalted plane of manhood; and the young people had much of the same quiet and dignified bearing.

The revelations of the day had been too powerful for the small brain of the cunning trooper. They came before his memory piecemeal. He longed for an opportunity to think them over, to get them into grasp, and to plan his course of action.

The splendid secret must be his own, and he must overreach all who would tomorrow put conditions on his escape. While meditating this, the lovely form of one of the girls, observed by his evil eye as she bent over the fire, suggested a scheme, and before the meal was finished, the sergeant had worked far on the road of success.

The chief and Moondyne talked long in the native language. The sisters, wrapped in soft furs, sat and listened, their large eyes fixed on the face of the Moondyne, their keen senses enjoying a novel pleasure as they heard their familiar words strangely sounded on his lips.

To their simple minds the strongly marked white face must have appeared almost superhuman, known as it had long been to them by hearsay and the unequalled affection of their people.

Their girlhood was on the verge of something fuller; they felt a new and delicious joy in listening to the deep musical tones of the Moondyne. They had long heard how strong and brave he was; they saw that he was gentle when he spoke to them, it seemed that the same thrill of pleasure touched the hearts and lighted the faces of both sisters.

"One outside, and two here," was the dread burden of the sergeant's thought. "Two days' ride—but, can I be sure of the way?"

Again and again his furtive eyes turned on the ardent faces of the girls.

"Ay, that will do," he thought, "these can be used to help me out."

The sisters retired to a tent of skins, and, lighting a fire at the opening to drive off the evil spirit, lay down to rest. Sleep came slowly to every member of the party.

The old chief pondered on the presence of the stranger, who now held the primal secret of the native race.

The sergeant revolved his plans, going carefully over every detail of the next day's work, foreseeing and providing for every difficulty with devilish ingenuity.

The sisters lay in dreamy wakefulness, hearing again the deep musical voice, and seeing in the darkness the strange white face of the Moondyne.

Before sleeping, Moondyne walked into the valley, and, lifting his face to heaven, in simple and manful directness, thanked God for his deliverance; then, stretching himself beside the fire, he fell into a profound sleep.

In the morning, Moondyne spoke to Koro and Teparu in their own tongue, which was not guttural on their lips. They told him, with much earnest gesture

and flashing of eyes, about the smu's nest in the valley beyond the lake, and other such things as made up their daily life. Their steps were light about the camp that morning.

At an early hour the old man entered the gold mine, and did not return. To look after the horses, Moondyne, with the girls, crossed the valley, and then went up the mountain toward the smu's nest.

The sergeant, with bloodshot eyes from a sleepless night, had hung around the camp all the morning, feeling that, though his presence seemed unneeded, he was in the deepest thought of all.

Whatever his purpose, it was settled now. There was dark meaning in the look that followed Moondyne and the girls till they disappeared on the wooded mountain. When at last they were out of sight and hearing, he arose suddenly, and moved toward the mouth of the mine.

At that moment, the young bushman from the outpost emerged from the pass, and, inquiringly for Moondyne and the girls.

As the sergeant explained in dumb show that they had gone up the mountain yonder, there rose a gleam of hideous satisfaction in his eyes. The danger he had dreaded most had come to his hand to be destroyed. All through the night he had heard the whirr of a spear from an unseen hand, and he shuddered at the danger of hiding through the pass to escape. But there was no other course open. Were he to cross the mountains he knew that without a guide he never could reach the penal colony.

Had the sergeant Te mana-roa been present, he would at once have sent the bushman back to his duty. But the youth had drawn his spear from the tusk tree at the outpost, and he proceeded to harden again its injured point in the embers of the fire.

The sergeant, who had carelessly sauntered around the fire till he stood beside the bushman, now took a stride toward him, then suddenly stopped.

Had the native looked around at the moment, he would have seen his spear through the stranger's heart as swiftly as he drove it into the tusk yesterday.

There was murder in the sergeant's face as he took the silent stride, and paused, his hand on his pistol.

"I was not," he muttered, "no noise with him. But this will do."

He stooped for a heavy club, and with a few quick and stealthy paces stood over the bushman. Another instant, and the club descended with crushing violence. Without a sound but the deadly blow, the quivering body fell backward on the assassin's feet.

Replied, he moved in his terrible work. He crept to the entrance of the mine, and far within saw the old man moving, before the light. Patrol in hand he entered the cavern, from which, before many minutes had passed, he came forth white-faced. As he stepped from the cave, he turned a backward glance of fear full import. He saw that he had left the light burning behind him.

Warily scanning the mountain side, he dragged the body of the youth inside the mouth of the cavern, then, seating himself by the fire, he examined his pistol, and awaited the return of Moondyne and the girls.

In the sweet peace of the valley, the livid and anxious wretch seemed the impersonation of crime. He had meditated the whole night on his purpose. All he feared was partial failure. But he had provided for every chance; he had more than half succeeded already. Another hour, and he would be sole master of the treasure—and with the sisters in his power, there was no fear of failure.

It was a terrible hour to wait; but at last he saw them coming, the little figures of the girls waddling among the trees as they crossed the valley.

But they were alone; Moondyne was not with them!

They came with bent faces, as if thinking of pleasant things; but they started with fright, and drew close together, when they saw the stranger, alone, rise from the fire and come toward them.

With signs he asked for Moondyne, and they answered that he had gone across the mountain, and would return when the sun had gone down.

There was an ominous disappointment; but the sergeant knew that his life would not be worth one day's purchase with such an enemy behind him. He must wait.

He returned to the fire, the girls keep- ing distrustfully distant. He feared they might enter the mine, and so soon discover the dreadful secret; so, getting between them and the rock, he lay down at the entrance.

Like startled deer, the girls looked around, instinctively feeling that danger was near. The evil eyes of the sergeant never left them. He had not foreseen this chance, and for the moment knew not how to proceed.

The sisters stood near the fire, alarmed, alert, the left hand of one in the right of the other. At length their quick eyes fell upon a bivouac of the sand, and followed the track till they met again the terrible face at the mouth of the mine.

And, as they looked, a slight beyond the prostrate man, coming from the dark entrance, froze their hearts with terror.

The face of the aged chief, his white hair discolored with blood, appeared above the dreadful watcher, and looked out toward the girls. The old man, who had dragged his wounded body from the cave, rose to his feet when he saw the sisters, tottered forward with a cry of warning, and fell across the murderer.

Paralyzed with horror, the sergeant could not move for some moments. But soon feeling that he was not attacked, he pushed aside the senseless body, and spring to his feet with a terrible malediction. In that moment of his blind terror, the girls had disappeared.

He ran hither and thither searching for them; but found no trace of their hiding-places or path of escape. At length he gave up the search, a shivering dread growing upon him every instant, and hastened to catch the horses. He began to realize that his well-laid plan was a failure.

There was now only one course open. He must take his chance alone, and ride for his life, neither resting nor sleeping. The girls would run straight to Moondyne, and he must act speedily to get beyond his reach.

In a few minutes the horses were ready, standing at the entrance of the mine. The sergeant entered, and, passing the

flaming basin, loaded himself with bars and pieces of gold. Again and again he returned, till the horses were laden with treasure. Then, mounting he called the dogs; but they had gone with Moondyne.

Once more the chill of fear struck like an icicle through his heart at his utter loneliness. Leading the spare horse by the bridle, he rode headlong into the ravine and disappeared.

X.

ON THE TRAIL.

It was evening, and the twilight was grey in the little valley, when Moondyne reached the camp. He was surprised to find the place deserted. He had expected a welcome—had been thinking, perhaps, of the glad faces that would greet him as he approached the fire. But the fire was black, the embers were cold. He looked and saw that there was no light in the mine.

A dreadful presentiment grew upon him. A glance for the saddles, and another across the valley, and he knew that the horses were gone. Following the strange action of the dogs, he strode toward the cave, and there, at the entrance, read the terrible story.

The slight struck this strange convict like a physical blow. His limbs failed him, and his body sank till he knelt on the sand at the mouth of the mine. He felt no wrath, but only crushing self-accusation.

"God forgive me!" was the intense cry of heart and brain: "God forgive me for this crime!"

The consequence of this fatal selfishness crushed him, and the outstretched arms of the old chief, whose unconsciousness, for he was not dead, was fearfully like death, seemed to call down curses on the destroyer of his people.

The life went miserably down before Moondyne till he grovelled in the desolation of his dismal abasement. A ban had followed him, and blighted all he had touched.

Years were pressed into minutes as he crouched beside the smoldering bodies of his friends. The living man lay as motionless as the dead. The strong mind brought up the whole scene for judgment. His forward eye saw the fleeing murderer; but he felt more of pity for the wretched man of vengeance. The entire sensibility of Moondyne was concentrated in the line of his own conscience. Himself focused himself—and should the criminal condemn another?

When at last he raised his face, with a new thought of duty, the trace of the unutterable hour was graven upon him in deep lines.

Where were the sisters? Had they been sacrificed too? By the moonlight he searched the valley; he entered the cave, and called through all its passages. It was past midnight when he gave up the search and stood alone in the desolate place.

In the loose sand of the valley he scooped a grave, to which he carried the body of the young bushman, and buried it. When this was done he proceeded to perform a like office for Te mana-roa, but looking toward the cave he was startled at the sight of the sisters, one of whom, Koro, stood as if watching him, while the other, aided by an extremely old woman, was tending on the almost dying chief, whose consciousness was slowly returning.

Bemused and silent, Moondyne approached the cave. The girl who had watched him shrink back to the others. Teparu, the youngest sister, rose and faced the white man with a threatening aspect. She pointed her finger toward the pass.

"Go!" she said, sternly, in her own tongue.

Moondyne paused and looked at her. "Begone!" she cried, still pointing; and once again came the words, "begone, begone!"

Remembered had strangled grief in Moondyne's breast, or the agony of the girl, uttered in this terrible reproach, would have almost killed him. Accused as he had, and he knew that the word was true.

He turned from the place, not toward the sisters, but toward the mountain, and walked from the valley with an aimless purpose, and a heart filled with ashes.

For hours he held steadily on, heedless of direction. He marked no places—had no thoughts—only the one gnawing and consuming presence of the ruin he had wrought.

The dogs followed him, tired and split- tled. The moon sank, and the sun rose, and still the lonely man held his straight and aimless road—a road mountain and through ravines, until at last his consciousness was recalled as he recognized the valley in which he stood as one he had travelled two days before, on the way to the gold mine.

Stretching his exhausted body on a sheltered bank beside a stream, he fell into a deep sleep that lasted many hours.

He awoke with a start, as if a voice had called him. In an instant his brow was set and his mind determined. He glanced at the sun to settle his direction, and then walked slowly across the valley, intently observing the ground. Before he had taken a hundred paces he stopped suddenly, turned to right angles down the valley, and strode on with a purpose, that, though rapidly, almost instantaneously formed, had evidently taken full possession of his will.

Sometimes persons of keen sensibility lie down to sleep with a trouble on the mind and an unsettled purpose, and wake in the night to find the brain clear and the problem solved. From this process of unconscious cerebration Moondyne awoke with a complete and settled resolution.

There could be no doubt of the determination in his mind. He had struck the trail of the murderer.

There was no more indirection or hesitation in his manner. He settled down to the pursuit with a grim and terrible earnestness. His purpose was clear before him—to stop the devil he had let loose—to prevent the escape of the assassin—to save the people who had trusted and saved him.

He would not turn from this intent though the trail led him to the prison gate of Fremantle; and even there, in the face of the guards, he would slay the wretch before he had betrayed the secret.

Death is on the trail of every man; but we have grown used to him, and heed him not. Crime and Sin are following us—we will surely find us, and some day will open the owl and show us the death-head. But more terrible than these Fates,

because more physically real, is the knowledge ever present that a relentless human enemy is on our track.

Through the silent passes of the hills, he heard a storm of fears and hopes, the sergeant fled toward security. Every mile added to the light ahead. He rode wildly and without rest—rode all day and into the night, and would still have hurried on, but the horses failed and must have rest.

He fed and watered them, watching with feverish eyes the renewal of their strength; and as he watched them eat, the wretched man fell into a sleep, from which he started in terror, fearful that the pursuer was upon him.

Through the day and night, depending on his great strength, Moondyne followed. While the fugitive rested, he strode on, and he knew by instinct and observation that he was gaining in the race.

Every hour the tracks were fresher. On the morning of the second day, he had found the sand still moist where the horses had drunk from a stream. On the evening of that day he passed the burning embers of a fire. The murderer was gaining confidence, and taking longer rest.

The third day came with a revelation to Moondyne. The sergeant had lost the way—had turned from the valley that led toward the Settlement, and had entered the trackless deserts of the interior.

The pursuer was not stayed by the discovery. To the prison or the wilderness, should the track lead, he would follow.

At first the new direction was pleasant—Dim woods on either side of a stream, the banks fringed with verdure and pranked with bright flowers. But like the pleasant ways of life, the tempting valley led to the desolate plains; before night had closed, pursuer and pursued were far from hills and streams, in the midst of a treeless sea of sand.

Nothing but fear of death could drive the sergeant forward. He was bushman enough to know the danger of being lost on the plains. But he dare not return to meet him whom he knew was hunting him down.

There was but one chance before him, and this was to tire out the pursuer—if, as his heart suggested, there was only one in pursuit—to lead him farther and farther into the desert, till he fell on the barren track and died.

It was sore travelling for horse and man under the blazing sun, with no food nor water save what he pressed from the pith of the palm, and even these were growing scarce. The only life on the plains was the hard and dusty scrub. Every hour brought a more hopeless and gristlier desolation.

How was it with Moondyne? The storm will still uphold him. He knew he had gained till they took to the plains; but he also knew that here the mounted man had the advantage. Every day the track was less distinct, and he suffered more and more from thirst. The palms he passed had been opened by the fœgaunt, and he had to leave the trail to find one untouched.

The sun flamed in the bare sky, and the sand was so hot that the air hung above it in a tremulous haze. In the woods the dogs had brought him food; but no living thing was to be hunted on the plains. He had lived two days on the pith of the palm.

On the third day Moondyne with difficulty found the sand trail, which had been blown over by the night breeze. He had slept on the sheltered desert, and had dreamt of sweet wells of water as the light dew fell on his parched body.

That day he was quite alone. The dogs, suffering from thirst, had deserted him in the night.

He began the day with a firm heart but an unsteady step. There was not a palm in sight. It was hot noon before he found a small scrub to moisten his throat and lips.

But to day, he thought, he must come face to face with the villain, and would kill him like a wild beast on the desert; and he thought upheld him.

His hand was bare and his body nearly naked. Another man would have fallen senseless under the cruel sun; but Moondyne did not even rest—the day passed he did not seem to need rest.

It was strange how pleasant, how like a dream, part of that day appeared. Some times he seemed to be awake, and to know that he was moving over the sand, and with a dread purpose; but at these times he knew that the trail had disappeared—and he was blindly going forward, lost on the wilderness. Toward evening the cool breeze creeping over the sand dispelled the dreams and made him mercilessly conscious.

The large red sun was standing on the horizon of sand, and an awful shadow seemed waiting to fall upon the desert.

When the sun had gone down, and the wanderer looked at the stars, there came to him a new thought, like a friend, with a grave but not unkind face—a vast and solemn thought, that held him for a long time with appraised face and hands, as if it had been whispered from the dark quiet sky. Slowly he walked with his new communion, and when he saw before him in the moonlight two palms, he did not rush to cut them open, but stood beside them smiling. Opening one, at length, he took the morsel of pith, and ate, and slept.

How sweet it was to wake up and see the wide sky studded with golden stars—to feel that there were no bands any more, nor hopes, nor heart-burnings.

The Divine Thought that had come to him the day before was with him still—grave and kindly, and now they were so utterly alone, it seemed almost to smile. He raised his body and knelt upon the sand, looking upward, and all things seemed closing quietly in upon him, as if coming to a great rest, and he would have laid down on the sand at peace—but a cry, a human-like cry, startled him into wakefulness, surely it was a cry!

It was clear and near and full of suffering. Surely, he had heard—he had not dreamt of such a cry. Again—God! how near and how keen it was—from the darkness—a cry of mortal agony!

With a tottering step Moondyne ran toward the woeful sound. He saw by the moonlight a dark object on the sand. The low wail cry hurried him on, till he stood beside the poor throat whence it came, and was smote with pity at the dismal sight.

On the sand lay two horses, chained at the neck, one dead, the other dying in

an agony of thirst and imprisonment. Beside the dead horse, almost buried in sand, as he had fallen from the saddle, lay a man, seemingly dead, but whose glowing eyes turned with hideous suffering as Moondyne approached. The wretched being was powerless to free himself from the fallen horse; and upon his body, and all around him were scattered heavy bars and pieces of gold.

Moondyne looked the chain from the suffering horse, that struggled to its feet, ran forward a few yards, and fell dead on the sand.

The men's eyes met, and the biltered lips of the sergeant—for it was he—moved in piteous appeal. Moondyne paused one stern moment, then turned and ran from the place—ran toward the palm near which he had slept. With heavy hand he tore it open and cut out the pith, and sped back to the sufferer. He knelt down, and squeezed the precious moisture into the mouth of the dying man—the man whom he had followed into the desert to kill like a wild beast.

Till the last drop was gone he pressed the young wood. Then the guilty wretch raised his eyes and looked at Moondyne—the girl's eyes grew bright, and brighter, till a tear rose within them, and rolled down the steamed and sin lined face. The barked lips moved, and the weak hands were raised imploringly. The sergeant fell back dead.

Moondyne knew that his last breath was contrition, and his last dumb cry, "Paradise!"

Then, too, the strength failed from the limbs and the light from the eyes of Moondyne—and as he sank to the earth, the great thought that had come to him filled his heart with peace—and he lay unconscious beside the dead.

The sun rose on the desert, but the sleeper did not move. Before the day was an hour old, other forms rapidly crossed the plain—not wanderers, but fierce, skinned men, in search of vengeance.

They flung themselves from their horses when they reached the scene; and one, throwing himself upon the body of the sergeant, sprang back with a guttural cry of wrath and disappointment, which was echoed by the savage party.

Next moment, one of the natives, stooping to lay his hand on the head of the Moondyne, uttered an excited call. The spearman crouched around, and one poured water from a skin on the face and body of the senseless man.

They raised him to the arms of a strong rider, while another took the reins, and the wild party struck off at a full gallop towards the mountains.

When Moondyne returned to consciousness, many days after his rescue, he was free from pursuit, he had cut over the bond of the Penal Colony; above him bent the deep eyes and kind faces of the old chief and the sisters, Koro and Teparu, and around him were the hills that shut in the Valley of the Vasse Gold Mine.

He closed his eyes again and seemed to sleep for a little while. Then he looked up and met the face of Te mana-roa kindly watching him. "I am free!" he only said