

The True Witness,

AND

CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. XXI.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, MARCH 31, 1871.

NO. 33.

NORA BRADY'S VOW.

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CHAPTER VII.—(Continued.)

"When can I go?" asked Nora, full of hope.

"To-morrow, when Willie goes to work," replied honest Thomas McGinnis.

"And it'll be a good time, Miss Brady, dear, to be inquiring for the situation you was speaking of," added his wife. "Many's the poor girl Mr. Donahoe's befriended in that way. He's got the warm side left for his countrymen, sure, and never thinks of trouble when he can do them a good turn."

With a light heart, Nora, neatly and becomingly attired, accompanied Willie McGinnis to his place of business. When they arrived there, the town-clock struck, and the boy, finding himself a half-hour behind the time, ushered her into the handsome and spacious book-store of the "Pilot" Buildings, and ran with all the speed he could to the printing-room. Nora felt abashed and embarrassed at being so suddenly left to depend on her own resources, and stood half-frightened and undetermined whether to stay or go away and beg the favor of Mr. McGinnis or his wife to come with her on the morrow. A number of persons were passing in and out, and the clerks were employed in picking books to be sent away, or waiting on customers. At last one of the clerks observed her, and asked her, politely, what she would have.

"I am waiting to see Mr. Donahoe, sir," she said, modestly.

"He is not in at present," replied the gentleman. "He is in another part of the building, very busy with workmen who are putting up a new steam-power press. Can you wait a little while?"

"If you please, sir."

"Sit down, then, and I'll tell him when he comes in," said the clerk, as he hurried away to attend to his duties. Nora thanked him, and sat down; but one hour passed, two, three; it was nearly twelve o'clock, and she still waited. Every one who came in, she thought, must certainly be the publisher; but, disappointed, she would watch them transact some little business, look over the elegantly-bound books, make purchases, and—go away. Fairly disheartened, she felt that a good fit of crying would do her more good than anything else. She did not know the way home, or she would have gone away. No one seemed to observe her, or at least no one spoke to her, and she had just formed the desperate resolution to address one of the clerks, when a quick, friendly voice near her said, "Do you wish to see any one, my good girl?"

"I have been waiting to see Mr. Donahoe," she said, rising.

"I am he. What do you want?"

Nora, like most of her sex, was a physiognomist, and it only required a glance at the friendly face before her, to feel reassured.

"I am very busy, and in a great hurry," he replied; "but tell me your business."

And Nora Brady told her story. With tears in her eye, which she could not keep back, and a low voice, whose sweetness was enriched by the slight brogue of her speech, she opened her heart. The active, busy publisher, who even in Yankee-land is noted for his energy and enterprise, was at first restless, and looked at his watch; then he leaned forward and listened with deeper attention; but when she mentioned the name of John Halloran he drew a chair beside her and sat down, folding his arms, while the most eager interest was depicted on his countenance. At last she brought her narrative to a close, by asking her hearer, "if he knew Mr. Halloran, or had heard of his being in Boston."

"You're a good girl, Nora Brady," said the publisher. "Of course I know John Halloran, and have seen him too. He is my friend. He was my guest."

"Oh, then, sir, may God bless you for that word! I've got many things to tell him in regard to them he's left behind him, and some jewels Mrs. Halloran sent him in case his money gave out," exclaimed Nora, clasping her hands together. "And where is he now, your honor?"

"I fear I cannot tell you that. Mr. Halloran left Boston two weeks ago. He went to New York, and remained there a few days, then left for the South."

Poor Nora! What a sudden darkness came over her faithful heart just at the very instant that she thought all was brightest! Gone—Wandering! And she here with messages from home for him, and means to aid him. "Why," thought Nora,—full of rebellion to this trial, but only for a moment,—"why could not God, who knows all things, keep him here?"

"Because, Nora, God designed to bring light out of darkness. It is His way. He brings up the precious ore of holy virtues from the depths of the human heart with hard blows.—The gems most precious to him are those which are cleansed with tears. His ways are past finding out, Nora Brady; but they are all right; so look up, and be comforted."

Thus whispered her guardian angel, who loved well the humble and pure-minded one he was commissioned to guard and guide.

"Don't be distressed," said the publisher, after a moment's thought; "I will put a line in the 'Pilot' next week, informing Mr. Halloran that letters have arrived for him at this office. You must send me the letters. If he sees the notice, we shall soon get some tidings of him. You're a good girl, Nora; and if I can serve you I will."

"The Blessed Virgin have care of your soul, sir, and a thousand thanks for your kindness to a stranger, but I should like to get a situation."

"What can you do?"

"I can turn my hand to anything, sir," she said, quietly; "but at home I mostly cooked, and got up linen."

"Very well. Persons very frequently come here to inquire about help, and I will keep you in mind. Now, you had better go. But where did you say you stopped?"

"With Willie McGinnis's mother, sir; the boy that's at work here."

"Do you know the way home?"

"I'm afraid not, sir; it's a long way."

"Stephen, send Willie McGinnis here," said the publisher to a porter who was passing by at the moment. "Here, lad," he continued, when the boy, flushed and expectant, came in. "Go home with this young woman to show her the way, then make a holiday for yourself the rest of the day."

Every morning Nora hoped that before night she should hear something from the "Pilot" Office. She listened with strained and anxious ears, as evening closed in, for Willie's footsteps; but day after day passed, and no message came and she began to think she was forgotten. She was sitting silent and sad one evening in Mrs. McGinnis's snug little parlor, when Willie ran in, and, throwing a slip of paper in her lap, hurried back to his supper. She turned it toward the firelight, and read. "Nora Brady will hear of a respectable situation by applying at Mrs. Sydney's, No. 62 Washington Place. No news of Mr. Halloran."

"I dare not write home and tell that," thought Nora, with a sigh. "No news from Mr. Halloran! Oh, my Blessed Mother! for the sake of that broken-hearted mother, and the little ones belonging to her, help me in this strait!"

Nora, guided by Mrs. McGinnis, who had to pass the place on her way to market, went to Mrs. Sydney's as directed. It was a large, handsomely constructed house, but wore a look of faded gentility which impressed every one with the idea that its inmates had known better days. Mrs. Sydney sent for Nora to come into her sitting-room, and received her kindly but with a scrutinizing glance. The lady herself was old, and had a care-worn expression of countenance, and she was dressed in mourning which had once been handsome, but was now rusty. Everything was scrupulously clean and tidy everywhere.

"I suppose you bring recommendations?"

"Here is one, ma'am, from the only place I ever lived at," replied Nora, handing her Mrs. Halloran's recommendation.

"Really, this speaks well for you, young woman," said the old lady, looking up with a pleasant smile. "I should like to engage you; but before I do I must give you to understand fully how you will be situated. Sit down there and listen. In the first place, I have a negro cook, who will keep you in hot water; besides which, I am compelled to take a few boarders, for I am not rich, and you would have to accommodate yourself to their humors."

"I will endeavor to do right, ma'am; and if, after doing my part, it don't suit, I can go away," said Nora, half-terrified at the prospect.

"Of course you're a Papist?"

"A what, ma'am?" asked Nora, amazed, for she had never heard the word before.

"A Romanist—a Catholic?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am, a Catholic surely," she replied earnestly.

"Well, no need to be riled. We're all something or other, and it's right, I guess. I'm a Universalist, but never take it on myself to promulge my doctrines to them that holds others. Only I've had helps that called themselves Catholics, and said they confessed to the priest, and went to mass, and all that, when, come to find out, they didn't go at all, but shined round here and there, visiting and frolicking, and neglecting my work; and I've come to this point, that there's nothing worse in nature than a bad Catholic. They're a disgrace to their religion, and give them that's outside a mighty poor opinion of it, too."

Nora listened with surprise and mortification, but said nothing.

"Now, I want you tell me honestly, do you go to confession?—do you go to your duties regular? for, you see, if I've had bad ones, I've had good ones too, and I know the difference."

"It would seem like praising myself, ma'am, and, faith, I never had such questions put to me before, because there was no need," replied Nora, with a bewildered look; "but surely

there's no power in the world could make me neglect my religion."

"I hope not. It can't be a religion that's worth much, to be neglected and scandalized by them that belongs to it. But, anyways, I want to tell you, if you are a good faithful girl, you may go to confession every week, and fast whenever you like, and go to mass on Sundays, and say your beads, and pray to images, if it does you any good, whenever you choose."

"I only go to confession once a month, ma'am, and never pray to images at all," interrupted Nora, quickly, while a merry smile dawned on her face, in spite of her efforts to control it.

"La suz! Not pray to images! Well, it's none of my business if you did. But there's another bother in your way. One of my lodgers is a very odd-tempered old bachelor,—very rich and as stingy,—my!—He'll be forever quarreling about his wood, and be in a snarl about his candle-ends, and scraps of paper. I can promise you skrimmagas enough with him, Nora, my girl."

"And then, ma'am, he may have his skrimmagas to himself entirely, for I'd scorn to waste or rack what didn't belong to me. Is that all, ma'am?"

"No. I keep only two helps,—Phillis and a white help; and there's work enough to be done. She does the cooking and washing, and the other cleans house and irons. I give her eight dollars per month; the other gets the same. Now, what say you?"

"I can only try it, ma'am. I don't mind work. I've been used to it all my life. I suppose I should find trials everywhere and in every situation; so, if you please, I'll come in the morning, if that'll suit."

"In the morning, of course. Be here by six o'clock. I think we shall get on; for, Nora, you look as if I could respect you.—Your dress, so plain and neat, everything so clean and tidy about you and suitable to a young woman who has to earn her living, makes me think you have a great deal of self-respect; and it's a good thing for everybody to have."

In her new home, Nora Brady found that Mrs. Sydney had not exaggerated the difficulties of the situation. In the first place, Mrs. Sydney herself was in a continual fuss about Nora's religious practices, and her going to confession, so that really, if she had been a bad Catholic, she could scarcely have fared worse. Mrs. Sydney knew that her interest depended considerably on Nora's religious sincerity and steady morals, and she determined that she should not lapse into indifference through her neglect. It is the fashion of that region to have an "eye to the main chance" in every particular and phase of life, and Mrs. Sydney was like the rest; therefore she cherished genuine piety in her help, after her own ideas. Then Mrs. Sydney was dreadfully afraid of her black cook, Phillis, and would have inspired Nora with the same terror, only Nora soon discovered that Phillis, with the keen instincts of her class, knew very well who to show her airs to and who not. She was one of the rescued-from-bondage ones, and had been made quite a heroine of, when she first arrived at Boston, by the "Equal Rights and Southern Transportation Company," which not only tickled her vanity and self-love, but inspired her with an idea that her friends, after all, were only poor white folks, to put themselves down so with niggers; so she ate and drank at their expense, let them show her off, and dress her, while she laughed in her sleeve, and was not much astonished to find herself suddenly dropped when their ends were accomplished. She had been in Mrs. Sydney's kitchen ever since, and presumed no little on having heard it said so often that "races were equal," and the black man as good as the white. The insolence of the coarse and ignorant black woman, who regarded Nora with no favor, because she saw at once how widely they differed, was a sore trial; but after the high-spirited Irish girl had thrown out a few flashes from her handsome black eyes, and told her, in a quiet but very firm way, not to interfere with her, and had on several occasions helped her through no slight difficulties in cooking, she behaved somewhat better. Nora did not waste; and Phillis did. Nora was neat and tidy; Phillis was slovenly and careless. Nora was even-tempered and cheerful; Phillis was like a volcano. Nora was close to the interests of her employer; Phillis was wasteful and extravagant. Thus between two beings so adverse in race, color, and morals there could be no harmony or comfort. But Phillis could find no grounds of complaint against Nora, and was annoyed and angry to discover that she felt, in spite of herself, a degree of respect for her which she had not felt for any white person before, since she left "Ole Virginny." Then came the old lodger,—one of the merchant princes of Boston,—who snarled and scolded if his candles and fire were lit in good time, and stormed and swore if they were not,—who split and counted out his own wood, and measured the waste of his candles by sticking pins at regular distances in the one he used. Nora had many a hearty cry to herself, but she had too much self-respect to rebel against Mrs. Sydney's arrangements or authority, to quarrel with one so

much her inferior as the cook, or dispute with Mr. Mallow about the disposal of his own goods. She knew that all positions have their peculiar trials, and that wherever one goes he shall find the cross, and that it was not by shifting and changing homes that she could win respectability or confidence. Nora knew that human nature is the same everywhere, and if she fled from these disagreeable trials at Mrs. Sydney's, where really she found much genuine, true kind-heartedness, she might fare worse elsewhere.

Several times she had inquired for news at the "Pilot" Office. She had written hopefully and cheerfully to Mrs. Halloran, once, but told Dennis Byrne, in her letter to him, how she was troubled, and inclosed two months' wages, which she charged him to "use for the comfort of those he had care of, but not for the world let them know how it came." As yet she had received no reply, and the light began to fade from her eye, and the crimson from her cheek. "Hope deferred," blending with some times a feeling of home-sickness, gave poor Nora many a *thrae* in her heart, and on two or three occasions she thought she was dying, she felt so oppressed and heavy.

One evening, the eve of a great festival, she had asked permission and gone to confession.—It was bitterly cold. Snow lay deep in the streets, and a drizzling mist of frozen snow and rain, lashed by an easterly wind which roared savagely in from the bay, almost blinded those who encountered it. There were but few persons abroad that evening. All who had homes were either there, or hastening toward them.—Nora drew her cloak closely about her, and, pulling her thick veil over her face to protect it from the sleet, hurried homeward as rapidly as she could through the banks and drifts of snow which were every instant accumulating on the sidewalk. Her foot struck against something, and she stooped down and picked up a tolerably large package, wrapped carefully, but wet and muddy.

A furious blast of wind came howling up the street, a chimney fell not far off, a quantity of slates from a roof came clattering down over her head, but fell clear of her, and in the confusion and fright of the moment she thrust it into her pocket, soaking wet as it was, and, nervously herself for a desperate struggle with the storm, she at last succeeded in reaching home, faint and exhausted with the cold. Forgetting entirely the bundle she found in the snow, she changed her dress, and, as soon as her strength returned, she went about her usual business, with no other concern than a fear that she should not be able to get to church in the morning.

When she opened the door of Mr. Mallow's apartment, to go in and light his fire, a scene presented itself to her which caused her to start back and pause. Two candles were burning, one on the mantel, one on the floor. Everything in the room was in the wildest disorder. Clothing was strewn here and there, papers were scattered in every direction, his wardrobe doors wide open, and the bedclothes tossed in a heap together in the middle of the bed, while he sat upright in his leather-backed chair, as rigid and motionless as if he were dead. There was a strange glare in his eyes, and Nora feared that he had become suddenly deranged.

"Are you ill, sir?" she asked, timidly.

"No," he growled.

"And what has tossed your room up, sir, so dreadful?" she asked.

"Be silent, girl! Is it any of your business? Let the room be. I tossed it."

"Shall I light your fire, sir? it is very cold; and you have two candles burning away."

"Two candles! I am mad! I am ruined! Put them out. I haven't a farthing to buy another! No; I'll freeze."

"I'm afraid you're ill, sir," said Nora, extinguishing the candle on the floor. "Let me call Mrs. Sydney."

"Call the police! send for the police! I've been robbed and am ruined," he growled.

"Robbed, sir! Ruined, sir! Lord save an' defend us, but surely you're mistaken," exclaimed Nora.

"Robbed, sir!" said the excited old man, mimicking her. "Ruined, sir! Yes, robbed of ten thousand dollars. Now go away."

"God save us, an' surely that's a heavy loss," said Nora, with such genuine pity and commiseration in her voice that he called her back.

"I believe you are sorry. Well, keep it all to yourself. I don't wish it spoken of to any one in the house, for Mrs. Sydney would go off in a fit of fantods, and by six o'clock to-morrow it would be in every paper in Boston, and telegraphed from Maine to Georgia. The rogues put upon their guard would escape, and I be left to resign myself to the loss as I best might. So hold your tongue, if you can."

"I will, sir, if it will be any comfort to you," said Nora.

"I believe you. I trust you, because you have never wasted my candles or wood, nor opened my wardrobe, nor inspected my pockets. Aha! I have a way of finding these things out, but you're an honest girl, Nora; but it remains to be proved whether or not you can hold your tongue."

"Thank you, sir," said Nora, leaving the strange old man to go down to arrange the tea-table. "It's no wonder he's crazy. Ten thousand dollars! It's a great sum, surely; an' I hope in my heart he'll find it ag'n."

CHAPTER VIII.

"Sweet it be once more to see
The earth where my fathers rest,
And to find a grave by the sounding wave
In homeland of the lovely west."

Mr. Mallow's heavy loss was kept a profound secret from Mrs. Sydney and her family, who only observed that he had suddenly become more silent and disagreeable than usual, and that his cheeks looked more sallow, while, notwithstanding all his attempts to steady it, his hand shook nervously whenever he lifted his cup or tumbler to his lips. But, well acquainted with the peculiarities of his rasping, unhappy temper, they supposed that he had failed in some speculation, or had met with something in his extensive business-operations to annoy him. But the detective police of Boston and Nora knew all about it. He engaged the skillful services of the detectives to ferret out the misguided and criminal person who had robbed him. He furnished them with a circumstantial description of the notes or bills and the wallet which contained them. He supposed he was robbed between his place of business and home. He was certain of having put the wallet in his breast-pocket before he left his counting-room, and he had missed it the moment he reached his room. This was all the information he could give them; but they had managed with success more obscure and intricate cases than this, and, incited to extraordinary efforts by the prospect of a liberal reward, their expectations were sanguine.

Toward Nora Brady the strange old man's manner was fitful, but kind. He frequently called her "a good honest girl," but steadily refused the necessary comforts of lights or fire; while she, really sympathizing with him and feeling sorry for his isolated loneliness, strove in every way she could to make him comfortable: all of which sunk quietly down like soft dews into his sterile heart, warming it with more human feeling than it had ever known before. When Monday morning came, Nora was up with the dawn. She had an unusual number of clothes to wash that week, and she wished to begin early, to avoid neglecting her other work. Having gathered the household linen, and the few pieces belonging to Mrs. Sydney, together, she unlocked the closet to take out some articles belonging to herself to do up, when she observed, for the first time, the soiled and muddy appearance of the *nie-mousse-line de laine* dress she had worn to confession the evening of the storm. Mrs. Halloran had given it to her for a birthday-gift some months before, and she felt pained to see it so soiled and, as she feared, ruined.

"Agh!" said Nora, taking it down from the peg on which it hung. "It is easy enough to get the mud out with soap an' water, but my fear is that the beautiful blue flowers an' these roses will come out along with it. But it can't stay so; that's certain; an', to give it a chance, I'll shake it well, then rub it between my two hands to see if I can clean it that way."

So, with the dress in her hand, she went round to the window, through which the first red sunbeams were stealing; and, rubbing the dry mud off quite easily, she gave it one good shake, when something fell with a heavy *thud* to the floor, and, turning quickly, she looked down and saw the package she had picked up in the snow. Nora laughed a low, merry laugh at her own forgetfulness, for she had never thought of it until that moment, and took it up to examine it. "It's an old thing, anyway," she said, turning it over; "an' old, greasy, ragged budget, an' if there's thread an' needles an' some snuff or tobacco in it, it's about as much as it's worth. What in the world it is I don't know, an', faith, I'm afraid to handle it; there's no tellin' the fingers that tied it up so tight, or what disease was in 'em. Anyway, if it's anything worth having, it's none of mine, an' I must see to that at once."

By this time Nora had unfastened the numerous strips of red tape which were wrapped around it, and unclasped the steel fastenings; then it fell open in her hands. A mortal paleness overspread her face, and she sank trembling in a chair beside her, exclaiming, "Merciful God, defend me!" And well she might be terror-stricken at first, for it was stuffed with bank-bills of various denominations,—some old, some new, but all of high value.—She touched them with her fingers, lifting their edges carefully. "One thousand, two thousand, three, four, five, six thousand! more—more and more!" she murmured, gazing with a half-stupefied look on the treasure. There was a dimness in her sight, and a strange singing in her ears. "Ho! lucky Nora! Now are your labors ended. You have found a great treasure; your trials are past; you need toil no longer; you can buy another Gendariff for those you so dearly love; and, best of all, you can marry Dennis. Close up that wallet, you silly child; it is yours; you found it; no one claims it. Use its contents and purchase happiness." Thus sang the Tempter of her soul to poor bewildered Nora, who sat trembling