

THE BLAKES AND FLANAGANS.

BY MRS. JAS. A. SADDLER.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SISTERS' SCHOOL—A GLANCE INTO TIM FLANAGAN'S HOUSEHOLD.

As we have taken a passing glance at the female school, governed by that most pious young lady, Miss Davison, to overlook that of the Sisters of Charity. It is almost needless to say that these good ladies are invariably characterized by their feminine gentleness and Christian modesty—the spirit of the Order, actuating and regulating all their actions, leaves little room for individual peculiarities. All have before them a common model for demeanor as well as for conduct, so that in every one is manifested more or less of the divine sweetness and modesty of the Virgin Mother. Of the Sisters who taught St. Peter's female school at the time of which I write, I will only particularize two: one was perhaps forty-five or fifty, and the other a fair young creature, in the second year of her monastic life. Sister Magdalena, the elder, might well have passed for the mother of a family. Her hair was well combed, and she wore a simple dress, and the latter always treated her with the deferential respect of a daughter, for, independent of the difference in point of age, Sister Magdalena had many other claims on the respectful consideration of her companions. She was a woman of excellent understanding with a strong and vigorous mind, well fitted to grapple with the most abstruse subjects, if such had been her taste; her natural abilities had been seconded by all the advantages of education, her family being one of the first in her native county. Had she been a Protestant, she would have been "a strong-minded woman," beyond all doubt; she might have taken the lead at public meetings, edited a daily newspaper, in some of our great cities, delivered public lectures, and written large volumes on metaphysics or philosophy. But being Catholic, as I have said, and born in Ireland, she was brought up by the Sisters of Loretto, and her mind was early imbued with the old-fashioned Catholic notions regarding feminine modesty and Christian humility. She was taught to consider human learning as a mere accessory to the grand science of salvation; very good and very useful in its own place, but never to be made the primary or fundamental object of education. So instead of blazing forth, "a burning and a shining light," on reaching the age of maturity, Sister Magdalena thought proper to take the very unworthy step of retiring from the world with all her natural and acquired graces, and all the rare endowments of her mind to live a life of seclusion and mortification among the humble Sisters of Charity. There, her talents and her virtues were hidden in "the bosom of her God," and devoted to Him in the service of His creatures. In the community, Sister Magdalena was only distinguished from her Sisters in religion by her still greater diligence and humility; in the school-room she was characterized by

her special where dazzling intellect. Was adorned by Christian modesty, and by the sick-bed of the poor and destitute, Sister Magdalena was indeed a ministering angel. Such was "the triple crown" which that singularly gifted woman had chosen for herself. Her young assistant in St. Peter's school was very beautiful in person, and as pure in mind and heart as are the celestial spirits; but her intellect was of no high order, which deficiency gave Sister Mary-Teresa but little trouble, so long as she knew enough to teach the little ones. "Dear Sister Magdalena, you know enough for all of us, and the higher branches are in her hands." But even this was more inferred from the young Sister's manner than from her words, for Sisters of Charity speak but little of themselves, and that little as rarely as possible.

The two little Flanagans were as yet under the care of Sister Mary-Teresa, and though she, of course, made it a rule to show no partiality, yet she could not help feeling a peculiar interest in the children, but especially in little Susan, who was the youngest child in the class. Ellen Flanagan, or —as she was generally called, Ellie—was at times a little refractory, and liked to have her own way, if she could at all manage it so, but Susan was as gentle as the breath of summer, and was beside so fond and so endearing that Sister Mary-Teresa was all the rest. But that was nothing strange, the other children said, for dear little Susan was the pet of the whole school. One morning, about a week after the social meeting at Tim Flanagan's, the two little girls went very early to school, hoping to get in before any of the others, in order to have a look at the pictures in a certain big black book, which lay on Sister Magdalena's desk. This book, or rather these pictures, had been running in their heads ever since one memorable day, some two or three weeks before, when Ellie had been called up before that grand tribunal where Sister Magdalena presided, to answer for some grave misdemeanor—grave it was in that school where all was innocence and childlike simplicity, though in other more worldly schools it would have amounted to nothing. However, while Ellie stood listening to the mild admonition of the good Sister, her sharp eye caught sight of some of the pictures aforesaid; the grand tidings were speedily communicated to Susan, and ever since, "Sister Magdalena's big black book all full of pictures," had been the chief subject of their conversation when alone together. Ellie would "give anything" in the world to see those pictures, and Susan had a great mind to ask Sister Mary-Teresa to show them.

"No, no," said Ellie, "don't ask her; let us try and get in very, very early some morning, and then we can look at them so nicely before any of the girls come."

But alas! for Ellie's fine scheme; the nuns were already in the school-room, engaged in preparations for the duties of the day. There were also two or three of the girls, sisters of whom was about the age of Ellie Flanagan. "Now, you see, Ellie," said Susan, "we're too late after all. Isn't it too bad, and we coming so very early?" "What is the matter with my little Susan this morning?" said the soft voice of Sister Mary-Teresa. "She looks as though there were something wrong."

"Don't tell her," whispered Ellie. "Yes, but I will, Ellie—I know Sister Mary-Teresa will get leave for a big black book, Sister, that's over there on Sister Magdalena's desk."

"Oh indeed? and what about the big black book, my child; does it make you afraid, or what?" "Oh! no, Sister," cried Susan, encouraged by the Sister's affectionate smile; "Ellie says it's full of pictures, and we do want to see them, but we can't get a chance for you see we came this morning ever so early and here's you and Sister Magdalena and all the rest in before us. If we could only look at them pictures, Sister, Ellie and I would be ever so good."

"Well, Susan, suppose I show you the picture, will you and Ellie, promise not to look round the room any more when you're at your prayers?"

It is needless to say that the promise was cheerfully given, whereupon the smiling Sister took the two children with little Mary Smith, and showed them "every one of the pictures" in the mysterious black book, to their infinite satisfaction. The book was no other than a volume of Butler's Lives of the Saints, an old Dublin edition, embellished with numerous engravings, and Sister Mary-Teresa, in connection with a little story or in connection with the pictures, the two older girls drawing near when they heard of the stories. Susan was quite taken with the infant St. John in the desert, with the lamb, and the Sister had to tell her more than once how he retired to the wilderness in his early childhood to serve God in solitude and in mortification. Numerous were the questions asked, and patiently did the gentle teacher answer them all, until the bell rang for prayers. By this time most of the girls were in and listening to their knees facing towards the large crucifix at the head of the room over Sister Magdalena's seat. The morning prayers were said aloud by Sister Mary-Teresa—they consisted of the Lord's Prayer, Angelical Salutation, the Creed, and the Angelus, ending with a short offering of the actions of the day to God and a little prayer for the faithful departed. The whole took up about five minutes. Then came the catechism, divided into two classes, heard respectively by the two nuns, already mentioned. With all due respect to the more advanced pupils and their accomplished teacher, we will remain with Sister Mary-Teresa and her infant class, consisting of about twenty children.

"Well, children!" said the good Sister, seeing them all properly settled in their places, "whereabouts are we today?"

"There, Sister," said the first girl, Sally Doyle, stepping forward and pointing out the place in the book held by the nun. "Very well! repeat the seventh commandment, Sally!" "Thou shalt not steal!" "Very good! What is forbidden by this commandment?—Go on, Alice!" to the next girl. "It is forbidden to take, to receive, to keep, or to cover anything belonging to our neighbor, either publicly or privately, without his knowledge and consent."

"Very well, indeed, Alice! Now tell me, Mary Smith, if you were to take a sixpence from one of your companions without her knowledge, would you thereby break this seventh commandment?"

"Yes, I would, Sister; but I wouldn't take a sixpence, or a penny from any one—unless my father or mother. Would it be any harm, Sister, to take it from them?"

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Ellie, my dear, said her kind teacher, "you must not feel hurt at what I have said. I scarcely think you have sinned in this matter at all, because you spoke through ignorance. You did not know that it was a sin to publish the faults of another?"

"No, indeed, Sister, I did not," said Ellie, looking up with a brighter face. "Well, then, I may venture to tell you, my dear child, that you committed no sin, but, remember, you can never have that excuse again. You now understand how the eighth commandment is broken, and will, I trust, be careful to observe that holy precept for the time to come."

All the children answered in the affirmative, and thus ended the Catechismal lesson of that morning. About a quarter of an hour was thus passed, and who may calculate the amount of good effected during that short time?—who may tell what precious fruit it brought forth in after days and years?—how many thefts, how many provocations—how much calumny and detraction would it have saved the hearts of parents and friends, ay! even the loving heart of Ellie—Ah! surely it is a pitiable thing to hear Catholic parents complain of so much time being lost in Catholic schools in teaching and learning the Christian doctrine—Time! What is time, but the ladder given us to ascend to God? If we use it not for that purpose it will be turned downward with double velocity to the abyss of never-ending woe. If our children are not taught their relative duties to God and man, and to their own souls, all else that they may learn is worthless trash, without any real value either for this world or the next.

A day or two after this practical lesson, Tim Flanagan happened to make some reference to Mike's misconduct with regard to his children. It was in the evening, just after supper, when all the family were assembled in the little sitting room, or rather kitchen. The young people were conversing over their lessons for the ensuing day, and Mrs. Flanagan sat knitting her stocking while Tim read aloud Gobinet's famous "Instructions for Youth." All of a sudden Tim laid down his book and heaved a heavy sigh.

"What's the matter, Tim?" said Mrs. Flanagan, with affectionate solicitude. "Nothing at all, Nelly, only I was just thinking of them poor children of Mary's. They get no Christian instruction at school, and though their mother does all she can to make them read good books at home, they're getting little by little to read the wrong kind of books. Novels are the whole gamut with them now, it seems, and she doesn't like to be telling their father all the time."

"God look on them this night," sighed Mrs. Flanagan, "I could cry for them from my heart out, indeed I could."

"They say, father, that Harry makes fun of the priests and nuns now," said Edward, "just as if he wasn't a Catholic. Mathew Grace says he heard him at it with his own ears."

"Take care, Ned," said Ellie, eagerly, "take care of the eighth commandment."

"What does the child mean?" said Tim, opening his eyes wide, and fixing them on his daughter.

"Why, father, Edward is saying something bad about the priests and nuns, and Sister Mary-Teresa told us the other day at Catechism, that that is breaking the eighth commandment."

The father and mother exchanged glances. Their hearts were full of joy and gratitude, and for a moment neither spoke. At last Tim reached out his hand; "come here, Ellie—God bless you, my child; but it's you that has the good memory about that way, and happy to hear you talk that way, my daughter, and I hope you'll never forget the lessons that you learn with them holy nuns. I must buy you a nice new doll for that!"

"And me, father," cried little Susan, "won't you buy me one too?" "There now," said the delighted father, "see what I have brought on myself. I'll see, Susan; I'll see what I can do. All of a sudden I'm proud to do it for her, and then I'll get you a doll if there's one to be had in New York city. Go over there to your mother, little pussy, I think she has something in her pocket for you. If you have your lessons learned, Ned, go and get that 'Life of St. Patrick' that you have, and read some of it for Tom and Johnny."

With such teachings as this at home and at school it was quite natural that the young Flanagans should grow in the fear and love of God, a blessing to their parents, and to each other. Weeks and months rolled over their heads, their bodies improving in health and strength, and their minds in all the knowledge useful and necessary for them. One after another the four children made their first Communion, and received Confirmation at the hands of the good Bishop Dubois, then titular Bishop of New York. Little Susan felt it hard that she could not be confirmed, or go to confession, or receive the Holy Communion when her sisters did. Her mother tried to console her by telling her that in a couple of years more she might begin to prepare.

"A couple of years, mother;—how long is that?—isn't it a very long time?"

"No, no, Susan dear, a year is only twelve months, and two years will not be long in passing. Don't be thinking about it, Susan, and it will pass all the sooner. Your turn will soon come—never fear but it will. Try and learn your catechism as fast as you can."

"Can't anybody make their first Communion or be confirmed, unless they know their catechism, well, well?"

"No, my child, because you couldn't understand what you were about unless you knew your catechism, well, well, as you say yourself."

"Well, mother, I'll try hard to be well, well, well, as you say yourself."

"Or sooner, if you can," added her mother with a smile, "go now and play with dolly awhile—that's a good child."

Meanwhile, Edward got a situation as clerk in the establishment where his father was employed as a journeyman leather-dresser. He had got a good solid mercantile education, "and that he knows quite enough to work his way decently through the world, and I have no fear but he'll do that, with God's help. He's smart and active, writes a first-rate hand, and is able to keep a set of books for any house in the city. He knows grammar and geography, Mr. Lanigan tells me, as well as any boy can know them, and what's best of all, he knows his duty to God and his neighbor; so I'm not much afraid but he'll do well. He has a better chance than I had," added Tim, "for I know neither book-keeping, grammar, nor geography when I started to push my fortune, nor doesn't yet, for that matter; but, never mind, I'm getting along well enough without them, thanks be to God."

This was said to Daniel Sheridan, who had, of late, become a "bosom cronny" of Tim's, owing to the increasing estrangement of Miles. Daniel had bound his son Mike to a carpenter, "just to keep his hand out of an ill-turn," said Dan, "I wish to goodness he was anything like as far on with his schooling as your Ned is; but the short and the long of it is, that he wouldn't learn do what we want in tryin' to cram lessons down his throat. Thanks be to God for it! he's not a bad son, though he's a poor hand at the learning; to be a wild harum-scarum fellow as he is, it wouldn't be easy findin' a more dutiful son. To be sure he's fond of kicking up shins, and keeps us all in hot water at times with his antics, but for all that, a word from me or his mother will cool him down in no time. He is, than to be like Harry Blake, for all he is at college, and talks like any gentleman. But what of that, Tim dear, when he won't bear a word from father or mother, and never bends his knee to a priest, I hear, from one year's end to the other—Christ save us!"

Peter Sheridan and Thomas Flanagan were learning Latin, on Dr. Power's recommendation. They were both of a reasonable disposition, and both desirous of becoming priests. Their parents were well pleased with their choice, and declared on both sides that they spend the last copper they had to push them along, "if so be that God gave them grace to persevere."

Tom Reilly and his wife had lately set up a little grocery-store in a shop not far from the Flanagans'. Tom was verging on sixteen when he left school at his own request, telling his mother that he was as far on as Mr. Lanigan could put him. "Of course his mother believed him. 'And besides, mother,' said Tom, 'it's high time I was doing something for you and myself. I'm bound to make a fortune, you see, mother, and you've been telling and saying so long to keep me at school that I must go and do something for you in return.'"

"God bless you, Tom," said the proud mother, "it's you that will do something for me. It was long days with me, Tom dear, when I took to sick-nursing, but sure, necessity has no law. Them days are gone by now, and with God's help and yours, I'll soon be able to raise my head with the best of them. Indeed, my little fancies—God forgive me if I'm wrong!—that even my Blake began to look down on me these last days, since Miles got to be a trustee, and Harry went to college, and to speak of Eliza going to that grand boarding school up town with the two Miss Thomsons; but, as I said before, it's a long lane has no turn, and may be my turn will come next. God be good to my uncle, Father O'Flynn, or my poor father, if they live any more, my dear, they would rest easy in their coffins. Ochoone! the day my mother—may she rest in peace!—came home to the new house that my grandfather put up for her and my father, she had her twelve good head of cattle, and came home riding in her side-saddle. She told me I ever tell you about the great wedding they had?"

"Oh, yes, mother, you told me all about it," said Tom, unwilling to break off too suddenly from his dignified parent, yet anxious to get away if possible. "Don't you think mother, it would be well if I went to look after those things we want for the store?"

"Well, I think so, Tom, as my uncle says, 'it's worth a penny's worth of money.' Raising up, she went to her cupboard, and opening a little tin box, she took out her precious store, the savings of five years. It amounted to no less than a hundred dollars, and that sum she counted over and over again, into Tom's hand. After the second reckoning, she gave it up, finding herself two dollars astray."

"There, Tom, count it yourself, your eyes are younger and sharper than mine, and besides, you're a better scholar than I am. None of us was ever very bright at the learning, except my uncle Phelim and poor Father O'Flynn—God be merciful to them all! They say my great-grandfather, by my mother—that was old Terence O'Shaughnessy—was a very able, well-discussed man, and read a couple of all right, Tom, dear?"

"All right, and straight, mother. This is the beginning of my fortune. Mind that, now!"

"Well, I hope so, dear—I hope so. God enable you, poor fellow!"

With all his pertinence and self-conceit, Tom Reilly was a good lad, dutiful and respectful to his mother, and well disposed to earn a living for himself and her. He was a little wizen and hard-featured to be sure, and rather small in stature; his manner too, was anything but prepossessing, but still he somehow contrived to make himself respected, and had early got the name of being careful and industrious. In money matters he was somewhat too close for a boy of his age, but as the chief object of his savings was

to secure comfort and independence for his mother, no one had a right to blame him. He was scrupulously regular in attending Mass, and made it a point to go to confession and Communion once a quarter, including the Christmas and Easter duty. Dr. Power had been heard to say (as Mrs. Reilly often boasted,) that Tom was an honest, upright young fellow, and could not fail to do well. Poor Tom had to take the world on his shoulders very young; but his mind was so constructed that he scarcely felt the load a heavy one. After he had got fairly underweight and entered fully into the spirit of the thing, he used to say that he could hardly live without it. A regular, old man was Tom in his peculiar turn of mind, having little of the buoyancy or elasticity of youth, and much of the sober caution of age. His heart alone had the freshness of youth, and no stranger could imagine what a dry, cold surface he hid beneath that dry, cold surface.

Tom Reilly and Edward Flanagan were nearly the same age, and, notwithstanding their dissimilarity of disposition, they were always very good friends, and were generally seen together. Edward was a fine-looking young fellow, giving promise at sixteen, of great muscular strength, with a well-proportioned figure, and a frank and open countenance, full of gaiety and good-nature. Though not of a very studious turn, Edward Flanagan was fond of reading, that is, provided the book were not too large, nor too dry. History was his particular forte, and by the time he reached man's estate he had acquired a very fair knowledge of its principal details, both in ancient and modern times. He had read what was to be read of the history of the United States, and had a due respect for the memory of Washington, together with a proper estimate of the honor of American citizenship, but somehow he hung with more intense interest over the changeable page of Ireland's story. Her great antiquity, her former glory, her manifold misfortunes, her unequalled fidelity to the faith of Christ

THE STOLEN MISSAL.

There was excitement in the Scriptorium of the Monastery of St. Willibert where there was usually no sound save the rasp of a quill or the scraping of a knife. And now it was the great Missal, at which Brother Angelus had been working for ten years was finished.

The scribe, who copied the sacred texts, and the correctors, who compared them, the monks who cut the parchment, and those who made the lines, and those who bound together the finished pages, to say nothing of the abbot and the prior, the sub-prior and the librarian, the only ones of the community besides the workers admitted into the Scriptorium, were all in gentle delight over the fruit of Brother Angelus' patient toil. For Brother Angelus, he it known, was the only one in St. Willibert who could do all things pertaining to a Missal himself. His hands had printed the ornate Gothic letters, illuminated the initials, and adorned the margins with miniatures, and made the designs for the cover, and now it was all done at that.

The transcendent beauty of the finished work, so moved the good Abbot Gelasius that he bade Brother Angelus add a line at the end, saying, "Who-soever steals this Missal is shut out from the communion of the Church."

On the morrow the splendid book was placed on a desk at the right of the altar. It was fastened to the desk by a little chain and held by the edification of the brothers and of the faithful who might see it.

But Dr. Power had other good reasons for liking Edward. He was so frank and so generous, so gay and good-humored, that it was impossible not to like him, and better than all that, he was truly religious. He had taught the Catechism in St. Peter's, ever since he was fifteen. Thus, the teaching of his worthy Pastor, the example of his good parents, and the Master, had all borne good fruit. Edward Flanagan was just what an Irishman's son ought to be, no matter where he is born or educated.

With the eye of a critic he looked at the work, the beauty of which was even greater than he had thought. "Alas," he said, "I am but a copyist now though once I was proud of my own designs. Need has reduced me to this. Did I not promise my father when he died that I would take care of my mother? And must I not do so, my dear brother? And must I not do so, my dear brother? And must I not do so, my dear brother? And must I not do so, my dear brother?"

"Here is your book," he said; "give me my twenty gold pieces." The Jew looked thoughtfully at the Missal.

"Hm!" he said "When I promised you twenty gold pieces I thought it would take a whole year, but now that you are through in so much less time, I cannot give you that much."

When Otto arrived with his treasure his mother received him lovingly, glad to think he had come home at last. "If she but knew," he whispered to himself as he waited on her.

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