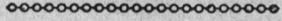


THE BROKEN PLEDGE.

By FRANCES WOODROFFE, in "The Irish Rosary" Magazine.



A Striking and Touching Lesson to Catholic Young Men and Young Women on the Dangers of Mixed Marriages.

"I'm not so sure, I'm not so certain sure," muttered the old coast-guardman, as he gazed out to sea. A boat was tacking, her sails fluttered white and shining as she veered around. He raised his spy-glass with a critical air, and cocking his head awry, prolonged his investigations. A trawler it might be, with mere fish as its burden; should Doonennis be its destination, and a big haul in its hold, Tim Dougherty would rejoice; good fish and plenty of it pleased Nan, and meant a cheap supper for both.

But the cargo of a smack was spirits, and perchance tobacco, too; hence Tim's inspection was, of necessity, a lengthy affair.

At last he seemed satisfied, for he nodded, grunted, and, turning away, walked slowly along the track of the cliff. Doonennis Bay was fringed with granite rocks, bare and precipitous; in the dying light of day they now stood out in bold relief; to the west, a red glow on sky and sea alike foretold dry weather just what Tim loved.

But somehow he was not in a mood to enjoy that fair promise; for no tangible reason his spirits had been falling all day. More than once he found himself sighing deeply, and for the life of him he could not make out why the thought of Roger Harding kept recurring to his mind.

Roger was a new hand, one fresh from England, and had scarcely been on the station six months as boatman; why, of all men, should he think of him? True, he was the first Briton within memory who had come to live upon their shores, but what of that? The alliances of nations and their enmities troubled Tim little, for his politics, if he had any, rose above all party prejudices. The man's religion, certainly, had been a sore point to all in Doonennis, and had they yielded to their inclinations, would more than once have shown resentment, reminding him how his ancestors, in their vain attempt to stamp out the Faith in Ireland, persecuted its loyal sons to death. But remembering that discussion brings often hard words, they forebore, and hastily changed the subject when it bordered upon dangerous ground, fearing to trust their warm blood when once fully aroused.

The shadows grew longer, the smack was but a speck on the horizon, and Tim had reached the end of his beat. Afar off, he could hear the mighty ocean booming as it dashed on jarred rocks, seething around them, tearing their sides, while below, the waves fell gently, idly lapping the shore. Dejectedly he retraced his steps, still wondering what ailed him. Twilight had set in and supper should be ready by this time. Not that he felt inclined to eat, his depression had taken away all appetite. He had not gone far, however, before his eyes lit up with a sudden joy, and a smile chased away all signs of care; he began to feel happy again as he waved his cap to his daughter, Nan. She was standing on the brow of a hill, a kerchief on her head, a small shawl thrown over neck and shoulders.

Tall and erect, with genuine Celtic features, she was not strictly beautiful, but her grey eyes were soft and true; where further charm was lacking they supplied the deficiency. She had some knitting in her hand, but her fingers were idle; indeed, several stitches had fallen from the needles, yet she did not attempt to pick them up. Her ball of wool, too, had rolled away—ten minutes had passed since then and it still remained hidden in the brambles. It was evident her thoughts were all-absorbing, one glance at her contracted brow and vacant gaze was proof enough of that. She often smiled, and yet a moment later, a cloud of sadness seemed to efface her pleasure, and sighing, she would apparently seek to unravel some knotty problem.

Twice did Tim call her before she turned with a start to find him close at hand. "Is it dramin' ye are, acushla?" he shouted, panting as he climbed the hillock.

The color came and went in her cheeks, she was excited, yet nervous, too: "What will his answer be?" she kept repeating to herself as she

went forward to meet him. "Oh! Father," she cried, "I have news, a rare surprise for ye."

Her words were joyfully spoken, but her heart misgave her; would he consent after all?

"An' what may that be, Nan, avourneen?" enquired the old Coast-guard, quickening his pace, with a gasp and a grunt.

"Why! father, ye'll never guess." Out of breath, Tim reached her side, and paused to pant awhile; then tenderly he kissed her, and laughing lightly replied: "Sure an' I niver will, unless it be ye that tells me ow't."

Nan flung her arms round the old man's neck and with a depth of entreaty, exclaimed: "Ye won't be cross, will ye now, father, but—but—" she hesitated an instant, "he axed me to marry him," she hurriedly continued, "an' I said yis."

She lowered her eyes, expecting a storm of opposition, but for a moment Tim was silent; though staggered by the tidings he was entirely puzzled.

"Who? Who did, me darlin'?" he ejaculated at length, "was it wan of the Murphy's now, or maybe Pat Callaghan?"

"Neither wan nor the other," responded Nan slowly, "but since it was Roger himself." The secret was out, she felt somewhat relieved, but the ordeal was not yet over.

Rarely has man's face undergone such a change as did Tim's in that short moment. The light died from his eyes, the smile vanished, while he shivered and bit his lips, as if in sudden pain; then he muttered: "Roger, Roger Harding? Nay, it's jokin' ye are, asthore?" and he looked up for denial of her words.

"Tis thruc, father," she almost whispered, and, turning away her head, toyed with the wool she held. "Nan, Nan, ye are daft," the old man exclaimed with emotion, grasping his daughter's hand as he spoke. "Ye doan't know what ye're doin'; Why! mavourneen, he's a Protest-an'!"

There was a depth of feeling in the words which expressed volumes, making its echo sound within the girl's heart, but she checked it.

"Bedad, an' I'll make him come in to the church," she answered reassuringly, but there was a dispirited ring in her voice.

Tim paid no heed to her remark; he was gazing far beyond the crested breakers into a region of fear and sorrow, and as he gazed, the legend of Doonennis came back to him with a new force and in a new light.

Long, long ago, before chronicles lived within its precincts, had the Faith been brought to that hamlet, and ever since had its loyalty to the Church been unswerving and devout.

As the centuries rolled on, and age succeeded age, it became their boast that, of its many generations, not one member had betrayed that sacred trust, conferred upon their fathers; no, not even in those dark ages, when persecution was rife, and death with religion went hand in hand. Was the tradition to be annulled now, and Nan the cause of its repeal?

"Oh! say its not true, me darlin'," pleaded Tim, and painfully his voice quivered, as he looked intently upon her averted face. A sigh alone escaped her, and he continued, "Harding's a steady lad, I've nought to say agin him, but he hasn't the Faith, and would ye marry wan who would scoff at it—"

"No, no, father," hurriedly interposed the girl, "he would not do that, he has too good a face."

"His face is well enough," Tim responded, "but it's his doctrine, an' yer soul, yer soul, Nan. Nay, ye cannot, ye must not."

"But I love him," Nan feebly remonstrated; the tears were rising fast, a conflict was raging in her heart, and wearily she leant against a tree for support.

Tim scarcely heard her words, as he passionately exclaimed: "A hundred times would I see ye die an' old spinster than wedded to a man who would not so much as uncover afore the Pope, nor tell a single word to the Blessed Mother of God," and he reverently defied his cap.

His voice, quivering and pathetic,

touched Nan's sensitive nature to the core. She longed to throw her arms about his neck, to comfort him, and declare she would do his will. But her love for Roger stayed her, and, to promote his claims, she weighed each argument in his favor.

Through affection for her, if for no other motive, it was thus she reasoned, he would not wound her religious feelings nor thwart her devout wishes. Ah! Nan, beware! Many another has sought consolation in such a pretext, and, building on the same foundation, deemed the future bright and fair. Alas! their hopes have been shattered, their lives are blighted. But Nan regarded all in roseate hues, and with her chain of reasoning, strove to conquer Tim's objections, endeavoring to point out the utility of his fears. Old Dougherty heard her through, refraining from comment till she concluded with a bright laugh, not wholly sincere: "An' who knows, wan day he hisself may get the true Faith?" Pausing for lack of breath and further arguments, Nan longed to see the effect her words had wrought upon her father, but it was almost dark now, so dark that she could scarce discern his features. A few moments she waited, expecting a reply, his consent, maybe.

Not a word came, however, and impatiently at length she called out: "Father, father, won't ye spake?" Then in the evening quiet his answer came: A deep moan, a cry from his heart, and all was once more still, save for the roar of the waves, far out to sea.

Nan could stand it no longer, and flinging herself at his feet, implored him. "Doan't, doan't, father! Why are ye so sorrowful?"

He raised his tear-stained face; "Thin ye won't marry him, Nan?" he eagerly craved. If Nan had ever hesitated in her choice, or wavered in her resolution, it was at this instant; nay, more than that, the words that would have soled Tim were upon her lips when she faltered, and in that brief space her mind had changed again.

But Tim thought her silence boded good: "Ye won't, will ye now?" he begged, and again he took her hand in his own. She withdrew it, however, feeling too much like a traitor in that loving clasp, a traitor to Faith and father. "I've given him my word, an' I can't go back agin it," was all she said. Strange and hollow her voice sounded, and, as she finished, she wept aloud.

Tim shivered, as he heard her speak; he raised his eyes to Heaven, and groaned: "God forgive ye, Nan, for the blessing will go from Doonennis, and a Dougherty 'll wreak the harm."

He was trembling as he walked away, mournfully remarking: "Come, child, ye must go in, it is gettin' coid and late."

All thought that night, till the stars paled and the east grew bright with dawn, did Dougherty keep a weary vigil. On his knees he prayed and thought and prayed again. He recalled anew the legend, its benediction and solemn words of warning: "May Doonennis be blessed," so it ran, "no soul has gone astray; false doctrine has not stolen one heart from St. Patrick's flock; may she be blessed till the day wherein she fails." Had that day, that day of woe, arrived? Was the pledge of its hamlet about to be broken and its boast made void? Such a grievous possibility filled his mind with terror, and, crushed by presentiments so sad and gloomy, he buried his face in his cold hands. His eyes were heavy, but it was from the weight of sorrow, not of sleep; only a vision came before him of Nan, happy, dancing Nan no more, but weeping and regretful.

His head swam round and round, and his brain was whirling, while he cried aloud in his grief: "O Lord, Lord, forgive her."

As the sun gleamed over the sea, Nan came slowly into the room; she was paler than usual, and her smile lacked warmth and joy. It, too, died away as she beheld her father kneeling before the crucifix, with outstretched hands; she had seen him in that same position how many

hours ago, and had he remained there ever since; could he have knelt there all the night? She feared so, as she caught sight of his muddy boots still on his feet, his cap on the floor before him.

But it was the look on his face that startled her, a look so terribly careworn, that ten years could scarce have wrought the change; the man of yesterday, robust and full of vigor, to-day seemed aged and decrepid. Quickly she ran forward, calling him lovingly by name, but though he turned at the sound of her voice, he seemed dazed, and merely muttered: "We have failed; it will go, an' we will be blessed no more."

Dispirited, Nan sat down to think; suddenly she arose with determination, and catching her shawl from the peg, hurried out of the house. In half-an-hour she returned, radiant and satisfied.

Flinging her arms round her father's neck, she spoke rapidly: "Now, ye must mourn no more; it's hisself I've seen, an' he's promised me—"

"Promised what, Nan?" questioned old Tim incredulously, though there was a hopeful ring in his voice.

She took a stool beside him, and gently stroked his hand: "He promised me," she repeated slowly, emphasizing the words, as if each brought a message of joy, "that he'd never cross my wishes, nor force me to do anything against the Church, and never, never to mock my religion."

She expected approbation but none came: "Is that all?" was his sole remark.

"Doan't ye believe him, father?" implored the girl, and her voice shook perceptibly, while she played with her apron-strings to keep back the burning tears.

Tim raised his head, and staring through the open window, spoke impressively: "Nan, Nan, think on him no further." For a whole minute both were silent, the importunate clock on the stair ticked ominously, the caged finch, hungry for its meal, hopped noisily from perch to perch, twittering the while; then a tear fell on Nan's hand, but she hastily brushed it away, murmuring: "I've promised him, too," then their eyes met. He had glanced at her inquiringly, and she hastened: "that—that—I would trust him." For one moment Dougherty looked at his daughter, his only child, with an indescribable longing, then mechanically he rose, and sought his cap and glass; the next moment he was gone, and Nan was alone, alone with her sad thoughts.

CHAPTER II.

That was six months ago, and Nan was to be married on the morrow. The afternoon was hot and close as she sat in the shaded doorway, putting the finishing touches to her bridal veil, though with so doleful an air, it might have passed for a shroud.

Now and then she would pause in her work, her thumb still on her finger, the stitch but half finished, and for a time the white net lay unheeded on her lap. Her mind was centred on the past; its pleasures, indeed, were buried, well-nigh forgotten; she could only regret its neglected chances, lament its failures; upon the future she could not dwell, there was so much sorrow to leave behind, so much painful truth that it engrossed her meditation, and left no room for brighter fancies or shadowy bliss to come.

Could it be but half a year since Nan had chosen her own course; since she watched old Tim retreating without a word from their cottage-door? The calendar, indeed, taunted no more, but from her troubled looks, her pallid cheeks and even in her hair a streak of grey, it seemed as if each day were one long week, and those few months as many years. Strange it would have been were it otherwise, for glance at her father as he sits mumbling at her side—what has worked that woful plight, changing him almost beyond recognition?

An old bent figure, trembling hands, an unkempt beard, and sad, roving eyes. Could anyone have recalled in that half-witted, aged man, the most able coastguard of the Western shores?

And it was Nan's choice that had brought him to this! She knew it, and with the knowledge came most bitter remorse and inconsolable grief; age in appearance, though not in years, followed as a natural consequence.

The needle, reluctantly taken up, soon fell again into the folds of her work, as moodily she rehearsed the sequence of events.

At first, he would spend whole days in solitude, wand'ring aimlessly about, with spy-glass in hand, yet doing no work. He would gaze on the sea, but watch for no ships, and it was only when Nan led him home that he would turn his back on the ocean, restless as his own soul. Com-

municative by nature, he shunned his old friends, and talked to few, while to all enquiries his answer rarely differed: "God will bless us no more."

There were times indeed, when, reflecting on Tim's melancholy, Nan determined to retract her pledged troth, but as she rose to fulfil her mission, the love of Roger stayed her, and with a sigh, she went to bear her bucket to the pump. The pail would fill, over its sides the water flow, but she was heedless of it all, rather seeking to convince herself that time would heal the wound. Little did she dream it was a festering sore, that imperceptibly would spread, taking root, not only in Tim's heart, but in his mind as well.

The process was slow, nor did she fully realize its actual import till, one day, she happened to overhear some chance remarks, a mere fragment of conversation. "Is it true, now, O'Shea," the words came sharply across the hedge, "that owd Tim Dougherty has gone rale crazed an' mad?"

Nan had been plucking weeds, but at this question she started wildly around and they fell to the ground unnoted.

"Indeed and indeed, I'm afraid it is so entirely," the man O'Shea replied, "an' 'tis his girl he'll thank when he's gone to the mad-house, for," he added, with a grim shake of his head, "I'm thinkin' he's not far off it now."

To all this Nan had listened, glued to the spot, her eyes fixed upon the speakers, her unwilling ears drinking in their every word; they were cruel, oh! so cruel, but worse than this, she felt they spoke the truth.

As they paused she seemed to collect her thoughts, for she shuddered, and with heavy steps walked towards the house. O'Shea heard the rustle of her skirts, and with dismay learnt who it was; at once he pulled the other's sleeve: "Whisht, man, whisht!" And he jerked his thumb across his shoulder, at the retreating figure.

The hem beneath her hands had twice been worked upon when, of a sudden, the cotton snapped; it was the end of her musing, and with her dream, the veil was likewise finished.

The next day broke fair and calm, the sea was unruined and a cloudless sky above. Nan's spirits rose, as she viewed the peaceful scene before her, and almost gaily fastened the veil upon her head.

She could hear Tim shuffling in the adjacent room, and quickly went to meet him. He was brewing himself some tea in his old work-a-day clothes: "Aren't ye ready for Church, father?" exclaimed Nan, in a pained voice—she felt hurt he could so easily forget her wedding-morn.

"An' is it a holy-day, that ye're goin' so early?" he demanded.

"Come, come, father, sure an' it's to be married I am," and, ready to depart, she took his arm, unlatching the door as she spoke.

She expected a display of aversion, but a blank look was on his face; it was evident he had but vaguely understood her, for he followed meekly, and she, wondering, led the way. No neighbors met her as she crossed the field: "Mebbe they're all in Church," she thought, and hurried on, fearing to be late.

Her betrothal had, from the first, received indeed a cold reception in Doonennis, for never before had a suitor of an alien religion pleaded there.

Nan called to mind the disapproval of her friends, as, entering the porch, she crossed herself and glanced around. But for a small group at the altar-steps, not another soul was in the sacred edifice; stay! there was one—old Norah Quinn was on her knees, telling aloud her beads, with many a prayer for Nan.

All through the ceremony Tim's eyes were fastened on the couple, noting each action, listening to every word, that bound them man and wife. The veins in his brow stood out in great knots, and his hands were clenched tightly, but beyond this, he seemed calm and self-controlled.

Scarcely, however, had the parting words been pronounced, than a wild cry resounded through the church, ringing once and again in the timbered roof, and Nan, returning from the altar, grew pale and stopped.

"Tim Dougherty is mad," the witnesses cried, while from her corner old Norah prayed: "God help him!"

The tears were streaming down his cheeks, as he turned and fled along the aisle and out of the porch. Fearing some evil, Nan hastened after him, forgetful of Roger, forgetful of all, save the hurrying object before her. Tim's head was bare, his long hair was floating in the wind, while more than once he stumbled on the uneven ground, yet he kept well in front of her.

Her home was close at hand, and to this he bent his steps. Nan felt

relieved—he would soon be safe. But as he neared the door he paused—forwards the sea; the cliffs between, precipitous and frowning, ran abruptly down till they met the crested waves below.

Terrified beyond measure, Nan quickened her pace yet more, urged on by the fearful certainty that a fall from those dizzy heights meant instant death, tragic and horrible.

She saw him lift his arms clutching at the air, as if in pursuit of some eerie phantom.

Long before had her veil been caught by some thorny bush; her dress, too, was torn, but she heeded none of this. Her legs were shaking, her breath was gone: "Father, father," she tried to call, but the words clung to her dry throat.

Then—, it was but an instant later, her heart stood still, he had reached the edge of the craggy rocks; one moment more, and he would be hurled headlong down, down, from point to point.

She clasped her hands and shut her eyes, not daring to behold that awful leap.

But he had tarried, and when she looked again, he was standing on a clod of turf, his arms still outstretched, his eyes fixed, gazing straight before him.

A yawn scudding along, ploughed its way through the waters, leaving a long wake behind; he seemed to follow its every movement.

"Father," Nan almost whispered; she could bear the suspense no longer, yet dreaded to surprise him.

"Nan," he answered, his face still averted; his voice filled with awe, for he spoke with a strange dignity and emotion: "Mavourneen, the boat is leavin', leavin' forever!"

There was more in the meaning than in the mere words, yet Nan failed to expound it.

He pointed to the distant ocean, dim in the morning haze, "Stop it, acushla, stop it!" he shouted imploringly; the craft had tacked, and a strong land breeze was driving it farther away, into the open sea beyond. "Tis too late," he gasped, watching it intently, "an' ye might have saved it, Nan, ye might have brought it back."

Attracted by this unusual scene, the villagers, one by one, had gathered round; scared, indeed, they felt, as they beheld that lonely figure halt on the jutting crag, and, as his voice rang out in language shrill and wild, they shivered as they heard him cry, while Nan, powerless to act, crouched on the ground.

The minutes passed. Tim spoke no more, but strained his eyes in anguish as the yawl sped ever onwards. Those about him marked its progress anxiously; it neared the harbor's mouth, it became a mere speck, and round the rocks it sailed, a white flutter, and it had disappeared from view. Tim shrieked as he saw it vanish, "Tis gone," he wailed, and there was an infinite pathos in his voice, "the blessing of Doonennis has gone for aye." He flung up his hands with a despairing gesture, his body swayed to and fro, and he fell backwards, with a thud, to the ground.

With one impulse the neighbors crowded round the prostrate form, while Nan, in broken accents, called him in endearing terms. As they raised him from the ground, a bent figure thrust herself among the foremost; it was Norah Quinn, who had hobbled from the church, her beads still told for Nan.

Sickness was no unfamiliar sight to her, and many in Doonennis were the eyes she had closed in death. A single glance sufficed to tell her now that human aid was vain; mournfully she shook her head, crossed herself, and, "God rest his soul," they heard her murmur low.

The words seemed to reach Nan, as a far-off echo, a dismal scene in one long nightmare; would she not soon awaken, to find it all a hideous dream, and brightness only of her wedding-day to greet her?

As in a vision and with eyes dimmed, she saw her father borne aloft; two men were carrying him away from her, but she did not strive to follow in their path; her limbs seemed void of action, her tongue of speech; her eyes alone were capable of serving her, but it was little they conveyed to her torpid brain. A confused sound of many voices reached her, indeed, but she distinguished no words, save three alone, "He is dead, he is dead."

As they rang in her ears and sounded deep within her heart, a hand fell upon her shoulder, and she thought she heard the voice of Roger, "Nan! Nan dear!" it called.

"Who is dead?" she asked dreamily, without turning her face away. Naught else was of concern to her while she gazed upon that poor, still form, the grey head resting wearily on its bearer's breast, she must watch it till out of sight.

dy abrupt: "You man," was the sol and only then, c down on Nan, and to pass away; her and her head sank weeping bitterly.

CHAPTER I

"Come, Nan dear, expostulated gently his hand into hers. She was standing grave, as if lay of staring vacantly at arm still raised, first, she had cast upon the coffin. I upon the wood below, erod slightly, but her composure. The sharply over the hill sympathisers gradual older ones, who ling the end hurrying hor of rain caught them Nan, caring little for weather, stood, with heart, over the earth Tim Dougherty.

Again Roger urged, ing, you must come, authoritatively, when heard him and obey they left the cemetery ing to look back; from seen the old grave-dig in hand, was impatient; lugubrious task; soon of earth conceal its o other mound be raised swelling number of the It was Nan who "Roger, asthore," she sad voice, as they pa swing gate, "ye ar I have now, the only o care for me."

"My sweet Nan," closing her shawl more her, "I'll be kind and always."

"I know it, I know reply, "how could it b and confidingly she lif eyes to his.

"Dear heart," he r tending down, kissed face.

In the months that f almost ceased to remem mer days of grief; rem she felt at times; pno suffered much, she knew present happiness helpo way the gloomy thought times would arise, and l niversary of Tim's neat the dreamy look had v her eyes, the wrinkles f

"My husband is so would say, as some old bing by, would drop in stiff limbs awhile, "nev he let me do for meself, selfish an' good man the is," and her face absol with honest pride and j long, too, she would sri house, gaily scrub the f undaunted energy, dig i toes; nothing was hard f er of love, it gilded bot toil and rest.

Her bliss, however, w by one cloud; but for its would have been the ha man in Doonennis Bay; yet won Roger to the Fa seemed so easy in theory, ant ideal; some prayers, and all would be accompl But she had not reckon host, and it was only b learnt the power of the f to deal with; deep-roote ism, bigotry, and, as tim open hostility; these m every turn, and when succ had disposed of some, o rise to menace her hopes.

At first Roger put her o light laugh: "You'll nev over, little woman," he v "so, to please me, let us other things," and openi he would discuss the topic with unabated ardor.

But it pained Nan to with interests akin in all were divided in religion; o and in toil, in the great m life they were not united. Not bear to think that th full of endearing term should never have fram to the Mother of God, wh ed her to the quick to co his soul, unwashed perh absolved, and alas! his prompt to perceive her want, were blind to the S of Love.

Seeing her words, howe no effect, she abstained from very; renewed, instead, her vor and increased her devot seemed to irritate Roger: duty to stay at home."

plained, when, one day, I stolen a leisure moment to church, "you should darn n or be cleaning the pots, b go to the chapel and not vice to attend to inside."

This harsh reproof griev more than she cared to s even acknowledge to her