

HER IRISH HERITAGE

BY ANNIE M. P. SMITHSON

AUTHOR OF "BY STRANGE PATHS"

CHAPTER XV.

THE CALL OF DARK ROSALEEN
"O! the Erne shall run red
With redundancy of blood,
The earth shall rock beneath our tread.

The first few months of 1916 passed quietly but happily for our two friends. Clare was busy preparing for her Reception into the Catholic Church, in March, going twice weekly into Limerick for instruction, and reading and praying earnestly. As for Mary Carmichael she was certainly happier and more interested than she had been since her great trouble; she seemed to be living over again those past days when she, like Clare, stood at the "threshold" looking half fearfully, half longingly at the wondrous "Mystery of Faith" within the Sanctuary. She was of untold help and comfort to Clare, helping her over many a difficulty, and explaining much that troubled her. No one can understand a convert's point of view—their difficulties and trials, their doubts and fears, so well as another convert. The same hard road, walked often with tired and bleeding feet, has to be gone over, the same trials, a smile here, a sneer there—have to be borne. Each individual case naturally has his or her own special cross at this time, but they have so much in common, no matter how differently they may be situated, that there is always a strong bond between them.

One thing, which is the source of great pain to many converts, was spared to Clare Castlemaine. She had no other religious beliefs to give up—for there was no wrenching away from the old faiths, the old ideas. Catholics who are born in the Faith cannot realize that a would-be-convert can possibly have much to give up from a spiritual point of view; to their mind one has nothing to lose and all to gain on entering the Catholic Church. They are right of course. But human nature is human nature, and one clings almost insensibly to the hymns one sang as a child to "Grannie" on Sunday afternoons, and to the prayers—imperfect though they be—which were learned at one's mother's knee. Clare had no such regrets, and neither had she the greater bitterness of seeing her nearest and dearest turn away from her—to find herself cut off from the friends of her girlhood, and to be cast more or less adrift except for her new friends on earth and "the millions of new friends in Heaven"—as a nun once said to a recent convert who had been left very desolate by her own people.

She was baptised on the 15th of March and made her First Communion on St. Patrick's Day. Mary had obtained a week's holiday, and they went to Limerick together. Clare was almost frightened at the thrill of perfect happiness which she experienced as she knelt at the Altar rail. She had been very nervous—although not at all of a nervous type—and felt herself actually shaking as she heard, as though in a dream, the voice of the priest coming nearer and nearer—"Corpus Domini nostri Jesu Christi—"

The next moment he had come to her. He had waited long, but though to show his forgiveness and love, he now poured forth into her heart that "perfect peace that passeth understanding."

Yet of the two girls, Mary was the more moved. She had none of Clare's English temperament, which can hide its deepest feelings under a calm—almost cold—exterior, and the tears were running down her face as she groped her way back to her seat. Never had the two loved each other more or felt more in sympathy with each other than on this March morning when they gave each other the "kiss of peace" in the little sitting room of their lodgings after their return from Mass.

Anthony Farrell came down from Dublin for a day shortly afterwards, and Clare's happiness was complete. It was arranged that they were to be married after the summer.

"So I must look out for another companion," said Mary, trying to smile bravely, although her eyes betrayed her pain.

It was the one blot on Clare's happiness. She knew that Mary would not return to Dublin, and it went to her heart to leave her in loneliness.

"It's nearly two years now since it happened," she said to Anthony, when they were alone together, "and I do believe that it is as fresh as ever in her mind—and as painful."

"What a pity she should waste her thoughts over such a sad as Delaney," said Farrell regretfully; "if only she would think of poor Tom Blake! Do you think he has a chance at all Clare, or ever will?"

"Ah, well," said Anthony, with a half smile, "Father Time is a wonderful old fellow—a better healer than all the physicians in the world. Who knows what the future has in store for her?"

Before going, he spoke a few words to Mary herself, but on a different subject—a subject that he had not mentioned at all to Clare. His words caused Mary to turn very white, and look at him with dilated eyes.

"But not yet, Tony," she breathed "not soon?"

"Sooner than you think perhaps," he said briefly, and turned away as Clare entered.

Easter Sunday and Monday passed peacefully and quietly in the little Co. Clare village, the inhabitants of which little dreamt of the tragedy already begun in Dublin city.

The two girls were in the habit of repeating the Rosary together at night, and at its close on Easter Monday, Mary astonished Clare by suddenly bursting into tears—violent heart-breaking sobs that shook her from head to foot.

"Mary! Mary! my dear! What is it?" cried Clare. But only sobs answered her.

"Mary," she cried again, now really alarmed—this was so unlike Mary—"What is the matter? Please tell me!"

"O! Clare! Clare," sobbed the other, "I don't know! I don't know what it is; but O! I wish I was back in Dublin—I'm wanted there!"

"Wanted in Dublin?" repeated the other, in puzzled tones, "but, Mary, if the Blakes or anyone else wanted you they would surely send for you."

Mary was trying to regain command of herself, and partly succeeded. "I don't really know what is wrong with me, Clare," she said, trying pitifully to smile; "nerves, I suppose!—rather a new state for me."

"Yes; but, Mary, what did you mean about Dublin?—and being wanted there?"

Mary rose rather unsteadily from her knees, and looked at Clare with a strangely worried look.

"I can hardly explain," she said, in a troubled voice; "a most overwhelming longing came over me to go back to Dublin at once, and I seemed to feel as if my native city was calling aloud to me!—calling me to return. Clare I know—I am sure something has happened there!"

"Something has happened in Dublin?" repeated Clare, half amused. "What nonsense, Mary, you must be over-tired, you have had such a hard time lately. Let us get to bed early, and you will feel better in the morning."

Next day Mary was in the village about post-time—they had one delivery early in the morning, but had to call for their mid-day letters—and she entered the little Post Office to inquire for letters and to get her newspaper.

She was surprised to observe quite a crowd round the door, and excited comments and remarks were being freely exchanged.

"Good-day, Miss Phelan," Mary said, going up to the counter, "any letters for me?"

"O! there are no letters at all, Nurse!" replied the little woman who kept the Post Office and fancy shop combined; "the Sinn Feiners have broken out in Dublin, and there are no mails or papers. I only got a few words over the wire from Limerick, and they are cut off from Dublin already, and we can get no news from anywhere!"

Mary Carmichael reeled against the counter.

"Are you sure! O! are you sure it's true?" she asked, putting out her shaking hands to steady herself.

"Oh, it's true, Miss—sure enough!" replied the woman. "Come into the room beyond, and I'll get you a glass of water. Sure I forgot ye were from the city Miss, and will have friends up there!"

How she got home eventually, Mary never remembered—it was like a dream, or rather a terrible nightmare like the days and nights that followed—a nightmare of horror and cruelty and murder—an orgy of bloodshed from which there seemed to be no awakening.

During the first few days—against her better judgment—Mary had tried to hope for the best, especially as the most inspiring rumours of all kinds reached the village in some extraordinary way.

An Irish Republic was firmly established—English rule in Ireland was over—finished for ever—and so on. But with the first newspaper that drifted in all her hopes and dreams vanished like smoke. She would never forget that evening when Clare came running to the cottage with the paper clenched in her hand. Mary almost tore it from her grasp, but with one agonised glance at the headlines it fell to the floor, and Mary was lying beside it in a perfect agony of sorrow and desolation. Clare had no comfort to give—no words to say. She read the paper in silence, trying to realize what it meant for her mother's country, for her new friends—for her cousins in Dublin—and, above all—for love is ever selfish though perhaps unconsciously—so for Anthony Farrell. That his sympathies were with them she knew, but whether he would take an active part or not was another matter.

"Mary," she said, putting out a trembling hand to the sobbing girl, "what about the Blakes? and Tony?"

"O! if I only knew!" sobbed the other. "Mother of God! if I only knew! Oh, Shamus! Shamus!"

Clare started. In her fear for her lover she had forgotten this cousin of hers.

"O! yes—Shamus!" she exclaimed, "he is sure to be in it—sure!"

"Sure!" replied Mary briefly. Then she raised herself and staggered to a chair.

"O! Clare!" she said, "if I was only there! if I was only there! I would give anything in the world to be with them now!"

The next day's papers came, and the next, and still the dreadful massacres went on. Then came news of the North King Street shootings, of the Potobello murders, and many other relations of what English martial law means for Ireland.

Truth to tell Clare was aghast. Never for one moment had she honestly believed that her father's countrymen would have acted in this matter with such an utter absence of the merest dictates of humanity—not to speak of justice or mercy. And for the first time in her life she was ashamed of her English origin. And yet all this time Mary Carmichael never said one word of the "I told you so" type. Clare wondered had she forgotten their conversation in Limerick on the day when they had journeyed from Dublin together, and she had been so offended when Mary laughed at the idea of English justice for Ireland.

As for Mary herself she was suffering as she had never thought she would again after her other trouble. For days she practically did without either food or sleep—and never felt the want of them. Many of the leaders had been dear friends of hers, and others had been known to her by reputation, and through the talk of Shamus. As for him, she never doubted for one moment that he had given his life for his "darling Rosaleen"—for his dear, ill-fated land—the land that all down through the centuries has always had, and always will have, the power to bring under her banner all the best and brightest, and purest of young Irish manhood.

Mary had wired to the Blakes as soon as telegraphic communication was re-established, but she had received no reply, and Clare had wired to Tony with a similar result.

That week was one that neither of them ever wished to look back upon—but alas! it could never be forgotten—it was never to be erased from their memory.

And then one evening in the second week Clare was standing at the gate of the cottage looking down the road, when she suddenly gave a cry that brought Mary to her side.

Anthony Farrell was approaching the cottage, but—was it really Anthony? As he reached the gate both exclaimed at his appearance, and Clare, with a quick sob, went straight to his arms.

"O! Tony, Tony!" she said, when she could speak, "how you must have suffered!"

A spasm of pain crossed his haggard and drawn features as he turned to greet Mary. Her shaking lips formed the word, "Shamus?"

Anthony did not answer in words, but, alas! it was not necessary.

"It is only what I expected, Tony," Mary said with the quietness of despair; "but, thank God, that you are safe. Come in now, and tell us all. We have gone through days of misery and suspense, that any news—even the worst—will be better for us."

Anthony followed her into the cottage and flung himself into a chair.

"O! Mary, Mary! God help me," he said. "How am I to tell you at all?"

TO BE CONTINUED

A LESSON IN XMAS
BY COLIN O'NEIL
Written for N. C. W. U. Christmas Service
Judge Joseph Rhimer—the Honorable Justice Rhimer of the Supreme Court of the State of New York—might have been mistaken for the traditionally genial figure of the Man in the Moon, as he stood under the green paper bell that hung above the centre window of the bay that commanded a view of the town. The judge's home, set upon the height of the hump-backed hill that was the spine of the little Hudson River town, gave opportunity to envisage the sprawled streets, which, now, half-submissive to assaulting winter, appeared with their small, unmelted mounds of snow and mud, like a mangled proof pulled by a drunken printer. The snow fell against the window in increasing quantity which promised that the morrow—Christmas Day—would not disappoint the greeting-card expectations. A grocery-wagon, bursting with its load, chugged laboriously up the hill, its tires slipping at every turn on a rail of the single-track trolley line, its hood sweating melted snow-drops in comic parody of winter. The street, otherwise, was deserted—although green paper bells, similar to that bobbing restlessly on the judge's round head touched it, were in every window.

The atmosphere was unquestionably Yuletide, even if the dull lead

of the clouds foretold nothing of joy; yet nobody could ever by any possibility have mistaken Judge Rhimer for Santa Claus. Perhaps his somewhat pudgy face might have been forced to the resemblance by skillful attachment of the required quantity of white whiskers; but the whiskers would certainly have been needed—for the Judge's mouth and chin were not altogether genial: eighteen years on the bench with a never-ending procession of always erring and sometimes atrocious humanity had stiffened what had once been pliable. But the Judge's eyes, large and grey and placed neatly in extraordinarily wrinkled surroundings, while not readily and persistently smiling, contained something more welcome than the ready and persistent smile—a quiet, probing light that penetrated everything in the eyes opposed to it, good and bad.

He was speculating before that window, wondering whether he was justified in the telephone conversation he had just had with the Governor of the State. The Governor had not enthusiastically granted Judge Rhimer's request. The Governor was a young man of considerable prospects in national politics, and this business of pardoning convicts had elements of danger on the eve of an election year; especially where murderers were concerned. Governors must reflect upon such things.

Judge Rhimer, perusing the little black book he kept always in the top drawer of his study desk, had decided that the thing must be done. The time had arrived; even if it had necessitated a personal visit to the Governor with the most cogent appeal—the thing must be done. He had sacrificed the liberty of other men whose freedom he had intended to gain for them this year as a Christmas gift, in order to have this pardon granted. Every year in early November the Judge consulted the little black book which summarized the record of the men and women it had been his duty to subject to punishment at the hands of the Commonwealth. Every year at about the same time Judge Rhimer addressed his appeal to the reigning Governor.

This year, he had requested but one pardon. He had desired many. There were, for instance, those two lads convicted of burglary at Newburgh. They had served two years at Auburn; which seemed almost sufficient. But they were very young; they could afford another year of correction without any substantial injury to their future. The request that the Governor had granted with no marked willingness had been a test;—something of a personal test for the Judge. His wide brows closed together as he remembered the harsh voice of Robert Nichols whom he had sentenced to prison for life. It had been a threat, a desperate threat, Judge Rhimer could recall the man's pale, distorted face, his quivering white fist and awful hush in the courtroom as the threat was uttered. Even in that moment the Judge had wanted to curse the counsel for the defense for not having frankly advised his client to expect the worst.

Now the prison doors were swinging open to return Robert Nichols to a world he had not seen for fifteen years.

A thin voice of complaint reached the Judge from above. It was his sick wife. His face fixed with worry, he went to her. This was, really, the thing that worried him most; it had been the most decisive factor in the end to form his determination to secure pardon for Nichols, for Judge Rhimer realized that he had involuntarily placed his wife's illness as a barrier in the way of that decision. He had not relished the thought of Nichols attempting to carry out at this time the threat he had made fifteen years ago from the grim walls of the prison, because he had determined not to be swayed by that slim selfishness, Nichols was free.

As he sat by his wife's bedside in that early evening the picture of a man's emancipation ran through his mind. He could see Robert Nichols, a dim, black figure bending against the white veil of the snow, hurrying from the grim walls of the prison. Even after fifteen years, and with the passage of hundreds of the captives of society before him, he could remember the face of Nichols: the startling black eyes, the high forehead, the beak nose and sinister mouth. Now he could see it, grey as the prison walls, the eyes sunken and dull, the mouth fixed. That was the Nichols type after prison life. The Judge knew it, knew all types. Nichols would seek vengeance on society. It might have been wiser to have refrained from interceding. For to Nichols the voice of society was the voice of the judge who had sentenced him. Judge Rhimer had taken his chance, or rather to give Robert Nichols a chance.

He had taken an unusual interest in Robert Nichols. The man's case had been exceptional, and the death of his poor wife and disposition of the little three year old daughter were items duly recorded in the Judge's small black book. And Nichols' threat was not omitted—although its imprint was so deep and bold upon the Judge's memory that it scarcely needed memorandum.

The lamps were lit and the clouds knitted thicker and thicker quilts of snow. It was, indeed, Christmas Eve. Streams of muffled figures hurried through the streets, pack-

age laden; sleigh bells tinkled and youngsters battled with the winter element.

A party of men stopped at Judge Rhimer's house, depositing there a large sack of toys and eatables which the Judge at first declined; but the spokesman reminded His Honor of his promise to play Santa Claus that evening at one of the city's few public institutions. Judge Rhimer, by this time obsessed with the portents of the night, murmured; but, his promise was his promise; and as he finally assented a strangely humorous gleam lightened his face.

The committee departed with echoing salutations, and the Judge ate a listless dinner, alone. His wife slept peacefully above. He permitted the servants to absent themselves for their last-minute Christmas errands. Now he sat silently in his front room, smoking one of the long stogies for which he was infamous in chambers.

Nichols' lean face appeared again. It might be a precaution to telephone the police station and have an officer on guard outside the house. Patrolman Sheedy was passing now, thumping his nightstick playfully in the mounting snow and glancing, as he always did, toward the Judge's house in instinctive respect for authority that earned respect. But Judge Rhimer dismissed the thought: deep in his soul he had the comforting Christian conviction that hurt or death in a good cause was martyrdom. Whatever might befall he had done his duty by his fellow-man according to his lights.

The clock striking ten aroused the Judge from a troubled doze dimly suggestive of important funerals. The house was becoming chilled in the absence of the servants. Challenging his bravery, Judge Rhimer trudged out of the room and through the kitchen made his way to the cellar—glad that an electric switch enabled him to light up that hateful cavern before advancing through the dark door. He heaped it high with coal and, smiling thinly at his sneaking sense of heroism, returned to the floor above.

His over-stimulated mind imagined the stealthy approach of a black, bent figure with a face like the stone of a grey prison wall and hate in its heart. Coming into the passage way the Judge floundered and seized a helpful stair rail. For the grey face he had dreamed of was pressed against the window of the first front door.

Judge Rhimer quickly recovered himself. Slowly, but without hesitation, he advanced through the first doorway to the street door as the muffled bell buzzed. Two black eyes stared eagerly at his approach, and a month like a line of steel opened as if to emit a curse. The Judge threw open the door and Robert Nichols, bent and shivering, staggered past him. His eyes glared wildly and a hawklike hand emerged from the coat pocket; but he thrust it in again. Judge Rhimer's back was turned in the act of closing the door; this seemed to halt the convict's immediate intent. The Judge looked at him with calm, penetrating eyes that belied his apprehension.

"Step inside that room," he said, gesturing, indicating the room adjoining the front living room—his library.

His visitor's mouth did not appear to open so much as that the lips fell apart.

"You know who I am?" he grunted.

"Yes," the Judge replied, evenly. "I know you and where you have come from—and why you are here."

It seemed much like a snarl on the convict's face. But he obeyed the Judge and went into the library. The dim light could not hide the utter pitifulness of his condition. Newly enough clad, although insufficiently, his frame appeared wasted. Mud-grey hair, prison-clipped, showed under the edges of his hat; his face was angry with pallor and his eyes were bitter points. He surveyed the room uneasily, as if suspicious of witnesses and assailants.

"I'm quite alone," the Judge explained, seating himself in a rocker by his reading desk. "Take off your hat and sit down. I've been expecting you."

The convict looked at the Judge in surprised doubt. Then he burst out in words like one who had suddenly found the gift of speech after an enforced dumbness.

"I saw the cop at the end of the block," he blurted. "That's why I came straight to the front door."

"I'm glad I was on hand to open it for you myself," said the Judge, pleasantly.

The convict, in a mechanical act of respect, swept his hat off; his bullet head was scarred and threatening. He laid two bluish, hard hands on the desk and spoke harshly at the Judge.

"I don't want none of that," he warned. "You know what I'm here for. Fifteen years I've waited for this, and I'd have done it the minute I set eyes on you. I ain't afraid of any chair after fifteen years. You know what I want first. You're clever, ain't you; but I'm going to get it from you."

His brow clouded threateningly; he beat aside the Judge's calm gaze by the sheer violence of his stare.

"You had better sit down while I talk to you," the Judge invited. But the convict swung away from the table, stood as erect as years bent over a compulsory work bench permitted, and glared defiance. A

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