

For the CATHOLIC RECORD. THE BOOK AND THE MAN.

Dedicated in the Interests of Humanity to the Prisoner, Whoever and Wherever he May Be.

This is the dedication of a story which is a veritable poem of nature. Moondyne, though written hurriedly, is not without the charms of an excellent literary style.

In stolen hours, when his pen could not be lifted for an instant from his MSS, the chapters of his great story progressed. If the eye of a skillful critic detects slight blemishes here and there, he need only remember that the author was ever "one with the workers, side by side."

Moreover, poetry, which is, according to a great poet, "the centre and circumference of knowledge," does not always teach that the singer should move "mid the evanescent hues of this ethereal world."

Moondyne is the strong man of the book. He is its fibre and its genius. With his Creator, he knew that "Men's lives are short; and unless they gather gold in the mass, how shall they wipe out the primal curse of poverty before the hand loses its skill and the heart its strong desire?"

He lifted himself above his position. His soul burst its manacles and cast off its clanking chains. It passed beyond the narrow environment of his prison and in the mountains of the Vasse and with Koro and Tapaine and the dusky sons of Le-mana-roa, exulted in its freedom.

Gold was too great a temptation for an enemy. The bond was free. But the enemy had not "come bliffoledd from Kooragup." He had seen the hills and noted the sun and stars as he came. The fearless Ngara could not stay the traitor's hand.

It was raised aloft, and in its downward course placed the brand of Cain on the brow that had conceived its crime. A horse's head was turned toward the mountain pass. The faithful animal bore a murderer and that which makes murderers. Heavy bars of gold were strung across the saddle-bow.

But not to him as his pursuer came "The Divine Thought." It had come to Moondyne the day before. "It was with him still—grave and kindly; and now they two were so utterly alone, it seemed almost a smile. He raised his body and knelt upon the sand, looking upward, and all things seemed closing in upon him, as if he were laid down on the sand at peace—but a cry, a human-like cry, startled him into wakefulness,—surely it was a cry."

Yes, Moondyne was not mistaken. It was a human-like cry. It was a human cry. It was the voice of Isaac Bowman crying aloud in the wilderness. It was his human nature begging for human presence and aid and sympathy. He expected death. Death was—is on his trail. "Death is on the trail of every man; but we have grown used to him, and heed him not. Crime and sin are following us—will surely find us out, and some day will open the cowl and show us the death's-head." And though Bowman realized that "more terrible than these fates, because more physically real, is the knowledge ever present that a relentless human enemy is on our track."

Yet his sin-befuddled mind and his throbbing heart yearned for the sight of a man's face and the touch of a man's hand, even though the face should be charged with thunder and the hand armed with the lightning of destruction. He knew not that the Great Thought had come to Moondyne. But in a little while, when the escaped convict had taken him from under the horse and had raised him up, the dying man took in as much of the Great Thought as his warped intellect could hold.

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

Till the last drop was gone he pressed the young wood. Then the guilty wretch raised his eyes and looked at Moondyne—the glazed eyes grew bright, and brighter, till a tear

rose within them, and rolled down the stained and sin-lined face. The baked lips moved and the weak hands were raised imploringly. The sergeant fell back dead.

Moondyne knew that his last breath was contrition, and his last dumb cry "pardon."

And yet! and yet! a few American writers have been blind enough to say that there is not enough of the Catholic spirit in Moondyne.

Al! that! Great Thought! That precious moisture! That last breath! That last dumb cry! Ah, that tear—the crystal essence of penitence!

Al! that! Great Thought. It did a great deal for Moondyne and the man in the burning sands of the Australian bush.

The scene is changed. Moondyne is in England. The story developing new characters, places them around the grand centre figure.

Manly Will Sheridan and the second villain, Sam Draper, with the flower of the book, Alice Walsley, enter into Moondyne's life.

The study of Draper is the greatest piece of character analysis in the pages of Moondyne. You remember his eyes—blue eyes: not the soft blue which usually denotes good nature, but a pale, slaty blue that has a hard and shallow look.

You know his manner! "He had a free and easy way with him that made people who met him for the first time think he was cheerful and amiable. But if you observed him closely, you would see in the midst of a boisterous laugh that the cold, blue eyes were keenly watching you, without a particle of mirth."

Here we have a character whose soul-workings have been laid bare. The author had the talent of placing life-like characteristics before his audience. Where else shall you find, in two paragraphs, a stronger human insight into human frailties than this?

The rascal thus pictured succeeded in parting Sheridan and Alice Walsley. Over this young girl, as many men have before, over just such a creature, Sheridan and Draper quarrelled. Sheridan's strong arm was drawn back and the vise-like fist sent Draper to the bosom of mother earth. Draper never forgot nor forgave that blow.

Strange that any woman should turn from a man like Sheridan to a brute like Draper! But women's ways are unaccountable. A few are naturally contrary. Some are the victims of caprice. Others again marry while they may. All form the pieces of the Chinese puzzle of the human race. One or two, and only one or two, remember, with Mr. Gladstone, that "a woman is most perfect when most womanly."

But Alice Walsley was foredoomed to bear the burden of man's deception. In such a case a woman always comes out at the wrong end. Her own kind give her "the cold shoulder." Men laughingly pay her deceiver on the back and say "he's a smart fellow." With the acute pain of a life-disappointment tugging at his heart strings—Will Sheridan sails away. In Calcutta, through the kindness of Mr. McKay, he receives the appointment of agent of a Western Australia Sandal Wood Company. By proper business methods Sheridan revolutionized that trade and became acquainted with the country of Moondyne. Success was his. The sky and the clime were fair. Life itself seemed so. With such surroundings ought man not be happy?

O'Reilly asks and answers the question: "Was it so with Agent Sheridan?" "Darkest of all mysteries, O secret heart of man, that even to its owner is unfathomed and occult! Here worked a brave man from year to year, smiling on by men and women, transmitting all to gold; vigorous, keen, worldly, and gradually becoming philosophic through large estimating of values in men and things; yet beneath this tottering and practical mind for the present was a heart that never for one day, through all these years, ceased bleeding and grieving for a dead joy of the past."

He had loved Alice Walsley with that one love which thorough natures only know. It had grown into his young life as an organic part of his being. When it was torn from him there was left a gaping and bleeding wound, and time had brought him no cure. "Answering the unceasing yearning in his breast, he came to a decision.

"I must go home" he said aloud one day when riding alone in the forest. "I must go home—if only for one day."

What changes in the course of the years! Sheridan looked once more on the scenes of his childhood. He was at the end of his journey—he was at home. Surrounded by all that he had known in the old life he fancied that he could hear "her voice in his ear, and all the happy love of his boyhood flooded his heart, as he bowed his face in his hands and sobbed." He stood before his own door, he asked for his mother and when he was told that she was dead "another cord snapped, and the stranger in his own place turned from the door with a moan in

his heart." But the stout heart contracted when his sister Mary told him that Alice Walsley was in prison.

So the man who had wandered away from his youth finds mockeries where joys had been, and in their hollow sounds the gamut of every discord. For murder—For killing her child! Ah! No! Not that! But the iron entered his soul when he read the card on the door of the fourth cell:

ALICE WALMSLEY. LIFE.

He had a glimpse of her. He passed out of her cell to become acquainted with Lord Somers, the Colonial Secretary, and the typical chief director of a convict prison, the "expert" Sir Joshua Hobbs.

Hobbs's face said plainly: "I know all—these gentlemen know nothing—it is not necessary that they should—I am the convict system."

He had graduated from a police court, where he had begun as an attorney; and he was intimately acquainted with the criminal life of England in its details. But he had no soul for the awful thought of whence the dark stream came, not whether it was going. He was merely a dried mudbank to keep it within bounds for a little way.

He was ignorant and arrogant—a pompous noddy and a petty despot. With his bulldog in the air he marched along, until a man of intellect, who seemed to take great interest in prisons and prisoners, appeared on the scene. This stranger's name was Wyville. "Sheridan liked him from the first look." Never among all the men he had known had Sheridan met such a man as this. The head, with all its features, the eye, the voice, the whole body, were cast in one mould of superb massiveness and beauty. There was no point of difference or weakness. Among a million, this man would not have merely claimed superiority, but would have unconsciously walked through the opening crowd to the front place, and have taken it without a word. Before him now stood three men least likely of any in London to be easily impressed—a young and brilliant statesman, a cynical and able novelist, and each of these felt the same strange presence of a power and a principle to be respected.

"Nature, circumstances, and cultivation had evidently united to create in this man a majestic individuality. He did not pose or pretend, but spoke straight the thing he meant to say; yet every movement and word suggested a reserve of strength that had almost a mysterious calmness and beauty.

"He was dressed in such a way that one would say he never could be dressed otherwise. Dress was forgotten in the man. But he wore a short walking or shooting coat of strong dark cloth. The strength and roughness of the cloth were seen, rather than the style, for it seemed appropriate that so strangely powerful a figure should be so strongly clad. His face was bronzed to the darkness of a Greek's. His voice, as he spoke, on entering the room, came easily from his lips, yet with a deep resonance, suggesting a possible tenderness or terror that would shake the soul. It was a voice in absolutely perfect accord with the striking face and physique."

Book Third carries us with a noble prayer to the cell of Alice Walsley. With the strong, true, sympathetic touch of a man who has known suffering and has looked upon the effects of sin, the author describes the fall of the woman who was "in for life."

Her heart was hard and cold. Her soul had turned away from Heaven, until Wyville co-operated with Sister Cecilia. Their tiny rosebud wafted the fragrance of God's providence into the sunless soul. The frozen heart became animated. The night had been long, but at last the dawn of a brighter day showed her that in misfortune the innocent may cheer and attend the unfortunate. She divined the nobler part which proves that a kindly word and an act of sympathy are of greater value than all the preaching and remonstrance of the world.

Before she left London for Australia, in the convict ship, the efforts of Wyville had gone a long way toward assuring her of a better future.

He had journeyed to her early home and had met that "modest and unassuming old fellow, Officer Lodge." Wyville tired not. "Great and sombre was the Thought which lay within the cell of this traveller's soul, to be investigated and solved."

He was working out his high ideals. He was doing his best to live up to them. He was helped because he did not believe in "a cold, statistical Christ," but in a God of "love and justice," and his faith "bridged the gulf of doubt with a splendid arch."

That sublime faith sustained him when he met Mr. Hagget. Hagget was the Scripture reader of the prison. "He was a tall man, with a highly respectable air. He had side-whiskers brushed outward until they stood from his hawk cheeks like paint brushes; and he wore a long, square-cut brown coat. He had an air of formal superiority. His voice was cavernous and sonorous. His lips were not exactly coarse or thick; they were large, even to bagginess. His mouth was wide, and his teeth were long; but there was enough lip to cover up the whole, and still more—enough to fold afterwards into consciously pious lines around the mouth."

Hobbs and Hagget feared and hated Wyville. They feared his power and hated, because they could not understand, his humanity. But he triumphed over both, and in the scene at the door

of Alice's cell, when she clung to Sister Cecilia and defied those who tried to part them, he gave Hagget a lesson, which that baggy-lipped Scripture-reader remembered to his dying day.

Then turning on Hobbs he handed him that potent paper which destroyed his power and made him bow his head in humiliation.

The convict ship was to sail. Sister Cecilia, Alice Walsley, Draper and his wife, Will Sheridan, Hagget; Wyville himself, Hammond, and Wyville himself, boarded the vessel.

The first few days of the voyage are indescribably horrible. The hundreds of pent-up wretches are unused to the darkness of the ship, strange to their crowded quarters and to each other, depressed in spirits at their endless separation from home, sickened to death with the merciless pitch and roll of the vessel, alarmed at the deafening thunder of the waves against their prison walls, and fearful of sudden engulfment, with the hatches barred. The scene is too hideous for a picture—too dreadful to be described in words. Only those who have stood within the bars, and heard the din of devils and the appalling sounds of despair, blended in a diaphanous that made every hatch-mouth a vent of hell, can imagine the horrors of the hold of a convict ship."

The most dramatic chapter in Moondyne is that one which tells us, "How a prisoner might break a bar."

A fire breaks out in the ship. A thousand lives tremble in the balance. But cool and brave and strong Wyville rushes to the rescue. With the aid of Hagget he saves the ship and its human cargo. Hagget's great "reef like lips quivered with suppressed feeling. He gazed earnestly at Wyville, then seized his hand in a grip of iron and said "forgive me."

When Mr. Wyville entered his room that night "his eyes fell on a letter, fixed endwise on his table, to attract his attention. It was addressed to him. He opened it and took out a photograph—the portrait of a convict in chains. There was no other enclosure. On the back of it were written these words, in Mr. Hagget's handwriting, dated four years before:

"This is the only photograph of the man known as Moondyne. It was taken in Western Australia, just before his latest escape from Fremantle prison. All other photographs of this prisoner have unaccountably disappeared from the prison books."

Mr. Wyville gazed at the picture * * * * * walked meditatively to and fro * * * * * looked at it with deep attention, while his lips moved as if he were addressing it, * * * * * tore it to pieces, opened the window of his room and threw the pieces into the sea."

The ship arrived at Fremantle. Wyville, now in authority, set about reforming the prisons and the penal system. Draper and his wife dragged out their miserable existence. Alice Walsley, whose innocence had been established by Harriet Draper's confession, met the love of her youth among "the shadows and the flowers and the bright-winged birds."

Sheridan was happy. But Wyville! Ah! Wyville! Into that strong, patient, sad-burdened heart a holy love had come long ago. The rosebud had had turned Alice Walsley's thoughts to the Almighty had been Wyville's votive offering. His life had been a life of struggles, of bitterness, of utter loneliness. Home and friends were but memories. He stood alone, and now that he had triumphed over cruel fate, powerful enemies, and over his own mighty passions, he yearned for the light of a woman's face and the love of a woman's heart.

But a greater blow than any he had yet received was about to fall upon him. For the first time he learned that his friend Sheridan loved Alice Walsley.

"The door of his room was locked for hours that day, and he sat beside his desk, sometimes with his head erect and a blank suffering look in his eyes, and sometimes with his face buried in his hands. The agony through which his soul was passing was almost mortal. The powerful nature was ploughed to its depths. He saw the truth before him, as hard and palpable as a granite rock. He saw his own blind error. His heart, breaking from his will, tried to travel again the paths of sweet delusion which had brought so great and new a joy to his soul. But the strong will resisted, wrestled, refused to listen to the heart's cry of pain—and, in the end, conquered. But the man had suffered woefully in the struggle. The lines on his bronze face were manifestly deeper, and the lips were firmer set, as toward evening, he rose from his seat and looked outward and upward at the beautiful deep sky. His lips moved as he looked, repeating the bitter words that were becoming sweet to his heart—"Till will be done."

He had "ordered his stout heart to bear it." The sands in the glass of his life were running low. He faced the angry convicts, quelled their contemplated rebellion and, though his scheme was somewhat fanciful and sentimental, because of its too implicit faith in human nature,—yet if he was not understood on earth he was in heaven.

As he passed his life in self sacrifice it was fitting that he should sacrifice his life for others—even if they were the lowliest and the least unworthy. With Hammond, his faithful friend, he read into the bush fire. There too was the nobleman of the bush, Ngara-jil. Before them, in peril of their lives, were Draper and his wife. The man and the woman were standing in a circle of flame. Unless some brave man dashed through that circle they would never again see the sun rise or set. But the brave man was there.

In vain Hammond tried to dissuade him. Wyville "struck his spurs into his horse, and the animal sprang to the front. But next instant he was flung back on his hanches by Ngara-jil, dismounted, who had seized the bride. The bushman's eyes blazed and his face was set in determination.

"No! No!" he cried in his own language; "you shall not! you shall not! It is death, Moondyne! It is death." Wyville bent forward, broke the man's grasp, speaking rapidly to him. His words moved the faithful heart deeply, and he stood aside, with raised hands of affliction, and let him ride forward. Hammond did not follow; but he would not try to escape. He sat in his saddle, with streaming eyes following the splendid heroism of the man he loved dearest of all the world."

Through the cinders and burning branches and sea of fire Wyville rode. The woman, Harriet Draper, faithful to the last, was bending over her husband holding "the wine flask to his parched lips" as Wyville approached. But he was too late. The woman breathed the fire and sank down beside the dead body of Sam Draper.

"One moment, with quivering face, the strong man bent above her, while his lips moved. Then he raised his head and faced his own danger."

He faced it well. He had to ride his horse through the fire. "The animal reared and screamed, but dashed through the fire, with eyes scorched and blinded by the flame, now solely dependent on the hand of its guide. The rider felt the suffering animal's pain, and recorded it in his heart with sympathy. * * * * * By the side of the swamp he was stricken from the saddle by the branch of a falling tree. His body fell in the water, his head resting on the tangled rushes of the swamp."

"Once before he died, his opened eyes were raised and he looked above him into the sea and forest of fire. But he would not accept that; but upward, with the splendid faith of his old manhood, went the glazing eyes, till they rested firmly on the eternal calmness of the sky. As he looked, there came to him, like a vision he had once before dimly seen, a great Thought from the deep sky, and held his soul in rapt communion. But the former dimness was gone; he saw it clearly now for one instant, while all things were closing peacefully in upon him."

So the man who had been Moondyne died. Here you have the outline story of Moondyne. Having read it you know the man and the author. Resurgam. St. John, N. B. JOHN MAHONY.

The Rationale of Confession. How many are the souls in distress, anxiety, or loneliness, whose one need is to find a being to whom they can pour out their feelings unheard by the world? Tell them out to them; they cannot tell them out to those whom they see every hour. They want to tell them and not to tell them; and they want to tell them out, yet be as if they be not told; they wish to tell them to one who is strong enough to bear them, yet not too strong to despise them; they wish to tell them to one who can at once advise and can sympathize with them; they wish to relieve themselves of a load, to gain a solace, to receive the assurance that there is one who thinks of them, and one to whom in thought they can recur, to whom they can betake themselves, if necessary, from time to time, while they are in the world. How many a Protestant's heart would leap at the news of such a benefit, putting aside all distinct idea of a sacramental ordinance, or of a grant of pardon and the conveyance of grace! If there is a heavenly idea in the Catholic Church, looking at it simply as an idea, surely, next after the Blessed Sacrament, Confession is such. And such it ever found in fact—the very act of kneeling, the low and contrite voice, the sign of the cross hanging, so to say, over the head bowed low, and the words of peace and blessing. Oh, what a soothing charm is there, which the world can neither give or take away! Oh, what piercing, heart-subduing tranquility, provoking tears of joy, is poured almost substantially and physically upon the soul, the oil of gladness, as Scripture calls it, when the penitent at length rises, his God reconciled to him, his sins rolled away for ever! This is Confession as it is in fact.—Cardinal Newman.

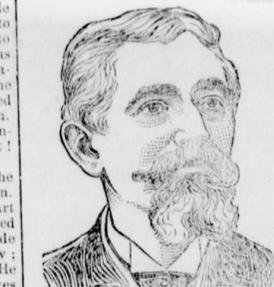
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