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AILEY MOORE;

A TALE OF THE TIMES.

CHAPTER I.—SOME OF THE ACTORS.

'Well met, Gerald!—Of all men in the world you were the most needed just now—though, on my conscience, the least expected.'

'Why, yes, I seldom indulge myself with a walk to the 'well' at an hour when business should engage me elsewhere. The road is pretty familiar to you, I believe?'

'Well done, sir; guilty—I plead guilty. No more devoted pilgrim than myself—no more zealous worshipper of the revered Saint Senanus! The watching hour of eve, or opening smile of morning, always brings to my enraptured eye such visions—angels of beauty, and—'

'Pray, my friend,' replied the first young man, with a scarcely suppressed look of mingled pity and contempt, 'pray, my friend, select some other topic for your levity. It is hardly becoming even in your mouth, to mimic wit at the expense of religion.'

'Religion!'

'Aye, sir; religion!'

'But, in the name of all the gods at once, what is the religion of holy wells? Pshaw, Gerald, you don't believe it. Religion! to mutter beads by bundles over the brook; kill the young daisies by knee-marches; and drink unmixed cold water without measure or compunction! Gerald, you don't—'

'Pardon a second interruption. You will be good enough not to justify your jesting humor, by insinuating a belie, that any Catholic participates in your views. Excuse me, yours is the language, not simply of the malevolent, but of the unwise. Our fathers worshipped around these sacred places; and the record of simple faith is read in the only offering which poverty can make. The cup from which the traveller quenches his thirst—the crutch upon which the cripple had leaned—the simpler bit of linen that hangs from the bough—all are voices from the past, that homes had found happiness, and hearts had found peace under the invocation of the servant of God, whose intercession is here prayed.'

'Well, Gerald, I shall not lose my temper by your severity. The Naiad worship I shall leave to the soft-hearted—whom you know I adore most profoundly. If ever I become serious, I protest I'll go and worship God Himself. There now, no dark looks, as you love me.'

'Ignorance, sir—it is simple ignorance. 'Tis astonishing, how enlightened some men become who find the restraints of faith inconvenient.—Whoever taught you that to worship Saint Senanus, or any other saint, was not to go and worship God Himself? You have learned your catechism ill, if you have not retained that the elect of God are honored only because God has chosen this as one mode of being honored. You will not be more wise in selecting the manner of approaching Him, than He has been himself.'

'Controversy, upon my soul!'

'By no means—'tis merely holding a mirror up for folly to see itself, sir.'

'But the wells have been condemned in many places,' said the other, in a rather subdued tone.

'Yes—the pilgrimages to them have been abused—as it appears you have abused that to the place where we are just going.'

'Well, a truce. Of course I know the absurdity of the sectarians. I know, for example, that the old women are perfectly well aware that God alone is to be adored, and that the saints have only, as it were, 'the ear of the court.'—I know they'd no more say an 'Our Father' to even Saint Senanus, than they would to Parson Daly. In fact, I heard old Biddy Browne, the beggar-woman, extinguish Mrs. Salmer, the other day, with 'I declare, ma'am, God told us to pray to 'em, an' I suppose He takes care they'll hear us; an' I'm sure, about offending Him, He'll be as well pleased that I ax the Holy Virgin Mary (blessed be her name, ma'am, as the angel said) to pray for me, as for you to ax Mr. Salmer to pray for you, though he's a very nice man; indeed.' But, Gerald, do you believe that God—or Providence—sends his blessings this road? Have you, yourself, ever known a supernatural result from the Holy Well?'

'I have.'

'Yourself?'

'Myself?'

'The lame—the sick—the blind?—'Pon my soul, I don't believe you're easily trapped, and I protest I'll give credit.'

'The blind?—How was it?'

'How now? You knew the person to be blind—and again, that the person saw within such time as to make the recovery supernatural?'

'I was present all the time. He was a very nice man; indeed. But, Gerald, do you believe that God—or Providence—sends his blessings this road? Have you, yourself, ever known a supernatural result from the Holy Well?'

their eyes—they cry, they cannot understand, and will not study.'

'Well, suppose me quite moralized now—what did really occur?'

'A woman, sir, led a blind boy to St. Senanus's Well. She was holy and confiding—one who made faith a real active agent in life's concerns—not one who laid it by for death-bed use or weekly occupation. She was very meek and patient, and though she sought her offspring's cure with eager invocation and throbbing heart, she would have thanked God, in her humility, had the boon been refused. The sun was setting when she reached the holy spot, and the boy said he felt how beautifully it was, for his face turned to the west, and the light streamed back behind his form, like a path for prayer to heaven. And how she, that mother, did pray! He was her only son. I am sure the people round her felt deep pity, for they wept; and many a rosary was offered for the gentle young woman whose hands were raised to the sky, over the head of her first-born. Thus the evening was spent—'

'And—'

'The boy returned seeing—the well was his Siloah.'

'You say yourself was present?'

'I said so.'

'Oh, of course—yes; but pray are the people living? are they palpable, discoverable bodies? I would travel any distance to see that woman and boy.'

'Well, you might, indeed, go to see that woman—happy for you, if you ever shall—she is in heaven.'

'And the boy?'

'Is now a man.'

'And—'

'He tells you the story, sir.'

Gerald More was a young man of some four-and-twenty years. He had received a sound, almost a liberal education, and added to the cultivation of his intellect, the self-possession, prudence, and firmness which are always so sure to sway such vitality as that of his companion. The latter, named James Boran, had once been intended for holy orders; but a brief collegiate experience proved to others and himself that neither his tastes, talents, nor dispositions were of the description to secure success. He was weak-minded, impulsive, shallow, and pretentious, patronized every opinion for an hour, and abandoned it in the next, was fastidiously pious for a week, and almost an infidel for three months afterwards. Extremely decorous when a presiding mind governed, he was the creature of every excess when he himself could pretend to rule, or when he was allowed an impunity. He had been expelled from college for transgressions of all kinds, consummated by reading, during public devotion, 'Don Juan' for a prayer-book. We find him that kind of character which has no place in the world, and hardly a hope beyond vegetating, yet prepared for any mischief or folly that will minister excitement or kill time. The 'Holy Well' was a frequent resort. He persecuted the young females who came thither for the purposes of devotion, and lied for a week after, on the nature and consequences of his feats. He had been engaged in his usual mission when he met his neighbor and early schoolmate, between whom, however, and himself, for some years, no sympathy and little intercourse had existed.

Nevertheless, Boran had more than once had recourse to his early friend for the exercise of some important offices. His scapegrace practices had over and over again driven him from the shelter of the paternal roof; and truly or falsely loaded his name with suspicions of participation in deeds with which neither his honor nor his safety was compatible. The parish priest was for a time a willing intercessor with old Boran—a hard-handed, and, as malice said, a hard-hearted man. The frequency of the prodigal's relapses, however, exhausted the good clergyman's hope; and positive refusal on his part again to interfere, had brought Gerald Moore to him as a surety and pleader. To a new exercise of his influence with the priest, young Boran alluded in the first words which he addressed to his companion. He had now lived for a week or more 'among the neighbors'—that is, with the profligate, who made a tool of him, and the unfortunate, who dreaded some day of his returning in good odor with his father to be made victims, or hoped to be rewarded.

While this matter of reconciliation was under discussion, and Boran draped his entreaty in promises of amendment, declarations of contrition, and accusations of his father, and elder brother, whom he declared to be an iron devil, they came to a turn in the road, which concealed a well, from which a stream of water was issuing. It was shaded by an old elder tree, that looked the protecting genius of the spot. A grey wall, of loose construction, embraced the well, and half-concealed a large dark figure that bent down, as if to enjoy the luxury of a bath.

The sound of footsteps attracted the stranger's attention, and he raised his head at the young men's approach. One moment—he pressed his worn felt hat over his brow—a broad and daring one—his dark eyes glistened with intelligence, and his gigantic form stood in the mid-path. There, gathered up in a great coat that seemed the load of an ordinary man, and gently leaning on a staff that wore the appearance of many a long day's service, he waited their advance.

Gerald was quite convinced he had never seen the man before. He examined him with attention, and the other met his inquiring eye with the calm self-possession of one who was quite unconscious of being an object of scrutiny. Yet there was something in his whole appearance—the suddenness of meeting, the bold, self-reliant look—the muscle, sinew, and the very garb of the new comer, that raised suspicion and apprehension in the mind of a beholder. In fact, the heart of Gerald Moore, as he himself said, many a day subsequently knew that man.

'Fine mornin' gentlemen,' said the stranger; great crowds at the 'well' down; and he touched his apology for a hat.

'Fine mornin',' echoed the two young men, with one voice.

'Great doin's going to come to pass in these parts, they say. The new landlord will take up the property in a fortnight; an' many an ould tenant will go to find a new berryin' place.'

'You seem well informed, my friend,' said Gerald, fixing upon him another look of interrogation.

'Wisha, yes, sir. Travellin' a good dale, and meetin' a great dale, one sees the two sides of every one, and every thing,' replied the countryman, yet retaining his totally impassable expression of features. 'May I be bould enough to ask, gentlemen, which o' ye is Mr. Boran?'

Boran thrilled to his soul's depths. At that moment the mysterious man's eyes rested upon him like a decree of fate.

'Mr. Boran—James,' he continued, 'the student that was.'

Boran bowed, muttering that he was the person, and indicating rather than expressing his wish to be informed of the cause of the question.

'Oh, sir, I'm mighty glad to make your acquaintance. I have a word to say to your ear, sir. Will you come this way? And he made a gesture directing Boran to retrace his steps.

'Speak on, my good fellow; I don't wish any concealment'—he now spoke with some hesitancy—'from my friend here.'

'Sha, asthone—oh, yes, but you know, sycrets is sycrets, and mine is only for Mr. Jas. Boran; and he fixed upon the person addressed a look of such deep meaning that even Moore chilled in its influence.

'Let me not interrupt you,' said Gerald, 'the man may have something of importance to communicate; and he walked on.

It was for an instant—he caught the glance of the stranger in passing. There was a smile—a smile of conscious power—and a light in the eye impetuous and sinister, that spoke not only authority, but absolute command. As for Boran, he retired with the unexpected visitor, like a man governed by a spell. In a few minutes he returned to say that the man was right. Business of much importance called him to a little distance; he hoped on his return to find Gerald mindful of his half-made promise; and, for his own part, he had resolved to lead a life for the future that should repair the follies of the past. Gerald bade him good morning, and pursued his way to his destination.

Much food for reflection had been contributed by the morning's walk. It was a glorious day in mid-summer, and the full-risen sun looked down upon the glowing harvest and rich foliage with the ardent gaze of an artificer on some splendid works of his own hands. The road lay along the brow of a hill in the south-west of Ireland, overlooking a magnificent extent of well-cultivated table-land, and commanding a distant view of the sea. The place we shall call Kilmacarra. The happy homesteads of humble life lay scattered over the plain, which here and there presented the dwellings of the more opulent, nestling amid trees, or surrounded by the whitened walls of comfortable farm-yards, that bespoke the competency and security which accumulating wealth confers. Numerous rivulets watered the plain, and in their noisy progress, their tiny waves glancing in the sun, seemed to laugh amidst the beauties which nature had so profusely scattered around.

And the good people of Kilmacarra were reflected in their possessions. Strife had rarely found entrance to destroy their repose. The parson; to be sure, was of a new installation, and wished to signalise the youth of his pastoral zeal by incursions upon Rome; but the 'old master,' just now passed away, dissolved the chill of sectarian rigidity in a laugh, which the whole town-land felt ringing through its happy heart, and

ended every proposal of Mr. Salmer to commence aggression upon the consciences of his tenantry, by—'for the Lord's sake, sir, have sense. Let well enough alone. You'll sharpen your neighbors' scythes to cut some man's throat, and drown the country round in malice, if ever you have your way. Doesn't the old priest love his faith? Aye, does he, and the souls of men too, as I saw in many an hour of hot epidemic. Old Father Quinlan and I have 'lived and loved together' in Kilmacarra, men and boys, for sixty years—we shan't go down to the grave mouthin' curses at one another—I'm hanged if we shall, friend. And more, he's a man whose acquaintance I'd like to renew on the other side, on my conscience.'

But were these things to continue? The heir to the estate was said to be aristocratic in the least acceptable sense, and fanatical in the most repulsive form of the frenzy. How would his arriving affect the felicity which had been a hundred years in growing to maturity? Should old friends be separated, and old homes vanish?—Should old families, as had been observed, seek new graveyards, and no longer hope to find quiet repose in the church where 'all belonging to them' rested? How should it be with Gerald's father himself?—with Ailey, his sweet sister?—and with the snug home in the valley? The young man started. He knew that, living under an 'abatement,' his family had no security for permanent possession at the reduced rent, unless the old landlord's practice, and their own immense improvements on the soil. There was nothing between him and 'rack rent' but—justice. Alas! when will justice be found, if the poor wait till prejudice lead the powerful to her temple?

It was strange, too, that among these reflections ever and ever the forms of the Borans were mingling themselves up. Now the 'old codger,' Daddy Boran, like an elf, with his curled flax-wig, and hooked nose, and his little grey eyes, that had a mighty inclination to cross over and visit one another. Then came the 'iron devil,' Nick, so frightfully like his father that the people, who saw them successively, for the first time, really thought it was the devil, who had made himself look younger for some diabolical purpose. And James the prodigal also; and that man who met him on his morning-walk—so singularly and so singular—his keen eye and thrilling tone of command brooking no compromise or delay—they all filled the mind of our traveller with conflicting surmise and feeling until he almost reeled with excitement.

But Gerald smiled at his own preconceptions, and, though not without an effort, shook off the crowd of imaginings that gathered round his soul. His had not been the education either of the mere animal man or the mere man of intellect; his mind and heart had both been fashioned in harmonious subserviency to the eternal designs of God. From the lips of his old guide, Father Quinlan, he had often heard the lesson, and by gradual but persevering advances had acquired the virtue of active exertion to accomplish duty and absolute submission when exertion became fruitless. When a man can no longer impute failure to himself—his fate is the wisdom of heaven, and his fortune is regulated by a principle productive only of good.

Gerald's attention was now awakened by his proximity to the 'well,' and by the crowd of fellow travellers, who less pre-occupied than he, passed rapidly by. Ailey Moore—the almost too much loved and only sister—waited his arrival, and, possibly, had been in expectancy for some time. Waggons filled with straw and bearing invalids, or cars more comfortably furnished with feather beds, and carrying some ancient woman telling her beads; old men and young, decrepit from age or from accident, and moving slowly on their crutches, while the eye suddenly uplifted and the spasmodic contraction of the lip denoted weariness or pain; young girls 'dressed for all day,' with laughing eyes and happy smile going to 'make their rounds,' for some old parent at home, or some lonely and helpless friend—for the dead it may be, for the sick; and children in their mothers' arms, that wandered with their great large eyes at the gathering so novel to them—all pursued their way along the road. But we find that we must delay our entrance to the 'Holy Well,' until the reader has had time to rest himself—when 'more of the actors' and some of the deeds' will form a second chapter.

CHAPTER II.—SOME OF THE ACTORS AND SOME OF THE DEEDS.

The well of Saint Senanus was just in such a spot as the holy recluse would have chosen for retirement. Some small distance from the road, which had been only recently made, there was a rising ground, encircled by ancient beeches, and in a quiet corner, as if the hill had lain down to rest beside it, was the blessed spring. A gigantic stone cross spread its arms above the highest point of the elevation, and directly up to the foot of the cross led a flight of rude steps, at each of which the pilgrim paused to make his

orison or acknowledgment. The whole area of the enclosure was bounded by a rough shaded path, along which, with bared feet and staid devotional pace, the 'rounds' were made, which were to be consummated by the application of the healing waters.

On the day of the events of which we chronicle—and let it be understood that we write a true history—faith and hope had brought a more than ordinary confluence to the well. Within the precincts of the sacred place were gathered a strange assemblage of almost every class; and without, as we have already intimated, a large number had collected to gratify curiosity, to amuse themselves, or to beg.

In the immediate vicinity of the entrance, and inside, sat two women and a boy. One of these, the elder, was dressed in a patch-work cloak, to which there was no telling how many years and how many different materials, had contributed. She was deeply wrinkled, embrowned by the sun, with quick grey eye, firm lip, and altogether an imperious expression of features. Her hair was perfectly white; and, terminating her accumulation of rags, she wore an astonishingly clean cap, with a most liberal appendage of border. By her side was a wallet, well watched by the boy aforesaid. He was evidently a relative; and though his hair all on end, and dreamy eyes—grey, like those of his protectress—impressed the looker-on with a notion of his idleness, yet, when the fellow took the trouble to master his stray mind (and 'twas seldom he did so), there was an intelligence in his look and word that was startling from very contrast. Let it be recorded, too, that he had learned to read and write, and that, though his corduroy jacket and trousers, or the portions of these habiliments which remained to him, there shone out a shirt as astonishingly white as the old woman's cap.

These were no other than Biddy Browne, the beggarwoman, and her grandson Eddy. Now, how Biddy Browne came to have a grandson was a wonderful thing to those who met her for the first time. She had, as may be imagined a manful mode of thinking and of acting, which is by no means acceptable to the lords of the creation, unless in themselves, and on becoming the 'better-half' of any swain, was likely to be the 'whole' of him;—that is to say, Biddy Browne was a woman that would make 'nothin' at all' of any pretender to domestic allegiance; and, indeed, gentle and simple, each in their own way, contributed by their fears, or, as they said, their affection, to spoil her.

Nevertheless, the old woman had not always been so morose—and even still there were moments when her lips parted, and her features relaxed, and her moistened eye told of the fount of feeling that welled up within. She had been a wife, a widow, and a mother. She had never possessed much, but her landlord coveted the little she had, and she became dependent upon the mother of Eddy, her daughter. The husband of the latter was first driven to excess by persecution, and then transported for having presumed to feel—'twas said that an insult he gave some shoneen made him be identified as sharer in a deed which he had never known—and he was exiled. The old story of the young wife drooping and dying, and an old parent and orphan left helpless, was that of the family of Biddy Browne. Her heart was embittered, and unless where her interest or deep affection operated, she was sharp as a two-edged sword. But she loved the boy, and he loved her fondly, and his eye, after wandering round and round scenery or gathering, would fix itself upon her face with a concentration which was surprising, and which would vanish as soon as noticed.

The beggarwoman was, at the moment of which we are writing, so seated as to command a view of the enclosure and the road. However, the former seemed to attract all her regard. In fact, she was in one of her phases of feeling, for her eyes were dimpled of tears, though her lips had relaxed nothing in their firmness of expression.

One by one the persons performing their devotions at the well presented a full front to a spectator from the gate. The 'round' having been made by the trees, and across the hilltop, by the back of the cross, there was a descent to the spring, and then the pilgrim emerged from behind, and with clasped hands and downcast eyes passed near the entrance.

A pale, young girl, with a beautiful child in her arms, just came from a recess, and bent her way towards the ascent to the stone cross. It was, on her, that the old woman's mind was occupied; and when, having step by step slowly ascended, she placed the little creature on its knees at the foot of the great symbol, and joining its tiny hands together, she pointed upwards, while the baby's eyes followed the direction, Biddy Browne, seemed quite a woman—the 'flood of never-ebbing time' was rolled back, and in the midst of awakened memories she felt as she used to feel.

'Ah, then, who is that?' said the second wo-