

AILEY MOORE

SALE OF THE TIMES SHOWING HOW EVILS, MURDER AND SUICIDE PASTIMES ARE MANAGED AND JUSTICE ADMINISTERED IN IRELAND TOGETHER WITH MANY STRIKING INCIDENTS IN OTHER LANDS

CHAPTER XXVI.—CONTINUED

"Let me kiss little Mary!" said the mother.

"Lie down, avourneen," said the old man.

"Ochone!" she answered. "I feel so queer—my head is so giddy! Daddy Jim, take care of Mary—poor little Mary—Mary," she said.

The child's face fell in towards the old man's cheek, and he trembled from head to foot—the face was icy cold. He ran from the little room to the cradle—night was just falling, the fire was nearly out, the two elder children lay in a little straw bed on the floor.

O Hierna! Hierna!—Lord! Lord! cried old James Nolan.

He ran to a corner, collected a little turf mould, got together a few sticks, and took some of the straw from beneath the two children. A momentary blaze illumined the cabin, and the grandfather ran to the cradle again, looked in, turned the cradle towards the light, looked in again, steadily—steadily.

A groan burst from the old man's heart.

"Dead!" he exclaimed; "dead!" he repeated. "Starved!" he cried, and he went down on his knees. Old James' first impulse in every excitement was to go on his knees.

"Glory, honor, an' praise be to God Almighty, an' the Virgin Mother!" prayed old James Nolan. "I'm a sinner, a sinner, so I am."

And then the old man prayed over the dead body of the innocent baby, and he wept for the poor young mother; and he stooped over the little skeletons that slept through weariness, and cried in their sleep for bread, and he kissed them gently.

"Wonderful! I don't die!" he said. "Father!" cried Mary Nolan from the room.

"Yes, aggra!"

"Bring in little Mary."

"Och, she's asleep, aggra all!"

"Och, she's dry; bring me in the poor baby."

"Not a bit of druth in it; not a bit of cushla," said old James, going to the door. "Mary, a lanav," he said, "the little angel is so quiet, that you must leave her now, an' get some rest, avourneen. Sure, Paddy will be soon in, an' then you can get up an' take—"

The idea was so terrible.

"Oh, I was dreaming, Daddy Jim," she said. "I was dreaming little Mary was dead—poor baby."

"Dead!" said the old man, yet half-trembling.

"Aye, throth, I thought she died of starvation—ochone! my head!" cried the young mother.

"God is good!" said old James Nolan.

The old man went on his knees in the cold, dark, desolate cabin, and his right hand was on the cradle of the dead infant.

"Little Mary!" he whispered. "Mary! pray for your poor mother, an' your brother an' sister, an' your father! Oh, pray for them—pray for them! God's hand is on them! an' pray for your gran'father an' gran'mother. You're happy now, ma lanav."

He had not finished speaking, when a step was heard at the door, and soon a female form entered.

"God save all here!" said the person.

"God save you, kindly," answered James faintly.

"I believe you don't know me, Mr. Nolan."

"Och, but I am growin' stupid an' queer, Biddy; but sure I ought to know you, particularly these times."

"You ought to know poor Biddy Browne, that owes you many a meal, an' many a good head's turn."

"Wisha, no, Biddy, 'tis I'm far in your debt—far, deep, indeed, a dhruifure (sister)."

"How is young Mrs. Nolan, an' the child?"

James placed his finger on his lips, and drew Biddy Browne over to the cradle.

"O Iosa Christ!" ejaculated Biddy. "Starvation!" answered James Nolan. "Starvation! an' we'll all follow 'em!"

"Oh, Mr. Nolan!"

"God's holy will be done!" cried the grandfather.

Poor Biddy Browne knew very well how things were with old James Nolan. She had met his son, broken-hearted and despairing, on the road, with hands lifted up to heaven, praying for succor. His clothes were dripping wet, and he was ghastly pale and much exhausted. He had gone to two, three, four houses, which contained honest and benevolent neighbors; but they saw the dreadful morrow, and every hour they heard of death—death—death. They wept with him or flew from him—only one could give him any relief and that relief was little. When he met Biddy Browne, he had just determined on selling his only coat for a meal or two, and returning home naked and despairing; but the beggar woman changed the current of his thoughts. Rapidly she saw his mind and the condition of his family, and as rapidly she had resolved what to do. She was just "goin' over to old Mr. Nolan's," she said, for poor Biddy made no scruple of a white lie, in order to spare "a decent boy's feelings." There was a body owed him

a crown, an' gov id to her to pay 'im," she said, "an' she was goin' to call in at Kinnacarra to bring a few things with her, for fear the family might want any of 'em. An' Biddy conked, 'maybe you'd want a shillin' of the money since you're down here,'" said poor old Biddy, putting her hand in her bosom and taking out the money.

"God is always good!" cried Patrick, seizing old Biddy by the hand and taking the proffered coin.

"Biddy," he said, "I know who owes the money to my father, an' who's payin' him," and Patrick Nolan's eyes filled, and he shook Biddy Browne's hands convulsively. Patrick saw through old Biddy's kindly fraud.

"Run, Biddy, for your daughter's soul!"

still; he wept, the old man did, and the young man's eyes were filled with tears, for he pitied the grandfather's sorrow. And then the young man took old James Nolan's burthen, which stood by the mouth of this deep pit, and while the old man's hands and eyes were raised to heaven, his gray hair dripping with the rain, the saturated rags clinging to his shivering frame, the stranger deposited it reverently in the deep hole, and he covered it up and religiously placed the seeds of withered grass in their own place, and went upon his knees beside the man whom he had helped and saved, and they prayed together.

The young peasant was not satisfied with the services which he had rendered, and determined to accompany the afflicted James Nolan back to the "gap." In fact, the old man required such charity from the stranger, for a lassitude, or rather a prostration, had succeeded to his excitement, which would have rendered his return to the house nearly impossible. Together these two commenced the way back, the stranger giving the good old man such aid as he could bestow in ascending the hill.

They had not long proceeded on their route, when Cusack the Bible-reader overtook them, and, to say the truth, appeared horror-struck at the woe-begone condition of old Nolan. He approached him with an unusual degree of respect, and presented his hand; but Nolan did not perceive him—the poor man was so absorbed in his own sad reflections.

"Why, then, Mr. Nolan, where were you in the cold an' wet this winter's morning?"

James raised his eyes and he saw feeling in the countenance of the scolarian.

"I was plantin' little Mary," answered James Nolan.

"Your little granddaughter, the flaxen-haired little colleen?"

"Dead," answered Nolan.

"An' what—"

"Starvation," quietly interposed James, but looking into the face of Cusack steadily.

"Oh, Lord—"

"Yes, Mr. Cusack, little Mary died a martyr, like the holy innocents, thank God! The longest life she could have wouldn't have been happy a death," and old James looked up to the black sky.

"You could have full an' plenty, Mr. Nolan," said Cusack, shaking his head.

"And the curse o' God along with it!" said the shivering old man.

"Well, well!" ejaculated the apostate.

"See!" said old James, suddenly acquiring almost a miraculous energy; "Mr. Cusack, you know I'm only one out o' hundreds an' thousands that see their daughters fade, an' their sons drop down day after day into the grave; an' there's joy in the funeral when we know we follow it for God. Ochone! Mr. Cusack, nature never gave the hearts and souls that bear the heavy crosses we are carryin'; an' well you know, you wouldn't do it for the creed that pays you. I beg pardon Mr. Cusack—pardon an' pardon—the day will come when you'll give the universal word we were starved in the cause of little Mary."

True for old James. There were hundreds and thousands to whom the gibbet would have been mercy, who saw each other sink minute by minute for months into the arms of death. Such martyrdoms the days of Diocletian never witnessed.

"The darkest hour of the night is nearest dawn."

Old James Nolan had strange news to welcome—perhaps reward him, when he arrived at the "gap." In entering his own house, the good man was seized by Biddy Browne the beggar woman, who summarily clasped him in her arms, and kissed him vehemently over and over again.

"Arrah! God is good! Oh, God is good! Daddy Jim, and had luck to see each other sink minute by minute, and darting a look at Cusack, who had entered with the others.

"What's the matter? Biddy, eh?"

"Glory be to the Mother of God!" exclaimed old Mrs. Nolan. "Oh! wasn't she praying for us?" continued the old lady.

"There is the man that has all the news, and the lether and the money! Arrah wisha ma grein chree hu Paddy Hynes!"

"Paddy! Paddy! Peggy Hynes' good, honest husband—oh welcome to 'thou land wance more!" cried Daddy Jim.

"A lether for you, sir, an' £50 from your son," said Paddy Hynes, placing his two arms round the old man's neck. Old James fell into the traveller's arms in a state of insensibility. Was it wonderful?

But this morning brought more news and more luck. Mary Nolan had become rapidly conscious; and what was most wonderful, her dream about seeing her little baby in heaven had assumed for her such reality, that she was quite conscious the child had died. Indeed, it is likely that when she parted from it last, she had some notion of its fate, and that her mind had yielded under the pressure of the belief in the melancholy death. She was calm then and thoughtful, and grateful when she saw her little household rescued from an impending and terrible ruin.

"O murderer, let me alone!" cried Biddy, once more. "O murderer! if there isn't Paddy Nolan, clapping his hands for joy, comin' up the road, and Father Mick—ould Father Mick wid 'im. Glory be to God!"

James Nolan blessed himself, Cusack looked pale and confused.

"Bennacht ahair!" cried Biddy, going on her knees at the door; "a blessing, Father!" cried the old beggar woman.

"Blessings on all here!" said Father Mick, looking the very sunshine of happiness; "blessings on all and every one!" cried the old priest.

"Great news!" cried young Nolan. "Och, Father," cried old James, "you're always the image o' God to us; you war hungry an' we all knew id before any of us wanted a meal."

"Hold your tongue, you old Rapparee," said Father Mick, fondly. Don't you remember when we were boys together? Go 'now an' make a gentleman o' yourself," he said, flinging him a bundle, "and pray for happy days to the Moores of Moorfield!"

"The Moores of Moorfield! ahair! the Moores of Moorfield!"

"Everyone has his own again. Daddy Moran has left Moorfield to the 'Flower o' the Valley' and her brother, and ten thousand golden guineas besides."

"O Muire mahair!" cried Betty, flinging herself on her knees.

"And Biddy Browne? Go 'now an' make a gentleman o' yourself," he said, flinging her a bundle, "and pray for happy days to the Moores of Moorfield!"

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