

HER IRISH HERITAGE

BY ANNIE M. P. SMITHSON

AUTHOR OF "BY STRANGE PATHS"

CHAPTER XII.—CONTINUED

Mary and Tom left the dining-room together after tea was over, for they had promised to spend an hour with Angel, who was not so well these days.

"Don't worry, dear," she said gently. "I know it's hard for you—but we—we can do nothing until we find where she is."

"Oh, dear God!" said the other, "if only anyone else but Bride had met her. What a piece of ill-luck!"

"Well perhaps it will be better luck next time," said his sister, trying to cheer him, although her own heart was heavy within her.

On entering Angel's room they found that Clare was there before them. Angel raised herself eagerly on her couch when she saw them—she was literally trembling with eagerness, and a hectic flush burned on her cheeks.

"Oh, Tom! Oh, Mary!" she cried. "Clare has been telling me about Bride meeting Mary Carmichael. Oh! why didn't she stop to speak to why didn't she? How could she be so cruel as not to do so!"

"Hush, darling," said Mary, putting her arms round the thin little form, "it can't be helped now. Bride didn't think you know—she was busy and worried over her cases."

"Oh, bother her cases!" cried Angel, very much as her brother Pat had done; what are all her old cases beside my dear, dear Mary?"

Clare laughed, and even in Tom's sad eyes a ghost of a smile appeared. Angel was so seldom angry—it was such a rare occurrence, and alas, just now, so useless.

"Don't fret, sweetheart," he said, stooping to stroke the soft fair hair. "If Bride met her, she's still in Dublin, still near us, and surely one of the rest of us will meet her some day, and then we won't let her off so easily!"

"Oh, Tom!" said the little one piteously. "I have had such awful dreams about Mary—and always, always she is standing on the brink of something—it's like a great rock or precipice—I don't know what, but she is standing there always and so near—so near to the edge. And oh, Tom, if you could see her face as I see it, night after night—night after night!"

They soothed her as best they could, those two who loved her so, and Clare Castlemaine stood and looked on. Since Mary Carmichael's trouble she had been going through a strange time, a time of storm and stress. In some queer inexplicable manner, Clare had always felt that her own life and future were bound up with Mary Carmichael, she had felt this ever since she had first met particularly did she feel this in the case of religion. It seemed to Clare that the Catholic Faith, towards which she had been drawn almost in spite of herself during these last weeks, would stain or fall by the attitude that Mary would now adopt—by the spirit in which she would bear this trouble which had descended upon her with such overwhelming force. Nurse Seeley had come to see the Blakes, and knowing as she did, that they were such real friends of her dear Mac, she had confided fully in them and they knew as much as herself. They talked over matters together, they planned and hoped and thought of this thing and that thing, but alas, what good could they do until Mary was found?

"Oh! I am afraid for her!" said Mary later on when only she and Tom and Clare were left talking downstairs, "I am afraid for her."

"You mean?" asked Tom, with the lines of pain showing more clearly on his honest face.

"I mean spiritually," replied his sister. Then she glanced rather wistfully at Clare.

"Perhaps I shouldn't speak of these things before you, Clare," she said sadly; "but I can't help it—my heart is sore tonight."

"You see, Mary Carmichael is a convert, and a comparatively recent one, all zeal and fire and high ideals—like converts often are. But she is a queer mixture, and I'm so afraid that her religion may not stand this terrible strain that God has seen fit to put upon it—I'm so afraid that in sheer despair she may do something desperate."

Clare looked up eagerly. "That's just what I am interested in," she said. "I'll have a chance now to see what Catholics are made of, so to speak, to see what real good there is in their religion. If Mary Carmichael stands this test well and keeps her Faith as strongly as ever—well, then I shall know that there is something in that Faith—something worth living for, and worth dying for, too!"

Tom got up and, walking over to the fireplace, stood leaning against the mantelpiece looking down at her. "Clare," he said quietly, "we are also wondering how Mary Carmichael will meet this trouble."

Not, of course, that it would affect our Faith in anyway—that, thank God, is out of the question for us—but for her own sake we are terribly anxious. She is, as you know, a recent convert, very fiery and enthusiastic—apt in fact to run to extremes even in her religious duties, and for those very reasons we are somewhat afraid for her now."

Clare listened eagerly. "Oh, Tom," she said, "how do you think she will bear it?" Her cousin's face looked strangely haggard and drawn, as he replied briefly.

"God only knows," said Mary, putting down her eternal darning for a few moments, and clasping her hands together in her lap. "You see she idealised Dr. Delaney so much, he was her type of perfect manhood—of truth and honor and chivalry, but above all of Catholicity at its highest and best. She looked up to him and regarded him as her ideal of Catholic manhood. She said to me: 'In Theo I see what the Catholic Faith can make of a man.'"

"Oh, that's nonsense," said Clare, half angrily. "I have met heaps of good men—honest and truthful, yes, and chivalrous, too. Men who would scorn to treat a woman as Dr. Delaney has treated Mary Carmichael, and yet they hadn't any definite religious beliefs at all—much less were they Catholics."

Mary Blake looked doubtful, but Tom said quietly. Yes, there are such men outside the Church; had they been within the fold they would probably have added to her army of saints."

Clare smiled. "Well, anyway," she said, "I'm going to wait and see how Mary Carmichael bears this trouble, which, of course, her Faith has taught her should be borne with Christian resignation."

She left the room soon afterwards and Tom and Mary Blake were alone. Mary's eyes sought her brother's anxiously as he still stood on the hearthrug—his attitude moody and despondent. Lifting his head he caught Mary's glance, and forced a smile to his lips.

"Don't fret for me, sister mine," he said in his quaint lovable way, and coming over to her he put his arms around her and leant his head on her shoulder; "don't worry, sis; but pray for her—pray for her!"

"Oh, Tom, I do," said Mary, with tears welling up to her eyes; "if we could only see her, if we only knew more about the whole matter! I can't think how Dr. Delaney—she stopped suddenly, for Tom had sprung upright, his hands clenched, and his eyes blazing.

"Don't, Mary—don't!" he said, in a choked voice; "don't mention the villain's name for God's sake—I cannot control myself when I think of him!"

His sister looked at him, half-frightened, never had she seen this quiet, serious, and even tempered brother of hers so aroused.

"Very well, dear," she said gently, and turned the conversation. Meanwhile the subject of their thoughts was leading her lonely and miserable life in Ranelagh. Mrs. Doolan, an old patient, had been delighted to have Mary in her little "bed-sitting-room" on the ground floor, and was very kind to her; but Mary was incapable these days of feeling either kindness or unkindness. Her feelings seemed still quite numb. Two facts alone stood out clearly before her mental vision—first, that Theodore Delaney had cast her aside when tired of her, had treated her as he would treat a woman for whom he had no respect, and secondly, he was a Catholic, and considered by all as an example of what a practical good Catholic should be. Therefore, for Mary, the Catholic Faith had failed.

"By their fruits ye shall know them," she repeated bitterly to herself, often and often during this desolate time, and desolate she was indeed, weary and lonely; she had deliberately shut out her God and turned her back on heaven and all spiritual consolations, and on Earth, with all its human joys and sympathies also. A soul in such a state is fit for the assaults of our spiritual foes, and the arch-enemy of the human race, perceiving that she stood alone and helpless, and unprotected, drew near, knowing that here would be an easy conquest—for we cannot fight without weapons; and, alas, Mary Carmichael had laid aside all her spiritual armour.

One morning, after a more than usual sleepless night, she went out about ten o'clock, and turned her steps citywards. She would for once risk meeting any of her friends, for she was tired of the streets and roads round Ranelagh and thought a change of scene would be more cheerful. She turned into Stephen's Green and stood for a moment idly watching with indifferent eyes the wild fowl on the water.

"Little Mary Carmichael! or do my eyes deceive me?"

Mary turned swiftly at the sound of the man's voice beside her, and she looked at him stupidly for a second. As she did so her mind went swiftly back to her London life and especially to one summer's day at Richmond, one of her "days off," and not the only one which she had spent in the fascinating company of Dr. Charles Raymond.

Charles Vere Raymond, M. B., F. R. C. S., etc., was a man of

about forty years of age. Tall, slight and clean shaven and faultlessly groomed and tailored as usual; he stood and looked keenly at Mary, through his inevitable eyeglass. He was a very clever surgeon, and many a critical "case" had Mary nursed for him in the past. He had thought very highly of her talents for her profession, and as a woman she had always possessed a curious fascination for him. She had seemed so different from the other nurses in the West End Home, whom he knew, and with whom he had flirted and amused himself in his idle moments. There was always "something" about Mary which had gained his respect, and Charles Raymond was not one who thought very highly of women as a rule. He was devoted to his profession, but merely as a profession, and regarded it from a purely scientific point of view. In his leisure moments—which however were not many—he led the typical life of a London man about town, and enjoyed without scruple any pleasures that came in his way. For the rest he was an avowed atheist, and, according to his belief, this life spent in his own pleasures.

Slowly Mary held out her hand, and he grasped it warmly. "So it is little Mac," he said laughing; "I was only wondering when I arrived here a few days ago for a short holiday, whether I should see you or not. But you are not looking well! Why, our grimy London must have agreed better with you than your own dear Dublin seems to have done."

Mary winced as she tried to smile at him in the old gaily manner. "I—I have not been very well lately," she said, "and I am on sick leave just now—but I'll soon be all right again."

"It's to be hoped so," replied Dr. Raymond cheerily. But he was not deceived; his professional glance was too keen to be taken in by any such excuses, and he realised that the woman beside him was suffering from something more than a cold, and that her sufferings were more of the mind than of the body, although, so closely are the two interwoven—as none know better than physicians—her bodily health was affected also in a lesser degree.

"Let us sit down here," he said, as they came to a seat, "and now tell me all your news since we met last—let me see how long ago."

"Three years," said Mary, with a tightening of the lips as she remembered all that those three years had brought to her.

"Three years," echoed Charles Raymond. "So it is. And yet in some ways it seems only like yesterday that we drove down to Richmond together. Do you remember, little girl?—and our dinner afterwards at the Star and Garter?—and the drive back by moonlight."

Mary did not answer. The devil was beside her—very close, and his arguments were very specious. After all why shouldn't she enjoy herself—if she could in this world? Perhaps there was no other? How was she to know?—all the whole building of her temple of Faith has fallen down—collapsed and lay in ruins beside her, her eyes wide open in seeming terror, and her cheeks flushed. She held out her trembling hands to her brother and bending over her he held them to his breast, while he tried to soothe her.

Tea was over at the Blakes, on the evening of the same day. Shamus and Norah had gone out and Bride also was away at one of her numerous Committee meetings, while Pat had gone to see a fellow-student on the same road. Only Mr. Blake, Mary and Tom were in the dining room.

Suddenly a piercing scream, followed by a voice calling, "Mary! Mary!" in tones of agonised supplication were heard. The three sprang to their feet simultaneously, and all cried "Angel," as though in one voice.

Tom reached her room first, quickly followed by his sister and Mr. Blake. Angel was sitting up in bed—she had been too weak the last few days to be allowed up—her hair tumbling over her shoulders, her eyes wide open in seeming terror, and her cheeks flushed. She held out her trembling hands to her brother and bending over her he held them to his breast, while he tried to soothe her.

and reckless, as if she cared little what she did or what became of her. What then about her religious zeal of which some of the London nurses had been telling him?

Mary sat silent for a moment, idly raking the gravel with the toe of her shoe. Then she lifted her eyes and looked at him with a more reckless expression than he had ever seen in any of the old London days.

"Well, yes, it's true," she said, "or rather, it was true, for I think I have had enough of Catholics—they are hypocrites—teaching one thing, and practising another."

Charles Raymond leant back in his seat and laughed. Here indeed was a piece of luck. The Gods were kind, and he would not have such a dull holiday after all.

"Well, I imagine he can tell good girl," he said cynically, "as far as I could ever discover, all forms of so-called Christianity are alike. Why if any of their sects really lived up to their teaching the world would be a very different place, and there wouldn't be much room in it for such a hardened sinner as myself? However, don't bother your head any more about these religious people—let them please themselves and go their way—and we will go ours. Now I have only a few days to spend in Dublin. Let us make the most of it, shall we? as if we were back in London three years ago."

For one moment Mary hesitated—and the cause of her hesitation was a wonder to herself. It was no last appeal to her better self by religion or faith or morality—these existed no longer for Mary. But the picture that made her pause for a moment before taking her downward step was that of a frail fair-haired girl lying on a couch, of blue eyes looking—oh, so anxiously into hers, and of a sweet, beseeching voice that seemed to say over and over again: "Oh, Mary! Mary! don't!"

Angry she brushed the vision aside, and turned with a reckless laugh to the man at her side.

"All right," she said, in the slang of past days, "I'm on."

"Good," said Charles Raymond, with quiet satisfaction. "Well what about this evening then?"

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TO BE CONTINUED

THE DIP OF THE SCALES

By Anna C. Minogue

It was a homey kitchen where Aunt Becky sat, peeling apples. Walls of that yellow you see in old crockery, with brown trimmings that had a hint of red, a braided rug, cream-tinted curtains—and a wood stove!

"I will have to give up my stove some day, for wood is getting scarce, and men to cut and haul it in, grass—just as there is no use crossing your bridge, till you come to it."

Thus Aunt Becky, when obeying her, "Honey, put a stick of wood in the stove for me, please," I expressed my delight at that relic of our grandfathers' days.

I will have these apples ready for the oven in a jiffy, and then I'll look for those samples I suppose you got for me in town yesterday? It seems the strangest thing in the world, my buying a dress for the wedding of a Grayson and a Kelly," she went on, scraping the core out of an apple. "If cousin Rose Grayson knew of it, she would rise out of her grave to forbid it. You can't understand, honey, how some of those old families here in the Blue Grass used to despise the Irish, back there before the war. I never blamed the Irish for siding with the Yankees. It was their chance to get even. I believe in everybody getting even, if they can. The good Lord does Himself. You do anything against the Lord, and you'll settle up sometime or other."

Uncle John's, and as their children were grown up, and ours growing, I spent half my time over there. I was there the night Martin Kelly came singing up the road and turned in at the gate. He had heard, he said, that my uncle had a stone fence to build and he was there to build it. My uncle didn't think as much of him as one of his negroes, but he belonged to the white race. He was given a room to himself and eat his meals on the back porch.

"Cousin Rose was my uncle's youngest child. She was seventeen and a mighty pretty girl, even if I do say it. The first Sunday Martin Kelly was at my uncle's, Rose and I met him, dressed up and walking toward the gate. 'Where are you going, Martin?' she demanded. 'To Mass, in Lexington, Rose!' he answered. I saw my cousin's face get a burning red. The young man walked on, singing as he went down the white turnpike. Rose flew to my uncle, mad as a hornet. 'Served you right for taking any notice of him!' was all the satisfaction she got from the old man. Rose was very quiet all that day and I think she laid her plans to punish him herself. The next morning I noticed she took great pains in dressing and she said to me: 'The Irishman sings well, Becky, I imagine he can tell good news to you. When we go out on the back porch, you may go to his table, and ask him if there really are fairies in Ireland.'"

"I did as I was bid, while Rose stood at one of the pillars, fastening up a morning-glory. 'Certainly there are fairies in Ireland,' said Kelly, 'and you can take back my answer to your cousin, since she sent you. Rose heard him and again she got red—in the face, and I thought she would fly to my table, and ask him if there really are fairies in Ireland.'"

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