

NORA DILLON'S DREAM

(Brian O'Higgins, in New Ireland.)

It was Christmas Eve in a Leinster home. Nora Dillon sat by the cheery fire that blazed and crackled on the open hearth; she felt tired, for she had been busy all day since early morning, and only now had she found a moment in which to rest. Everything was finished, all was in readiness for the Great Festival that is honored as truly in the peasant homes of Ireland as in any land beneath the sun; the last bit of holly was fitted into its place among the pictures and other little ornamental articles on the white-washed walls, the tables and chairs and stools were scoured until they became white as when they left the carpenter's hands, the milk-cans, saucers, and other kitchen utensils, shone like silver in the light of the fire, the big Christmas candle was placed in the old-fashioned candle-stick in the centre of the table opposite the kitchen window, the kettle was crooning contentedly over the fire ready for action, and all that two skillful hands could accomplish had been done to make the little home as cheerful and festive-looking as possible. No wonder that Nora felt weary as she sank into the old chair of wicker rods beside the fire to rest until the arrival of her father and mother from the market town, a couple of miles off, whither they had gone to do the Christmas shopping, as was their wont.

They were simple people, Mike Dillon and his wife Kate—poor, as poverty is spoken, but rich in the blessings of peace and health and contentment of mind. Nora was their only living child, though God had sent them six children besides her, and had called them home again, some in the dawn of babyhood, some in the early joyous days of boyhood and girlhood, and one, the eldest, Jim, who had emigrated and found a grave in the land of the stranger. It was the sad story so often repeated—the young, soft, country-reared peasant going into a life-touring, smoky western city and then undergoing an overburdening toil—hardship, con- sumption and death. It was a great blow to the poor parents, not so much on account of his death, for they knew how to welcome the Holy Will of God, but that he should be so far away from them in a cold, strange land, with no one in all likelihood to kneel by his grave and offer up a prayer for his soul. They would not mind so much if he was sleeping with the others in the little churchyard at home, where they could go on the Sunday morning and mingle their tears with the dust above his breast, and where they themselves would join him some day.

It was hard at first, but the silent years and their faith in the all-seeing Father softened the great sorrow, and then they had Nora—she had been spared to them and she was their comforter and consolator—her loving care, her cheering words, and hearty laughter brought back into their lives the gladness of former days. Lately, however, the semblance of a shadow had begun to creep around them again. Just a few days before this Christmas Eve, Nora had received a letter from a girl in America, an old school companion, urging her to leave the dullness of home behind and go where she would quickly earn a fortune. She told of her own success in obtaining a fine position, mentioning that Nora would be sure to find the same in a short time, and offered to pay her passage out to the New World if she would only consent to go. The old people were opposed to such a course; they would rather keep her at home, and the memory of Jim's fate haunted them. But Nora was entirely bent upon going, and after coaxing a sort of semi-approval that sounded like a refusal, from her parents, she answered her friend's letter, accepting her offer gratefully. She had in her nature that inexplicable hankering after the great world outside the circle of home, which seems to be placed like a curse over the Children of Ireland, especially her daughters, and in the realization of which so many of them are sadly disappointed, meeting instead of the fortune which their fancies had fashioned out for them, misery, humiliation, destruction, and oft-time, sinful death.

Eamon Fitzgerald, Nora's playmate in childhood, her schoolmate and friend, a strenuous worker for Ireland as secretary of the local branch of the Gaelic League, had pointed out to her the dangers attendant on emigration, and had almost begged of her to abandon the idea of going, but all was useless; she had finally decided to go in the early spring and no amount of entreaty could induce her to alter that decision. Thoughts of Christmas gone by and of others yet to come, mingled together in her mind as she lay back in the old chair and gazed dreamily into the warm heart of the fire.

Where would she be this time twelve months? What would she be doing? Who would be near her and speaking to her? Visions of a city home of brilliant lights, of comfort and wealth and all that a girl could wish for, flashed before her mind's eye, bright and very near at first, then growing dimmer and dimmer, and fading away until at last they wooed her into the realms of sleep. And then she came to a dream. She saw the hills of home and the dear friends, and the old haunts of childhood fading away, passing from view slowly but surely; she heard her mother's voice raised in a wall of lamentation, and she saw her father's face reproachful and sad, and worn, entreating her to remain at home; she felt the hot tears scorching her cheek and blinding her eyes, but the tempter's whisper spoke into her ear, "There is wealth beyond the sea. Come, you will find it, and then you can return." She nerved her heart against pain and grief, and went towards where the wealth was waiting. Then home and all were blotted out and over the vast ocean she was speeding. To right and left, in front and rear, was a boundless waste of waters farther than the eye could reach; hundreds of faces were before her eyes, hundreds of forms were around her, but still she felt alone and friendless among them all, and that chilling loneliness was the first shadow on the bright vision that lured her away from home.

At last the weary sea-journey came to an end, and into a great noisy city she went, where the people went about their business at a break-neck speed, where it was a race for gold from morning till night and again

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But the darkness became more intense and terrible, the black figures came nearer and nearer, she felt their cold fingers gripping her arms, and in the loudest voice she could command, she screamed, her last thought centred on home, "Eamon, Eamon, come to me, save me, save me!" "Nora, do not scream so, I am here. Good Heavens! you are shivering like a leaf, and you are whiter than the snow outside. What is the matter? What has happened?" Nora started and looked around, trembling and dazed. She had wakened with the scream and for a moment, could not believe that she was really at home and that she had been only dreaming. Eamon Fitzgerald was standing beside her, holding her hand in his own, speaking in rapid tones, and gazing at her anxiously, the fire was blazing as cheerily as ever, and everything was unchanged.

Nora breathed a long sigh of relief and shuddered slightly at the thought of her recent terror. "O, Eamon," she said, in a low tone, "I have dreamed a terrible dream, and I can scarcely make myself believe that it was unreal. Listen for a moment and I will tell you all about it and you will not blame me for my terror."

In hurried words she told him what had passed before her mind's eye, not even the least portion was left unaccounted for, it was all stamped clearly upon her mind. "Thank God," said Eamon, fervently, "would to heaven that a thousand girls all over Ireland to-night could listen to what you have told me, or have dreamed your dream. Eamon, I think it is a picture, Nora, placed before you by an all-wise Providence as a timely warning. And it is a true picture whether or no. Many a poor Irish exile boy and girl has met with even a worse fate than that portrayed in your dream. And what of America now, Nora?"

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"You will never repent those words, Nora. If there is wealth beyond the seas, there is also misery. There is work to-day at home for the women of Ireland. Our land has been in a dream as you were, and God has shown her a picture of the black future before her, if she continues walking in the paths of the stranger. She has heeded the warning, she has felt her foot once more on the way that is her own, and she needs all her daughters, even more than her sons, to help her along that way, until the goal of freedom comes in view, and the power of the stranger is broken for ever."

Nora's story was a pleasant surprise to Tom Dillon and his wife when they returned home, and there was at least one pleasant fire-side group in Ireland that Christmas Eve. The Branch of the Gaelic League, whose hard-working secretary Eamon was, and is, for he would accept no higher post, has prospered and extended its labors since then. I see by a local paper received the other day, that a Woman's Branch has recently been established in the same place, whose members are by no means few. The name of the President is Mrs. Nora Fitzgerald.

The Irish in Scotland

The natives of Connaught resident in Glasgow and the west of Scotland, assembled in thousands to celebrate their annual reunion. His Grace the Archbishop of Glasgow presided, and delivered an eloquent address, dealing with current affairs in Ireland. Archbishop Maguire, who was received with loud cheers, expressed his regret that the Most Rev. Dr. Clancy had been unable to appear at that reunion. Cardinal Logue, who had been in Glasgow from time to time, had told them more than once that he had a general supervision over Irishmen in every part of the world. He did not know whether everybody who had listened to his Eminence was willing to admit that, but at any rate, his audience was willing to admit that (laughter); and he supposed Bishop Clancy would make a similar claim. Had he been there Dr. Clancy would be surprised to find such an enormous assemblage of people from the province of Connaught. He doubted very much whether his Lordship could gather as many Connaughtmen from the principal town of his diocese (laughter and applause). They were all sorry they could not receive from the lips of one of the leaders of the people in Ireland an account of how Ireland is and where they should stand. The answer to that used to be that the answer was the distressful country that ever yet has been; but he thought that if Bishop Clancy was there he would have told them a somewhat different story of their country, and he could in a kind of way say his own country also had passed through many years of sorrow and trouble, and what was worse than that, many years of deliberate oppression (cheers). He was not a politician, and they would have no chance of hearing from him, as they might from Bishop Clancy, the politics which perhaps would be pleasing to many of them. He did not stand in the way of the right of any man, of any clergyman or bishop to interfere in politics if he considered it was right for him to do so. That was a point upon which every man must judge for himself. He interfered with no man's liberty, and at the same time he should feel unwilling that any man should interfere with his own liberty on the same subject (cheers); but a man did not require to be a politician or a partisan in order to acknowledge that there was perhaps no country in the world that had been the subject of so much deliberate oppression as their country had been (cheers). Other countries from time to time had been sometimes down and sometimes up, but their country for hundreds of years had suffered more deliberate oppression than any other, and all politicians, with perhaps the exception of a small number in the North of Ireland, would admit that truth, which was practically above all controversy. It seemed to him that the time was at last drawing to an end, and that brighter times were in prospect for Ireland than she ever had before (cheers). One thing especially that made them perhaps more hopeful than they should be otherwise was that there seemed to be departing from the Irish nation what, if he might be allowed to say so, was for many years one of the principal defects, that was the tendency to disunion among the Scotch. The famous Dr. Johnson had said that whilst Scotchmen were joined in a conspiracy to make little of everyone else and to make much of themselves, the Irish were an impartial people, as no one ever heard one Irishman say a good word of another. Thank God that was coming to an end, and he was quite sure that with their gifts and energy the Irish people would become a great nation (cheers). Ireland had been cursed for many years by landlordism. While there was absolutely no supervision exercised by Irish landlords, there was constant supervision over the tenants in order to make them pay their rent, and sometimes to make them do things which they were not in the least legally bound to do. The question had been one entirely of the rights of property, and nothing whatever of the duties of property. A great man—if he was a great man—said once, many years ago, "We are now in the stage of British history when we should hear more about the duties of property and less about the rights of property." That time has now come in Ireland (cheers). He hoped that in the coming session of parliament all the defects in the measure which created a peasant propriety in Ireland would be cleared away. It used to be said, "Why should Irishmen be content to pass their lives in dull, agricultural pursuits in an island surrounded, as Lord Beaconsfield said, by a melancholy ocean? Why should they not go to New York or to Glasgow or elsewhere? That superstition had died out. When a great millionaire was reported, some time ago, to have made such a statement he was told by the Irish leader that the Irishman at home, even in poverty, was far better off than the Irishman in New York or Chicago (cheers). Referring to the University question, His Grace said they had often been told that the Catholic Church discouraged education and wanted to keep the people in ignorance and darkness. It was very strange that, if that were the case, it was the only point upon which the British Government in Ireland worked to bring about what the Catholic Church required; or if the Church wanted the people to remain in ignorance, the British Government certainly made every effort to keep them in ignorance (laughter and cheers). Much had been done to settle this question, but they had not yet in Ireland what they had in Scotland—an education system which allowed the sons of the humblest to rise to the top of the educational tree (cheers). He thought the demands of the Irish people and the Irish clergy were extremely reasonable, and there was at least a prospect of these extremely reasonable demands being granted (loud and prolonged cheers).

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