

MARY LEE or The Yankee in Ireland

BY PAUL PEPPERGRASS, ESQ.

CHAPTER XIX.

UNCLE JERRY AND THE "THREE TWINS."
—A SURPRISE.

The reader will remember that Mrs. Motherly had a strong objection to Mr. Guirke's carrying his purse with him, whenever she suspected him of going to visit the blind fiddler at the Cairn, or the widow with the "three twins," at Ballymaddock. She insisted it was her duty to search his pockets on such occasions, and he submitted her to do so, with all the docility of a child, save and except when a third party happened to be present; then he drew himself up, and proclaimed his independence both by word and look, but so ostentatiously withal, that any one with the slightest discrimination might have seen it was only the advantage the coward takes, when he unexpectedly finds help at his back. Uncle Jerry was, we must admit, rather peculiar in the exercise of his benevolence, or, as Mrs. Motherly used to say, very odd in his ways. It was not exactly because Batt Curley of the Cairn was destitute of the ordinary means of living, that he took such a kindly interest in him, for Batt always earned enough to eat and drink by his fiddle, hard as the times were; it was because he was old and blind, and only a fiddler at that. So also with respect to the widow and the "three twins," at Ballymaddock; there was nothing very lamentable in her case either; but the thought of a poor lone woman, with three children born at a birth to take care of, so fixed itself about his heart, that he found it impossible to banish it. And it was only because the case of the negro had something peculiar in it, his sympathy was so suddenly excited in his favor. Had the doctor told him the negro's arms had been broken, he would have felt for the poor sufferer, no doubt, as he felt for everybody in distress; but to have all his toes broken and disjointed, was something dreadful to think of. A door African wounded in this manner touched the tenderest sympathies of his generous soul.

The reader must not imagine for a moment, notwithstanding all we have said, that Uncle Jerry's fancy had more to do with his benevolence than his heart. No such thing; fancy was only the angel of light that stood by, while Charity, the first-born of the Redeemer, drew the picture of human sorrow, and held it up before him. Christian Charity, loveliest of virtues! when the Saviour, who gave you in triumph to the world, first presented you on Calvary, how beautiful you were then! When, taking you by the hand, He led you up the hill, and pointing to the Sun of Christianity just beginning to rise, bade you go forth to bless and bind all hearts together, till the light of that source of life forevermore—how modest your blushing face, and how timid your noiseless step, as you then came out from the darkness of paganism, to weave your web of love round the great heart of regenerated humanity! You had worshippers in those days to fall in millions at your feet; but where are they now? Alas, alas! like the deserted king of Greece, looking round the Bay of Salamis for his scattered ships—

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A PAINTING OF CHRIST.

A man who tottered as he walked, whose dress was so shabby that it was long past even the appearance of gentility, whose unkempt hair was but half concealed by a battered and greasy hat and whose honest collar turned up and tightly pinned beneath his chin to conceal the fact that his shirt was collarless, paused before the entrance to one of the great up-town churches of New York, and with bloodshot eyes, peered through the doorway into the vestibule. Several moments he hesitated. Then, with an unconscious gesture of latent dignity, his form straightened and with head erect, he passed into the church.

The chimes had long since ceased to ring, the priest was already in the midst of his sermon, and as the human derelict drifted into the rear-most part of that vast auditorium he heard from the pulpit, in stentorian tones, these words: "Christ being risen from the dead, dieth no more. Sin hath no more dominion over him."

It seemed to the weary man as though these words were addressed personally to him, and as he knelt for a moment with bowed head, his eyes were turned to the altar, and he saw a crucifix, which had not recurred to him in many years, something like a glow thrilled him so that presently he leaned back, and, fixing his tired eyes upon the preacher, he listened with concentrated attention to every word of the sermon. So wrapped was he in what he heard and so intense were the emotions engendered by it that he was not conscious of the end of the discourse, and it was not until many moments later, when almost the entire congregation had left the church, that he remembered where he was.

He started to his feet then with sudden energy, intent only upon leaving the church before he should be recognized, for there were many present who had known him in the past; but the throng of people in the aisles was too dense for him to penetrate, so he sank back upon the cushions again and with bowed head waiting.

Presently he was startled by the touch of a hand upon his shoulder, and, looking up quickly, he started to his feet, shamefaced and flushed.

The hand that touched him was now stretched out, palm upward, for him to take, but he pretended not to see it.

"I should have avoided you," he said, "I believe me, Roderick, I did not mean that any one should recognize me. I do not know why I came here at all to-day."

And then smiling bitterly and with irony in his voice, he added, "I did not even know that it was Easter until after I entered the church."

"Will you go home with me, Philip?" asked the other, still keeping his hand extended, as if determined that it should be seen and taken.

"Home with you? No, thank you all the same."

"Then let me go with you."

"I am sorry, Rod, but I have no place to take you," was the reply.

"It's so long since I held a brush or a palette in either hand. The only home that I know now I find in the back rooms of gin mills. Does not my appearance vouch for the truth of this statement?"

"Then let us sit here for a little while, for I want to talk to you, Phil. For months I have tried in vain to find you. Here we will be quiet and undisturbed."

"Are you willing to be seen in the company of such as I, Roderick?" asked the artist tensely. "Do you remember what I was, and do you realize what I am?"

"I doubt it. Yet it was kind of you to speak to me to-day; kinder still to wish to help me, for that, I know, is your wish; but I am beyond help from others. The only chance left to me now lies within myself."

"Have you forgotten, Phil, that this is Easter Sunday?"

"No; I have just remembered it."

"Why not leave the dead past behind you to-day and rise from this living death, as Christ rose 1900 years ago?"

"If I only could, if I only could!"

"You can if you will."

"How?"

"You say you have lost your manhood? Have you also sacrificed your talents?"

"No; I can paint as well as ever when my nerves are not unstrung, but I have prostituted them shamefully. Do you know how I keep body and soul together now? By decorating saloon mirrors and taking my pay in drinks and luncheons over the bars. You find me in this condition because I have degenerated into a thing."

"Nonsense! Phil. Did you ever have a better friend than I was in the old days?"

"Never."

"Will you put aside your false pride and let me be that same friend now?"

"If you wish to lend me money—no."

"That is not what I mean. I want to help you, just as you would help me if the conditions were reversed. If you will consent to what I have to propose, you will confer the favor, not I. Will you hear the proposition?"

"Yes. What is it?"

"There has been a committee appointed, of which I am chairman, to have painted a life-size portrait of the Master. It is to hang yonder, over the chancel. Will you accept the commission? Will you paint the picture? I have the authority to give the order, and it is expected that I will make a payment in advance. There is no one in all this city as competent as you, self to do the work. Will you do it?"

The artist was silent for a moment, and when he replied there was a dreamy, introspective expression in his eyes, and his voice was so low that the words he uttered were almost inaudible.

"If you had asked those questions an hour ago," he said, "I should have answered no. Now I answer yes. Then I was aimless, hopeless, passionless. I drifted into this church as a chip drifts into an eddy of the stream of life. I believed that I had lost all the ability to be emotional, but there was something in the sermon we

heard to