

# THE ADVOCATE.

VOL. V.

Sun.

NOVA SCOTIA, DECEMBER 24, 1897.

No. 2.

## A Merry Xmas to all Readers of The Advocate.

SELECT SERIAL.

### NORAH DESMOND'S DOOM

By the Author of "A YEAR OF HER LIFE," "KATHY'S SECRET," "A MODEL GIRL," "A MANAGING MOTHER," &c.

#### CHAPTER II.

THE next morning Norah having recovered from her depression of the night before, is standing with a little group of her poorer tenants very busy in supplying their wants, when Terence puts his curly head in the door of what she is pleased to call her surgery.

"Is there any admittance?" he says.

"Oh, come in!" Norah cries eagerly. "You will just be all the use in the world. Here's Mrs. O'Flaherty wants some lotion for her rheumatism, and so does Mary Reilly. There's the big bottle up there on the shelf. Pour the lotion out carefully. And now, Eily, let me see the baby's arm. Dear me, she'll know better next time than to try playing with the boiling kettle!"

"She will that same," the woman answers. "An't it meself that has been nearly wore out these last three nights wid her frettin'!"

Norah dresses the little injured arm so skillfully that the child's wailing ceases, and her busy fingers never stop while she bids Mrs. O'Flaherty rub in the lotion at bedtime, and promises to bring some jelly down to Mary Reilly's sick mother, and strong soup for little Micky Dawson, who has been weak and ailing.

At last they are all gone, with grateful hearts and full hands, and, as the sound of the last blessing dies upon the air, Norah turns to Terence O'Neil.

"There, that is what you will have to do when I am away!"

"Me!" he cries, amazed into bad grammar. "I should poison them all; give the babies the rheumatism stuff to drink, and tell the old women to rub themselves with cough mixture. I could never do it."

"Oh, yes!" she says confidently. "It only wants a little practice; and somebody must help the poor people when I am away."

"That is just what I wanted to talk to you about," he begins eagerly. "You can't really mean to go, Norah! What shall we all do without you?"

"Learn to help yourselves," she answers gaily, "and to help each other. Of course I don't want you to do quite as well without me as with me."

"We promise not," Terence interposes.

"But," continues Norah, frowning at him, "I do hope you will all try, you especially, Terence, to be as helpful as you can. Oh, it will do you good for me to go away for a month or so!"

"I won't," he says ruefully. "We shall all fall into bad ways and keep low company, and be so deteriorated when you return that you won't be able to tell the difference betwix me an' Mike Hooley."

Mike Hooley is the laziest, dirtiest ne'er-do-well in the neighbourhood. But Norah is not to be scared by the dismal picture.

"Well, I shall be so improved by my residence in the metropolis that things will balance pretty evenly," she says, laughing. "And now, if you are going to stop, Terence, you must be quiet, please, for I have my accounts to do."

"And after?" he asks.

"Afterwards I must take down the soup and jelly I promised, if they are ready."

"Then I'll stay," he decides.

"And not talk?" "Of course not, when I know you want to be quiet,"

Nevertheless he begins to sing, after a moment.

"So my Kathleen, you're goin' to leave me all alone by meself in this place. But I'm sure that you'll never desave me. Oh, no, if there's truth in that face!"

Though English, desavers by nature. Though perhaps you may think them sincere.

They're you're a wate charmin' creature; But don't you believe them, my dear!"

Norah had been trying to shut her ears to the mellow voice and the doleful ditty; but now she looks up with a laugh.

"But I shall believe them," she declares. "It is so much nicer believing people than disbelieving them, especially when they say nice things."

Terence gives a little groan.

"Now do be quiet," she begs, "or I shall have to send you away. It is worse for you to sing than to talk. Because I very often don't listen when you talk, but when you sing I can't help hearing you."

After this, Terence sits silent and dismal.

Terence O'Neil and Norah Desmond were playmates in childhood, and have been friends all their lives. Miss O'Neil, Terence's aunt, owns a little house and a small farm, which is wedged into the corner of the Desmonds' lands, and Terence is the old lady's darling and heir. So that some day he will be what Lady Alicia delights to call him now, "a squibben," though the term vexes Norah.

That he is a gentleman is a fact discovered at the first glance, and at the second it is seen that he is very much in love with Norah. And the willful young lady knows the fact and cares not a bit, for it is Terence's normal state to be in love with some one. "So, of course, when there is nobody else, he's in love with me," as she told her old nurse when she pressed her anxiously on the subject.

There are little puckers on Terence's brow this morning, and his eyes look a little heavy. The idea of Norah's absence is very distasteful to him, and the fear that she may meet a lover in England is even more so. He does not attach much importance to her self-imposed vow of never marrying. She will break that, of course, he thinks, when the temptation is strong enough. Wildly he wishes to be such a temptation. He steals a glance at her as she sits with all her thoughts bent upon the book before her and its long columns of figures.

How beautiful she is! thinks Terence. Will she come back to him like that, if she comes at all, or "improved," forsooth, out of all knowledge? Would it be possible for her ever to cease to feel her old-kept pleasure in the simple country life, in her dogs, her horse, in him? He puts himself last, and feels a doubt as to whether he has a right even to that humble place. Brian Boru, he thinks, is dearer, after all. Then, in spite of himself, he begins to sing again, but very softly.

"And when you come back to me, Kathleen, what the better will I be off then? You'll be speakin' such beautiful English. Sure, I won't know my Kathleen again!"

"Is that a reflection on my parts of speech?" Norah asks, looking up brightly. "I always rather flattered myself on my nice derangement of epithets. But I shall learn a great deal in London, I dare say"—with a little mischievous—"at least, Lady Alicia thinks so."

"We have always been more than contented with you as you are," Terence says sadly. "But, if you will go, you will, I suppose, and we must make the best of it. Only we shall never have you back the same again. I know it. I can fancy just the style of a man that will fetch you, Norah; I can see

him now as plainly as possible in my mind's eye."

"I can't," she says. "Show him to me, Terence. What is he like?"

"Very purty," Terence answers, with eyes that stare into vacancy, as if he saw the objectionable Englishman before him.

"A fine man?" says Norah, with a little laugh.

"Oh, very fine," Terence replies scornfully, "and—and English! A philanthropist, of course—that is what will attract you, Norah; and one of those men who always know what other people want better than they do themselves."

"That's nothing distinctive," says Norah!

"And, when he comes over here," Terence goes on, taking no notice of the interruption, "he will put up his eye-glass, and look at the beffy—so—with a derisive imitation—"

"and say, 'Dear me, a very interesting relic of mediæval superstition! I must really send an account of it to the Saturday Review.'"

Norah's face is grave now.

"Hush! You mustn't joke on that subject," she says. "It—it isn't kind."

"And why isn't it kind?" he demands, with fierce gaiety. "Why should no one ever speak of that? You are brave enough in other things, Norah. Wink to your spirit, and don't blink up by a rascally old bell. You may fool folk and get the bell tatted when their friends die!"

The Desmonds that have the luck to get it done free, gratis, all for nothing. An object's finding fault with Providence to get to the ringing bells the last bit in the wurr'd trouble me, if I had the luck to the family."

Here Terence's eyes become tender and languishing to such a degree that Norah rises hastily from her seat and begins to gather up her papers with trembling hands.

"It is very weak of me, I know, but you have never heard it, Terence, and I have. Do you think I shall ever forget that awful night my father died?"

Her voice breaks now, and tears are in her eyes. Terence is struck with remorse.

"Don't cry, alannah!" he entreats, with that fascinating touch of the brogue which he assumes or drops at will. "It is all my fault intirely. It's the unlucky spalpeen I am, never to be able to open my mouth without putting my foot in it."

Norah laughs a little shakily at this. And Terence, encouraged to further efforts, proceeds forthwith to treat her to the most ridiculous stories and stalest jokes he knows. One after the other, without mercy or pause for breath, he tells them; until Norah's merry laugh assures him that she has recovered completely. Then he ceases in the middle of a long tale which is as old as the hills and which Norah knows by heart, turning on the disasters of Widdy Doolan's hen.

"I'll keep the rest till next time," he says soberly.

"Thank you," Norah answers, with much gravity and very apparent gratitude. "That is so kind of you! And the hen will keep, you know; at least she won't get any staler than she has been for the past twenty years."

"If you please, Miss Norah, the soup's ready," a red-haired maid says, putting her head in at the door.

"I'm coming at once," Norah replies. "Really, you needn't trouble to come, Terence," she says; "I can carry it all quite well."

"So can I," returns Terence ob-



THANK YOU, SANTA CLAUS.

stinately. "It's little enough we'll see of you the next few months. You needn't grudge me a walk by your side."

"Oh, of course, if you like," Norah says carelessly, and she leaves the room quickly, so that he does not see her heightened color. She is beginning to have uncomfortable misgivings about Terence.

Surely, when she has been his confidante and adviser through twenty fickle fancies, he is not going to have a serious attack for his twenty-first, with her for his object.

As she puts on her cloak and hat an idea occurs to her that may lessen the dangers of the walk, about which she is feeling a little nervous. And it is this idea of hers that makes her rather upset the notions of old Mary, who has been busily superintending matters in the kitchen, and who has got the soup ready to take in a jug, expressly warned for its reception, large enough to prevent any risk of spilling its contents, and with its top securely covered with a folded white napkin.

"Not that jug, please, Mary dear," Norah says to the old woman. "It's a little jug, I want."

"An' what will ye do with a little jug?" the old woman exclaims. "Sure, as it is, you can carry the dhrap o' soup as aisy as ye please, an' never trouble your head at all, at all. But if it's in a little jug ye will have to walk as if ye were treadin' on eggs. Why should ye give yourself all that bother?"

"Mr. O'Neil, very kindly is going to carry the soup for me," Norah answers gravely, "and I think I should like him to have a smaller jug."

Old Mary's keen gray eyes sparkle with sudden intelligence, and she does her young mistress's bidding without more words. Carefully she pours the soup from its large receptacle into one which it fills to the very brim.

"The young gentleman must plaze to be very careful," she says, smiling. "If he steps too fast, or talks too much, the soup will all be spilt, every dhrap. Tell him an'ud Mary said he was just to plaze to kape his mind intirely on the jug."

"I'll tell him," Norah says; and she does. Terence promises to obey; but he does not keep his word long. And, after all, Norah's little ruse is not so very

successful, for Terence has to walk so slowly that the walk takes twice as long as it would otherwise have done.

As they walk under the arches, which are yet dew-drops of their green hedges and rosy vines, Terence fails to talking again about Norah's absence.

"What shall we all do without you? There will be nothing to look forward to from one week's end to another."

"But there will be my letters," Norah says consolingly. "I shall write, of course, and tell you and your aunt all my news; and where I have been, and all the grand people I have seen and everything."

"Will you really write?" Terence cries joyfully. "And will you tell us, Norah, truly, if—if you meet him?"

"Whom?" asks Norah vaguely. "That Englishman," says Terence savagely.

"Oh," she exclaims, with a little laugh, "yes I'll tell you if I meet him! I had forgotten him altogether."

"I wish I could," says Terence, the sigh he heaves agitates the soup so that a little scalding stream trickles down on to his fingers. He shakes them ruefully. "Why didn't you have a bigger jug?" he exclaims. "But—harking back—is that a promise, Norah?"

"Which?" she asks, a little puzzled. "Oh, about that wonderful Englishman! Yes, it's a promise, if you like."

In spite of this concession however Mr. O'Neil seems still discontented.

"If one could only hope that you would come back free!" he says mournfully. "But that is too much to hope for. It's little good it will do me to know that you are going from us for ever. Of course you would have to live in England always then?"

"Then—when?" Norah cries a little sharply. "Is it still about that wonderful Englishman you are talking?"

"Whom else?"

"Well, I shall never marry him or anybody," she declares. "Of course I shall come back free. I will promise you that too, if you like. Have I not told you, over and over again, that I shall never marry?"

"Did you really mean that you would promise that?" he exclaims with sudden agitation, which

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