

MOODYNE JOE

THE GOLD MINE OF THE VASSE

IX.  
MR. WYVILLE

At the hotel, Sheridan found a note from Lord Somers, requesting him, if disengaged, to call upon him that afternoon. Half an hour later, he and the Colonial Secretary were riding together toward the West End.

"By the way, Mr. Sheridan," said Lord Somers, "there is a gentleman in London I want you to meet, who knows a great deal about the Australian Colonies, and especially about the West. He is our chief adviser on the proposed reform of the Penal System."

"Indeed," said Sheridan, interested at once. "This is the second time to-day, I surmise, that I have heard of him. Is his name Wyville?"

"Yes; do you know him?"

"No," answered Sheridan; "I have never heard of him. Sir Joshua Hobb does not like his reformatory ideas which incline me to think Mr. Wyville must be a superior man."

Lord Somers laughed. "Sir Joshua Hobb is indeed, a strong counterblast," he said; "by nature, two such men are compelled to antagonize each other."

"You admire Mr. Wyville, my Lord?" asked Sheridan.

"Thoroughly," answered Lord Somers. "He is a most remarkable man—a man of exalted principles and extraordinary power. His information is astonishing—and what he speaks about he knows absolutely. I fancy he has lived a long time in the colonies, for he is enormously wealthy."

"Is he an old man?" asked Sheridan.

"No, I don't think he can be forty—certainly not more—but a person of so much force, and with a manner so impressive, that really one forgets to think of his age. He is altogether a notable man—and I may say, in confidence, that even the Prime Minister has more than once consulted him with advantage on Colonial affairs."

"You interest me exceedingly," said Sheridan. "Such men are not common in Australia."

"We are beginning to think otherwise," laughed the Secretary. "And yet you Australians seem to learn everything without newspapers. I remember, when Mr. Wyville first appeared here, some years ago, he might have dropped from the moon, so obvious was he of the doings of the European world."

"He must have lived in the bush," said Sheridan, smiling.

"Why, he had never heard of the Crimean War," said the Secretary; "and when I mentioned the Indian Mutiny to him, one day, he grievedly stared, and asked, 'What mutiny?' Are you so utterly removed from civilization from news, in your bush?"

"Well, Mr. Wyville must certainly have had the minimum of society," responded Will; "we usually get a report, however vague, of what your civilization is doing."

"Shall we call on Mr. Wyville?" asked Lord Somers; "he lives in Grosvenor Street."

"I shall be delighted to meet him," said Sheridan, and a few minutes afterward they stopped before a large and handsome mansion.

Mr. Wyville was at home. A colored servant showed the gentlemen into a rich reception room, in which Sheridan's quick eye noted many Australian features of decoration.

"The colored servant seemed a negro of the common African type to the superficial eye of Lord Somers. But there was an air of freedom about him, an uprightness in the setting of his head on the neck and shoulders, the effect being heightened by blue-black hair, that stood straight out like a handsome and very soft brush, which at once attracted the attention of Sheridan.

"Australian?" he thought, half aloud; "is it possible that a bushman may be trained in this way?" He smiled at the absurdity of the thought; but was struck once more by the man's air as he turned to the door.

"*Mir-ga-na nago mial Vasse!*" said Sheridan in a low voice. "*Mir-ga-na*, a common name among bushmen, 'you have known,' or 'you belong to the Vasse.'" The black man turned as if a shot had struck him, and stared at the gentlemen, not knowing which had spoken.

"*Nago mial wan-sar Vasse!*" repeated Mr. Sheridan.

"*Tid-lung nago Vasse! Guab-ha-lectch!*" answered the man, the look of amazement slowly changing to one of deep pleasure and curiosity. "My mouth knows the Vasse! That is good!"

"By Jove!" said a pleasant voice from a window recess in the room; "please ask what was the prince's name in his own country!"

There came from the recess a handsome, well-set man, who greeted Lord Somers in a familiar manner.

"O, my dear Hamerton!" said the Secretary, "I have great pleasure in making you acquainted with another Australian gentleman, whom you will find as interesting as Mr. Wyville."

The gentleman bowed. Sheridan liked him from the first look. An aristocrat, stamped, with a broad open forehead, clear, honest eyes, a firm mouth and jaw, and a manner above trifles, and careless of form.

"Mr. Hamerton is a priest of the new order," said Lord Somers to

Sheridan in mock-earnest; "he is a journalist and book maker—hungry for novelty as an epicure."

The black man had remained in the room, statue-like, his eyes fixed on Sheridan's face.

"Mr. Sheridan, will you please ask his royal name?" said Hamerton.

"*Wan-gon-di?*" said Sheridan to the man.

"Ngarra-jil," he answered.

Mr. Sheridan motioned him to go.

"He is Ngarra-jil, a native of the Vasse country," said Sheridan.

"Is this really a language, with even an approach to regular formation, or the local gibberish of incoherent tribes?" asked Lord Somers.

"I have not studied its form," answered Mr. Sheridan, "but it certainly is not a mere local dialect. The same things have the same names all over the continent, with only a slight difference between the Swan River and Sydney—two thousand miles apart."

"How did you guess this man's particular nativity?" asked Hamerton.

"I have lived at the Vasse many years," said Sheridan, "and have grown familiar with the people. I believe the Vasse natives are the most superior tribe in Australia."

"You are right, sir," said a deep voice behind them; "the Vasse people are the parent stock of Australia."

"Mr. Wyville!" said both Lord Somers and Hamerton, with sudden gravity and respect.

Sheridan turned, and met the eyes of him who had spoken—deep, searching eyes that held him strongly for a moment, then passed quietly to another direction.

Never, among all the men he had known, had Sheridan seen such a man as this. The head, with all its features, the eye, the nose, the whole body, were cast in one mould of superb massiveness and beauty. There was no point of difference or weakness. Among a million, this man would not have merely claimed superiority, but would have unconsciously walked through the opening crowd to the front place, and have taken it without a word. Before him now stood three men least likely of any in London to be easily impressed—a young and brilliant statesman, a cynical and able novelist, and a bold and independent worker; and each of these felt the same strange presence of a power and a principle to be respected.

Nature, circumstances, and cultivation had evidently united to create in this man a majestic individuality. He did not pose or pretend, but spoke straight the thing he meant to say; yet every movement and word suggested a reserve of strength that had almost a mysterious calmness and beauty.

He was dressed in such a way that one would say he never could be dressed otherwise. Dress was forgotten in the man. But he wore a short walking or shooting coat, of strong dark cloth. The strength and roughness of the cloth were seen, rather than the style, for it seemed appropriate that so strangely powerful a figure should be strongly clad.

His face was bronzed to the darkness of a Greek's. His voice, as he spoke on entering the room, came easily from his lips, yet with a deep resonance that was pleasant to hear, suggesting a possible tenderness or terror that would shake the soul. It was a voice in absolutely perfect accord with the striking face and physique.

"Mr. Sheridan," he said, holding out his hand, which the other took with a feeling of rare pleasure, "we should not need a formal introduction. We are both from a far country, where formality is unknown; and I have been quite intimate with your plans and progress there for several years."

Sheridan could hardly stammer a reply, he was so profoundly astonished. He could only recall the wild nature of West Australian life, and wonder how it could have contained or developed this important man.

"You have studied with some effect," continued Mr. Wyville with a smile, "to have learned the language and discovered the superiority of the Vasse tribe."

"My life for nine years has been passed among them," answered Sheridan; "but the possibility of training them to European manners I should not have thought possible."

"Oh, civilization is only skin deep," said Mr. Wyville, pleasantly. "The gamut of social law is not very extensive; and a little skill, practised with kindness and attention, will soon enable one to run over all the keys."

"You really think it possible, Mr. Wyville," asked Lord Somers, "to transform the average savage into an obedient footman?"

"Yes, my Lord, I know it is possible—and I have seen stranger things accomplished with little difficulty. Refinement and gracious intercourse, even according to civilized rule, are quite in keeping with the natural character. We assume that to be savage which is no proof of inferiority. Degraded civilization is brutal, indeed; but the natural or savage life is not."

"Then," said Mr. Hamerton, "why can't we put all our savages in Australia through your civilizing process, and do away with savagery at one stroke?"

"Why not begin at home?" quietly asked Mr. Wyville.

"Ah, just so; I hadn't thought of that!" and Hamerton lapsed into listening, with a shrug.

"Have you actually civilized your savage servant?" asked Lord Somers.

"I don't think I quite know your meaning, my Lord," answered Mr. Wyville. "All my people are Australians, taken from the bush. I am well served, and honestly; and I have no gossips in my household, for no one in Europe can speak to my people—except Mr. Sheridan here," he added smiling.

"But how have you changed the nature of the bushmen?" asked Lord Somers, very much interested.

"I haven't changed it; my men are bushmen still. I have attempted no change whatever, and that is the secret of my success. It is true, I have asked Ngarra-jil and the others to wrap some warm cloth round their bodies while we live in this cold climate: to open the door when the bell rings; and to drive slowly and carefully in the streets. This was learned easily in a week or two.

The bushmen are natural horsemen, trained to riding through close woods. We have no collisions with other carriages, I assure you. Then, again, my men, being savages, never lie and never steal."

"But is not this actual civilization?" asked Lord Somers.

"I really don't know," said Mr. Wyville.

"Ha, ha!" chuckled Hamerton. "I really think it is!"

"Yes, you may laugh, Hamerton; but this is very interesting," said Lord Somers. "Have your men retained any of their savage ways, Mr. Wyville?"

"I think they have kept all their natural customs, which people in England call savage ways. They eat and sleep in their own fashion—I do not see any reason for imposing my way upon them, if they prefer theirs. Mine is on itself no better, except as it pleases me. They even keep their familiar implements, if they please."

"What, for instance?" asked Lord Somers.

Mr. Wyville touched a bell. Ngarra-jil appeared at the door.

"*Yanga dan-na uommer,*" said Mr. Wyville.

The Australian disappeared, and in a few moments returned to the door, holding three or four long and slender spears in his hand, and the *uommer* or throwing stick in the other.

Lord Somers and Mr. Hamerton examined the weapons with great interest vainly trying to draw a word from the observant Australian; while Mr. Wyville took Mr. Sheridan aside, and conversed with him for several minutes.

On taking their leave, Mr. Wyville gave Sheridan a cordial invitation to come and see him soon, as he had much to say to him.

"You will find me at home almost always," he said.

"And if Mr. Wyville is absent, you will certainly find Mr. Hamerton," said Lord Somers, jestingly.

Before they parted, Lord Somers informed Mr. Sheridan that Hamerton was a wealthy gentleman, who had refused to adopt his hereditary title, and who had also decided to earn his own livelihood, making a yearly division of the profits of his estate among his farmers and tenants. This had earned him quite another kind of title among the upper classes; but he had gone on working in his own way, and had already won for himself an honorable name as an author.

"Hamerton is a Republican now," said Lord Somers, after a pause; "he was a Socialist in the University."

Mr. Sheridan remarked that he seemed quite to agree with Mr. Wyville's opinions.

"Yes," the Secretary said, "he has been much attracted to this remarkable man—more so than to any one he has ever known." Lord Somers also mentioned that the Government was about to introduce a sweeping reform of the entire Penal System, and that the Australian colonies were being reformed on the system of the Andaman Islands, the Penal Colony for India," said the Secretary; "but the Australian colonies offer a profound problem. If possible, we are bound, he says, to use the convicts not merely as slaves, preparing the way for civilized life, but to transform them gradually into a healthy basis of population."

"It certainly is a wide field, and a grand undertaking," responded Sheridan, "and it is terribly needed. But Mr. Wyville is an uncommon mind. I trust his views will be largely heeded by the Government."

"He has the matter in his own hands," said the Secretary, confidentially and earnestly; "the Prime Minister has asked him to draft the entire bill."

conducted, do you not?" asked Sheridan.

"No," said the governor, "only the women. These are the healthiest and best among their class; because they are soon released in Australia, and get married to liberated men, or go to service in settlers' houses. But the men who go to Australia are the opposite—they are the worst criminals in Great Britain. They are first selected for their sentence; men imprisoned for life, or for twenty years, are sure to go. Next we take them for re-conviction; we want to send away as many professional criminals as possible. Then we make up the number with strong young fellows, who have never been in prison before, but who are able to do a good deal of hard work."

"I presume the Australian authorities soon give this last class their liberty, and encourage them to become settlers?" said Sheridan inquiringly.

"Quite the contrary," answered the governor, very gravely, as if he, subordinate though he was, could see the wrong of the system. "These men, who should be punished lightest have the heaviest burden in Australia. The professionals escape hard tasks, by knowing how; but these poor fellows, being strong, and ignorant of the rules, are pushed into the quarry gangs. The change has heard, I find, of which you very rarely, indeed, does a really dangerous criminal get heavy punishment in prison. As a rule, the worst characters outside are the best in prison."

"It is a bad system," said Sheridan. "Does Mr. Wyville's plan propose a reform?"

"Mr. Wyville," said the old governor, walking toward the door, which he closed, then, sinking his voice almost to a whisper, "Mr. Wyville is a man and a Christian, sir. I have heard him say that the true penal law should be filled with the spirit of Christ, and that our present code had none of it. He is going to change the whole machinery. He knows more about humanity and reform than a regiment of your K. C. B.'s."

The bluff old major mopped his face with his large handkerchief. He was excited.

"Pardon me, Mr. Sheridan," he continued, "I speak too quickly against my superiors, perhaps. But I don't do it often; and I think you Australian gentlemen may have a good deal of influence in making the new law."

"You know Mr. Wyville intimately, Major?" asked Sheridan.

"I have known him for five years, sir," answered the governor; "since first he visited the prison with an order from Lord Palmerston. He has done more good to convicts in that time than all the men in Britain—I'm free to say that," added the major emphatically. "Four years ago, I called his attention to an extraordinary case among our female convicts—the very prisoner you saw the other day. She had never prayed, and had hardly spoken a word for five years after she came here. Mr. Wyville took an interest in her, and she has changed the whole manner of her life."

"By what means?" asked Sheridan, profoundly interested.

"Means?" repeated the governor, again resorting to his sail-like handkerchief; "it was done in his own way—unlike any other man's way. That poor girl's life was saved from insanity and despair, by what do you think? by a poor little flower—a little common flower he went and pulled in my garden, down there."

Sheridan was about to hear the story of this strange event, when a low knock came to the door. The governor opened it, and there entered and stood near the threshold two ladies, dressed in black, with snowy head-dresses. They were the Sisters of Mercy, who attended the female school and hospital. They had come for their ward keys, without which it was impossible to pass through the pentagons, each ward or passage ending with a door.

The governor treated the ladies with respect and courtesy. He handed them their keys with a knightly bow, and, as they retired, he bowed again, and waited until they had reached the end of the passage before he closed the door. Sheridan, who was a Catholic, was gratified and much surprised at seeing all this.

The governor turned to him with a radiant face. "God bless them!" he said, earnestly, "they may believe in the Pope of Rome, but it doesn't prevent them spending their lives for the love of God."

"Are they constant attendants in the prison?" asked Sheridan.

"Yes; they might as well be penal convicts, for all they see of the outside world. It was through these ladies, and the little flower spoke of, that Mr. Wyville did so much for the poor girl. I'll tell you that story some day. Just now I have to make my rounds of inspection. Will you join me?"

"With pleasure," said Sheridan; and they passed into one of the male pentagons.

TO BE CONTINUED

THE UPAS-TREE

In a few days, as soon as he could do so without apparent haste, Will Sheridan visited Millbank again, and was escorted by a varder to the governor's office, where he was graciously received by that dignitary. Very soon, Sheridan adroitly turned the conversation on the transport service, and the class of prisoners to be transported in the next ship. The governor, who was a portly old army major, was willing enough to talk on this subject.

"The Government has no special ships for transport," said the governor; "we charter a large merchant vessel, and fit her up for the voyage. The *Houquemont*, which will sail in April, is now lying at Portland, under preparation."

"The convicts to be transported you select from those who are best

ETERNAL LIGHT

Father Charles used to say that only once did he meet any man, excepting some very holy religious, who expressed himself as wholly contented, and it is worth while to see what sort of earthly blessedness that man enjoyed. As a condition of contentment, we ask at least a "modest competence"; but Father Charles' contented friend was penniless, a pauper living on New York City charities. Happiness spells poverty, practically homeless, and the "City Home" that sheltered him on hospitable Blackwell's Island, together with some 3,000 or more other paupers, was hardly a substitute, despite the unselfish devotion of nurses and matrons. It is hard to say what goods of life David Dwyer possessed that could give him much happiness; youth, it is true; but what is youth without health? What is youth when you are paralyzed, and wasting away in anguish?

A feeling of awe came upon Father Charles, who was then Catholic chaplain of the City Home, the first time he stood before that stranger and had to tread down his heels, said down to thread your way, he came to David Dwyer, and when the nurse pointed him out, you were shocked to notice that he could not enjoy the comfort of a bed. He was fitted in some peculiar way to the queerest sort of wooden rack; and on that rack he had lain eight years—from 1902 to 1910. Before you lay a living skeleton, immovable, as if dead, except for the keen Irish eyes that gazed gravely from the upturned face, the face that still showed a ghost of David's old self, when he was "as nimble a lad as ever walked down Broadway"; when he exulted in his strength, and had been a structural iron and caisson worker, fearless and invaluable. As he lay there helpless, he recalled, with humorous irony, how he had once balanced himself over the abyss of Niagara, when he helped build the famous Suspension Bridge. He had worked, too, as deep as high, and it was down in the compressed air chambers under the North River that he had contracted this mysterious affliction, which had baffled all medical knowledge. Photographs and clear vision, and the most delicate reports of his condition were sent to him at home abroad, yet his disease remained an enigma.

Except for a slight sideward turn of the head, he had never moved from one position, nor seen even his own hands; though after five years, on his instant prayer to his beloved St. Rita, he was rewarded with a slight motion of his finger-tips, so that at least he could again recite his Rosary, next after Holy Communion the greatest solace of his life. But the helplessness was not the only trial; there was a deeper vale of suffering, for it had been eight years of torment, often of agony. His strange affliction, while it withheld clear vision, had swollen his feet to such incredible proportions that the slightest touch or change of temperature brought unutterable suffering, for which all that medical skill could suggest brought scant relief.

As Father Charles saw him there, in the noisy, draughty corner of that great ward, surrounded by rough and uncouth companions, and lying with knees drawn high upon his wooden rack, kept alive by the merest ghost of a diet, he seemed to see a life on which all the sunshine of human happiness had set forever. To visit such a place was depressing, to live there was a trial, but to be paralyzed and in daily and nightly agony there for eight years! Yet the sun had not quite set on that life. The soft light of prayer beamed from that pain-worn countenance. Every hour in the day was apportioned with its holy duty. The Sacred Heart, our Blessed Mother, St. Joseph, St. Rita, the Holy Angels, each had their own time of praise and thanksgiving and petition. The beads moved ceaselessly through the stiffened fingers. Not only prayer, but labor, too, found place in that strange day. From the frame of gas pipethat surrounded his wooden rack hung a French grammar that David studied faithfully two good hours daily; and it was with mischievous delight that he sprang his self-taught French on the unsuspecting visitor. Nor did he stop with bringing happiness into his own life. A warm heart beat in that withered frame, a heart for his fellow sufferers. If for the wayward and afflicted. If you told him of some poor fellow in need of advice or warning, "Look in the little drawer under my head," he would say, and you found there David's spiritual dispensary—his pictures and leaflets and booklets, sedulously gathered from friends and visitors, to be distributed in an unceasing apostolate. All was a matter of concern to him; his visitor's health, the improvements in the hospital, the poor lad in the next ward who wouldn't make his Easter duty, the Protestant inquirer after religious truth, the Sisters asking for prayers. He had a remedy, a suggestion, for all.

So when the 4th of March, 1910, came around, the time for the Novena of Grace in honor of St. Francis Xavier, Father Charles' first thought was to enlist good David's prayers. A special intention that year was recommended by the Jesuit Fathers all over the world, the cure of a young religious who had been struck blind by a painful accident. How ready were those hundreds of poor, devout souls in the City Home to join in the great world-wide plea for clemency! Their simple faith

shames our all too frequent skepticism. There was, of course, no trouble in enlisting David. He was eager at the very scent of the spiritual chase. The famous little drawer had to be stocked with extra Novena leaflets, and before night had set in, old Tommy, David's secretary and companion, as faithful as he was pained and halt himself, had sent them speeding to everyone whom David's active mind could designate.

But Father Charles valued David's prayers too much to run even the chance of his relaxing in fervor.

"You haven't forgotten the Novena, David?" he asked, when happening by the next day.

"No, Father," but then David stopped, as if embarrassed.

"You haven't any difficulty in making it?"

"Not exactly, your reverence, but there is something which I should like to ask you before I continue the Novena. It was a thought that came to me of a sudden last night, as I was lying there awake praying to St. Francis Xavier. It is a thought that gives me the greatest happiness you could think of; yet I don't like to trust to it until I have asked your reverence's advice."

"Go ahead; what was your thought?"

"I thought that it might please God if I were to ask St. Francis in this Novena to take away my own eyesight and give it to the young Father who has been struck blind. You see, your reverence, he went on to-day with more than his usual animation, 'what is my eyesight compared to his? I am only a poor laborer, good for nothing in the world; and his eyesight will help him to save thousands and thousands of souls. If I am blind, nobody suffers but myself; but if he is blind, thousands suffer besides.'"

For a few moments Father Charles was too much moved to reply. His heart spoke only compassion for poor David's miseries and yet something whispered to him that here was the triumphant humility of the saints, which glories in infirmity. Still hesitating to answer, he asked further:

"Can you think of any other reason, David, why you should wish God to transfer your eyesight to Father H.?" Beside the good to souls, do you look for any spiritual benefit to yourself?"

"I surely look for it, Father," David replied. "You see my eyes. They are the only comfort I have left. They are strong and fine as ever. I can read all day without fatigue, and I can watch a fly crawling up the wall over on the other side of the ward. I should have been crazy long ago if it hadn't been for my eyesight."

"Well, then, why do you want to lose it?"

"To be more like our Blessed Lord on the cross. You see, Father, he explained some cherished plan, 'there is nothing whatsoever for me to look for except a big share in Christ's cross. He had no comfort at all. He had nothing but suffering. Now, if God takes my eyesight from me, I shall lose all comfort, as our Blessed Lord did; and, Father, that thought makes me happier than anything else in the world. But, of course, Father, I shouldn't care to make that offering without your permission. Will you, grant it to me?"

"Granted!" said the chaplain, feeling himself about as humbled as a man can be. "If God does not accept your offering, you have all the merit, and no harm is done. If He does accept it, that will be a sign of His good pleasure."

All that day David was jubilant. He lived and planned only for that Novena, trying by every device of pious ingenuity to wrest this unique favor from God. The rest of the week Father Charles was called away to a neighboring institution; but when he could pay a flying visit to David's ward, he was greeted by words of jubilant satisfaction.

"Eight years ago," said David, "I should have gone mad at the thought of such sufferings as mine have been. But, Father, now I would never pray to get well. Sure!" he added with an air of unearthly conviction, "I am ready to lie here for thirty years more, and suffer all that I have had and more, too, if it would be pleasing to our Blessed Lord."

The Novena was concluded and David received Communion that morning. God had apparently not granted David's prayer. His eyes were as bright as ever, and gazed in peace upon his Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, whom he was trying so closely to follow. "But there is still time," he repeated. "I'll keep on knocking, and God may give me eyes away yet."

His prayer, however, was being heard in a different way. Father Charles did not hear, in his absence, that David had suddenly sickened and weakened near to death, and had been anointed on Wednesday by another visiting chaplain. Sunday night Father Charles happened by and heard the news.

"But don't worry," David said. "I can't tell you what peace I have. I am perfectly happy. Never in my life have I had such peace. Oh, God be praised!" And he repeated: "I am perfectly happy. I wish only for the cross of Our Lord."

"Thank God for the graces He has given you, David," said Father Charles, "I'll be back tomorrow early."

And early the next morning Father Charles kept his promise. He hurried to the familiar corner, but was bewildered when he saw there was no sign of David.

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