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NORA BRADY'S VOW.

BY MRS. ANNA H. DORSEY.

CHAPTER I.

"We're men,—as such, should know our rights, and knowing should defend; Who would be free themselves must dare the tyrant's chain to rend; Ah! fruitless is the grief that springs above a nation's fear,— One firm resolve of mighty men is worth a sea of tears."

Songs of the Nation.

A sunset of unusual beauty, and a few bright tints still lingering on the edges of many a drifting cloud, diffused a peculiar and transparent clearness in the atmosphere, and threw out, on the smooth waters of the Suire, successive images of picturesque scenery. Rocks, trees, and overhanging banks, touched here with light and softened there with shadow, with traceries of tangled shrubbery running through it all, were pictured forth with rare and beautiful fidelity: but beyond these fell a sterner gloom, and more solemn shadows, which seemed to chill the very waves in whose calm depths they slumbered like wild and sorrowful dreams in some living human heart. There was a ruin on that shore, a ruin of old, whose gray walls, majestic tower, and mildewed arches had for centuries past stood like a hoary prophet beside those waves, to remind the living of their faded glories, and incite them to a future which should repair the sorrows and losses of the past. And now as the soft twilight slowly gathered around the old Abbey of Holy-Cross-by-the-Suire, it only required a vivid imagination to people that quiet solitude with its by-gone inmates. The swift flitting of bats through its pillared arcades, the sad cry of the bittern brooding in the rank grass below, and the faint rustling of the ivy clinging to the ruined walls, when blended with the long-ago memories and legends haunting the spot, made a language expressive enough for any lover of ideal to work his spells with, and drape cloisters and shrines with their ancient splendors, and crowd those broad aisles once more with saint-like processions or prostrate forms. Erected by the pious and munificence of Donald O'Brien, King of Limerick, in the year 1169, the magnificence of its architecture made it a fame worthy of the shrine which inclosed a relic of the TRUE CROSS incased in a reliquary of gold and jewels of inestimable value, and presented by Pope Pashal II. to McMorogh the predecessor of Donald. Its magnificent altars, dedicated to the Holy Cross, to St. Mary, and St. Benedict, were famed throughout the land, not only for the splendor which surrounded them, but for the multitude and devotion of the worshippers and pilgrims who continually thronged thither; while the austerity and holiness of the monks who, holding the Cistercian rule, filled its cloisters, rendered it one of the most celebrated and sacred monastic establishments in Ireland. But, like incense exhaled from precious flowers, those souls which through succeeding centuries glorified God in their works of holiness and purity, were now fled; the feet of the spoiler had trampled over the place, and unholly hands had desecrated and ruined the shrines; the earth, rich in the dust of bodies which had consecrated themselves to God, was torn up and scattered, in search of perishable treasures; the magnificence of architecture, the costliness and charm of rare sculptured marbles, the rich and gorgeous stained glass of the windows, were all defaced—broken—ruined. And there it stands at this late day, to tell its own tale of woe, appealing to the Lord of Hosts for justice and vengeance on an iniquitous and oppressive system which for centuries has tortured His Spouse the Church with fetters and disfigured her robes with the rust and tears of oppression.

The moon now risen poured down a flood of light into the broad nave, slanting her silver beams on the long rows of pillars, leaving the aisles in darkness and shadow. The altar of the HOLY CROSS stood out conspicuous and beautiful in the unclouded radiance. One might almost have imagined that the careful old monks had thrown a cloth of gold over it, to protect from dampness and dust its treasures; but no, it was only the cold, bright moonlight, the faithful witness and tender consoler of its silent woes, which still sought to brighten its deep desolation and throw a beauty around its decay. At a little distance were the broken altars of the Virgin Mother and St. Benedict, near which stood the royal tomb of the O'Brien, with its canopy of marble supported by twisted pillars. Here and there the moonbeams lit them up, gleaming on a rare tracery, or silencing over some sculptured arch, touching here a broken shaft, there the defaced image of saint or cherub, or rippling down over the moss-grown graves like the footprints of the angels who watch the dust of those who sleep in the Lord.

Suddenly the silence was broken by a slow footstep, and a man, old and gray, entered the ruin. Arrested by the exquisite and mournful beauty of the scene, he stood a moment, leaning on his staff, to survey it; then, reverently uncovering his head, he knelt, and, folding his

hands over his bosom in the form of a cross, appeared to pray devoutly. We cannot say for what or whom he prayed. It may have been for the repose of those who slept in peace around him; it may have been for some living tempted soul; or it may have been for his country, for troublesome times again threatened it, and well he knew, that aged priest, that one, nor two, nor thousands of victims could close or fill the awful gulf which unsuccessful outbreaks always opened.

Ere long the clatter of horses' hoofs were heard on the bridge which spanned the Suire, and soon issuing from the shadow and galloping along the shore, the horseman urged his steed up towards the ruins, where suddenly halting, he lifted his cap from his head, and, wiping the moisture from his brow, he threw back the thick clustering locks that fell over it.

"Old Holy Cross!" he murmured, "your gray ruins have not been vain teachers, and once more must I visit that tomb and shrine which first awoke my fairest dreams for the regeneration and freedom of this dear land.— It may be the last time I shall ever look on ye, old relics of the days that are gone; but if I fall in this struggle, let me hope, O Heaven! that the blood that shall be poured out like water, in defence of man's holiest rights, may nurture into full strength and maturity the roots of that glorious tree whose leaves shall sweeten the bitter waters of the woes of my country." There was a tone of deep feeling in his voice, and an earnest enthusiasm in every gesture, as he turned in under the arches of the old abbey, which indicated in his nature the elements of heroic courage, and a spirit which would glory in martyrdom.

When he saw the kneeling figure of the priest, he started, then drew back in the shadow of a pillar, where he stood like some gray statue, gazing thoughtfully on the scene. But presently the aged man finished his prayer; he made the sign of the cross on his breast, and, bowing his head reverently for an instant, in honor of the Majesty who once dwelt there, he turned to leave the abbey, when the other stepped forward, and, laying his hand with affectionate freedom on his shoulder, said,—

"Father McCarthy, I did not expect to find you here!"

"John Halloran!" said the priest, starting. "I am glad to meet you. I have had you in my mind this live-long day, and have just come down from Glendariff, where I went to seek you. Ease my heart at once by saying that you have abandoned the wild and ruinous scheme—the hopelest plan that we have spoken of before."

"Father, I am sorry we have met, if the old dispute is to begin,—the old and useless dispute. Shame on the clergy of Ireland, who oppose this daring effort for the freedom of their flocks and their altars, and lend their influence and hand to the oppressor!" exclaimed the young man, angrily.

"Thou, God, knowest how baseless is the charge," said the priest, baring his gray locks, and lifting hands and eyes toward heaven, as if appealing against such unmerited injustice. "Thou knowest how we have stood for long, sorrowful years between the porch and the altar, bowed down with the woes of the land, and leading the people through the wilderness towards the place of promise. But the people sin by disobedience and revolt; they wait not for the harvest, but pluck the unripe fruits and suffer; they wait not God's time and God's holy will, and long bitter years are added to their exile. John Halloran, I am old—more than seventy years have rolled over my head. I have in that time seen much of men, and I have watched, like an eagle from his eyrie, for the day-dawn; but I tell you I see it not yet. These revolts—these volcanic eruptions of a few burning hearts, which at best only leave their ashes to their country—these uncertain, irresponsible insurrections, which never assume the dignity of revolutions, only rivet the chains more firmly, and put off the day of deliverance into the dim and distant future."

"Now, father, what is the use—what is the use of all this? Age and misfortune have cooled your blood and patriotism together, and, near the grave, you have but small care for a future which will roll over your ashes. Oh, my father!" exclaimed John Halloran, with deep pathos, "does not the scene around soften your heart?"

"Of these ruins I will not speak; but of yonder wretched cabins, thrown together from their fragments, and which scarcely afford a miserable shelter for the human beings who occupy them, of the want and desolation which surround them, I must and will speak. Their wretched inmates, possessed of the dignity of immortal souls, are reduced by the system which oppresses them to a level with the beasts. Where is their activity—where their energy? Crushed out of their lives by a knowledge of the utter inadequacy of their labor, and the hopelessness of their condition.

"They have lost almost the noble image of man. Their gaunt, athletic frames are meagre and fleshless—their color livid—their features sharpened—while their countenance express

the habitual influence of strong, deep passions. Where is the quick intelligence, which only flashes out now and then mingled with the lurking slyness of distrust? Where are the thrift, the industry, the plenty, which should be theirs? Ask the tithe-gatherers, the tax-collectors, the drivers, who, like locusts, devour their substance. The very children are want-stricken and badly clad, while the liveliness of their age is disfigured by squalid poverty and drapery of extreme want; they are idle and joyless, and loiter about the cabin-door without an aim, while the father, perchance, has gone to seek employment in the English harvest-fields where his hire is paid with a smile of derision, and he is expected to excite laughter by his blunders, who might well command tears by his wretchedness.* And these are your children—these are the miserable ones to whom you would have us deny succor! Is it only in this poor hamlet that such things are seen blotting the face of nature? No, oh my God! over all the land the same dismal spectacle is seen: from every cabin is heard the wail of anguish, and wherever thrift and plenty smile, it is for those foreign leeches who add to our burdens and have no right to a foothold on our soil. And can we rest? Must we rest? Shall we desist? No, rather let us perish!" exclaimed the almost frantic man.

"John Halloran," said the aged priest, whose bowed form trembled with an emotion he could not control, "think you that these things move you and leave me unscathed? I declare solemnly before Heaven that, had I a thousand lives, I would lay each life down to be trampled out by separate and distinct tortures, if by the sacrifice this dear land of my birth could be delivered. But I am a powerless old man, who can only pray and plead; and it wrings my very soul to see energies thrown away—worse than wasted—which, at the right time, might work wondrous changes; to know how men whom I honor for their worth and unselfishness will fall in the unequal strife without even the honor of a soldier's grave; and how others, the noble descendants of the McCarthy More, the O'Brien, the O'Donoghue, and the O'Neill, will be hunted like felons to suffer a felon's doom. I know ye all, John Halloran. Some are my own kinsmen, some of my flock, and yet, woe's me, I can neither stay their madness nor arrest their folly."

"Father!" said the young man, suddenly interrupting him, while a bright smile burst over his countenance, "let ten days or over you will sing *Te Deum* in your mountain chapel for the deliverance of Ireland. The moment the first blow is struck, the whole country will fly to arms, and our oppressors, unprepared for the overpowering crisis, will be scattered like chaff on the whirlwind. Brian Boroihme and Malachi the brave will be our rallying-words, and, after a few decisive struggles, our land will be all our own. We shall have once more our own laws, our own parliament, our own rulers. The old names will be honored in the land. The Church will lift her head free and rejoicing; and the great possessions, wrested from the old princely sons of the soil by the virgin Queen Elizabeth, by the Jameses, and by that devil's own psalm-singer, Cromwell, will be restored to their descendants."

"Halloran," interrupted Father McCarthy, "your dream is the one which has haunted me for years; but, alas! it is only the gleam of a meteor, the splendor of a rainbow, which fades while we gaze on it. Would to God your sanguine hopes were based on surer foundation! but, alas! boy, the means of the foes against which you contend are almost omnipotent. While you plot, they counter-plot; while you scheme, they undermine; and already, by the aid of base informers, the chief leaders of this rebellion are marked, and predestined to ignominy and death. It will only be the reenactment of the tragedy of '98. But I will say no more, except this; and listen well, John Halloran, for I am going to knock roughly against the doors of your heart: and if this consideration which I offer fails, then God help you; I will say no more. Up yonder, at Glendariff, is a meek and loving woman, whose cheeks have become worn and thin with watching, and with the anxieties to which the continual perils of her husband give birth. She sits now beside two weeping children, who divide her love and hopes with their absent father. A few months ago, Glendariff was the abode of happiness and peace; now it is the retreat of fear and sorrow. Who is this mother? who this wife? She belongs to one of the old princely sept of the land. She was the sunshine and flower of her old feudal home, and her hand was destined for a rich and powerful nobleman, her equal in birth. A splendid future was before Mary O'More.— But she spurned it all,—rank, riches, and splendor,—to wed with one whose worth alone was his nobility, and whose riches consisted of the old farm-house and the few acres where his forefathers had toiled generations before him. John Halloran, you know whom I mean!—Have you a right to drag down that high-born, gentle woman into poverty, and, at the best, exile,—to impoverish the children she has

borne you, and fix the name of felon's brood on them?"

"Even that I dare," said John Halloran, in a calm, stern voice; "that—all—everything for the sacred cause of my country. I am one of the people. I glory in having sprung from them, and I, John Halloran, will deliver them, or die. Life—soul—wife—children—and home!" he exclaimed, striking the ruined altar by which he stood with his clinched fist.— "Let me only strike a blow for Ireland, let me be remembered among her deliverers, and I would not barter the title it will give me for an imperial diadem, or the most ancient birthright that the archives of time could bestow. My poor Mary! My sweet, saint-like wife! That was a tender chord for you to crash down so rudely on, my father. May the Blessed Mother of God succor and defend her and her babies," he said, in a low, trembling voice.— "But I must hasten home. You mean well, my father, but you are behind the times. One grasp of the hand, and your blessing, ere I go!" and he threw himself with a simple abandon at the feet of Father McCarthy, adown whose furrowed cheeks warm tears were fast falling.

"My child," he said, in a broken voice, while he laid his hand on the head of the kneeling man, "perchance we shall never meet again on earth. Our meeting to-night is not one of chance. You are engaged in a perilous enterprise, and, to my certain knowledge will pass a terrible crisis in a few days. Let not, then, this hour go by unimproved, but, at the sacred tribunal of penance, make peace between your soul and God. Here, beneath the solemn heavens above the dust of the holy dead, give me power, by performing sacramental penance with an humble and contrite heart, to absolve you from the guilt of sin, if perchance your conscience is burdened and sore."

The appeal was not in vain. It was enough. Like a child, simple yet strong in his faith, the noble but mistaken man, kneeling by the side of the venerable priest of God, who sat on a broken tomb, poured out in whispered words the sincere and earnest confession of his soul. Thus alone in that old ruin, watched over and guarded by unseen angels, we leave them, and wend our way to Glendariff, the home of John Halloran.

CHAPTER II.

Oh, the moment was sad when my love and I parted:
Savourneen Deelish, Eileen Ogge;
As I kissed off her tears, I was nigh broken-hearted:
Savourneen Deelish, Eileen Ogge;
Was was her cheek, which hung on my shoulder;
Damp was her hand; no marble was colder;
I felt in my heart I should never more behold her:
Savourneen Deelish, Eileen Ogge.

Mary Halloran, whose mind had been unusually disturbed that day by vague apprehensions, grew more and more uneasy as the hours wore on, and wandered out to station herself on the side of what, at Glendariff, was called the "Sunset Hill," to watch for the return of her husband. But the brightness faded from the sky, twilight deepened into gloom, and soon the chilly night and the pale moonlight, which threw grotesque, weird-looking shadows around her, warned her in. "I cannot rest," she murmured, with a deep sigh: "this veiled sorrow pursues me everywhere. Oh, why does not John come? While he is near me, the dread and terror stand aloof; when he is absent, they haunt and scourge me." She lingered a few moments at the door, listening intently for the well-known sound of his horse's hoofs on the gravel. But all was silent; and, turning away with a shudder, she entered the house, and, with slow, heavy steps, went up into the children's room to seek some solace in their smiles and caresses. But the little ones were asleep in their cribs, and, leaning over, her tears fell heavy and fast on the golden curls and fair cheeks of Gracie; but when she gazed down on the fine manly face of her boy Desmond, over whose crimson cheeks dark locks of curling hair had strayed, and saw the laughing brow and firm, well-set lips, her tears ceased, and, folding her hands together, she whispered, "God help thee, boy! thy battles will be strong and bitter with life; they may break, but never bend thee." Then she felt, as she watched the holy calm that overspread their features, and knew how dark and stormy was all before them, a wish, half defined—almost a prayer,—that each little soul, ere day-dawn, could be housed in heaven. She kissed them softly, and, bidding Eileen shade the light from their eyes, went down into the drawing-room, that she might hear the first sound of her husband's footfall when he entered. There was a large oriel window opening down to the lawn,—the only modern addition John Halloran had made to his house when he came of age,—from whence she had always been accustomed, since their marriage, to watch his approach up the road leading to Glendariff. She drew back the heavy curtains, and looked out long and anxiously; but all was lonely and silent, the very shrubs, on which the moonbeams had woven a tissue of silver, being motionless. The heavy drapery fell from the grasp of her slender fingers, and, with an aching heart, she went away, and threw herself with an exhausted air into a low cushioned chair near the fire.

A door opened noiselessly, and a light foot-

step entered. Mrs. Halloran turned her head quickly, hoping it might be her husband.

"Oh, is it you, Nora?" she said.

"Yes, ma'am; I came in to see if you would have lights."

"Oh, Nora, I am so uneasy about Mr. Halloran. No—no—no; do not bring in the lights yet," she said, in an agitated tone.

"It's a cup of tea would set you up, ma'am; let me fetch in the tray."

"No, dear; not until Mr. Halloran comes," she replied.

Nora stood a moment looking at the fragile form and pale countenance of Mrs. Halloran, which seemed whiter and more sunken in the fitful fire-light, surrounded as it was by the dark-erimson cushions against which she leaned, and an expression of bitter sorrow flitted over the girl's handsome face, while a tear stole silently down the black fringes of her eyes, and fell unheeded. Then she closed the door very softly, and went back to the kitchen, muttering, "It's no use to deny it, but it's an evil heart would put the mildew and tear on such a delicate flower as that, sure. So much for puttin' new wine in old bottles. Let everybody mate with their equals, high as well as low." Then she gathered up her work and took her seat beside the cheerful fire, with an attempt to look cheerful and unconcerned, and a few efforts to sing blithely, which were sadder than the bitterest tears would have been. The door of the spacious, cheerful kitchen, where Nora reigned supreme, was thrown open, and a broad stream of light flowed out on the sward and shrubbery, setting them all aglow, as if a red sunset were gleaming over Glendariff. The brick floor was sandaled in fantastic patterns, and the dressers literally glittered with the well-scoured pewter and copper utensils that covered them. Here and there hung a colored print, neatly framed in carved bog-wood, of the "Annunciation," "St. Agnes," and "St. John the Evangelist," over which were arranged tastefully sprigs of holly and fern. On a little shelf, apart, reposed a handsome prayer-book, and a rosary of coral and silver, her last year's Christmas-gift from Mrs. Halloran, and of which she was specially proud.

Nora was a fine specimen of her class.— Above the middle height, handsome and well formed, everything about her expressed an innate pride of character and a high degree of self-respect. She had been the plaything and playmate of Mrs. Halloran when they were both children at Fada-Brae Abbey; and, as Mary O'More would never study unless Nora Brady had lessons also, Mrs. O'More, to secure her daughter's attention, and also to benefit the girl, of whom she was fond, directed the governess to indulge her daughter's affectionate whim, until she was sent to France to finish her education. Thus commenced the affection between the nobly-born Mary O'More and Nora Brady. Widely separated by rank, yet loving and grateful, they continued to serve each other in their respective spheres until a mutual dependence was established, which developed many a noble and beautiful trait in each.

Nora's service was light enough, and one which she preferred to any other situation at Glendariff, as in it she enjoyed all the benefits of an active life and could contribute very essentially to the comfort of those she served.— Nora's kitchen was her parlor, reception, and sitting-room, and its neatness was a marvel to all who were privileged to enter it; for let it not be supposed that the drudgery and cooking for the people employed at Glendariff were performed here. There was another building, apart from the mansion, where all this was done, and where substantial comfort prevailed; for it was one of the cares of John Halloran's life to attend to the well-being of every living thing connected with him; and he was rewarded by increased prosperity and a cheerful service which was becoming rare and uncertain in the down-trodden country.

Nora's song gradually ceased, and a deep, thoughtful expression settled on her countenance. Occasionally she went to the door and looked anxiously down the path, but returned each time with a disappointed look to her chair. The red in her cheeks grew deeper, and something like a frown gathered on the smooth, white forehead of Nora, as, giving her head a toss, she broke out with,—

"It would be a good thing altogether, I believe, if there wasn't a man to be found; for wherever one is there is trouble, surely.— There's the mistress, now, with her beautiful face growing more like a wraith every day, by rayson of the great oneness that's on her in respect to the meanderings of Mister Halloran, and no one to the fore but that Donald Dhu to comfort her, that in place of easing her poor heart, fills it with the afflictions of Job hisself, that's got a leer in the bad eyes of him, enough to give a witch. Then, on the back of that, as if it wasn't enough to put a decent girl demoted, here comes that *ommadawn* from Kildare, laying his forge, and the hoofs that wouldn't be amiss if they give him a kick or two, to persuade me, by troth, to marry him, and butthering me up about his new lease and the fine cow. But I won't—if he's got a lease for five hundred years on the old place, and

* Lady Morgan.
† Rebellion of '48.