

MOONDYNE JOE

THE GOLD MINE OF THE VASSE

III.

THE SANDALWOOD AGENCY

About a year after his trip to Calcutta, while his ship lay in Shanghai, Sheridan received an invitation to dinner from the chief owner, a wealthy and acute old Scotchman, whose palatial residence and beautiful grounds overlooked the town. He was surprised at the courtesy, and showed the invitation to the captain, a kind old sailor, who had formed an affection for Will from the first.

"Go, go, my lad," said Captain Mathews. "It's a piece of luck, no doubt. I've heard that the old man has a daughter, or a niece, though I believe she's rather rough; but what's that, when she has a shipload of money? You're in luck, youngster; of course you'll go, and in your best rig, too. I'll lend you my old claw-hammer coat."

"Thank you, Captain," said Will, smiling inwardly, as his eye took in the short but portly dimensions of his old friend; "but I think I'll go as a plain sailor, without any pretence at society dress."

"Well, I don't know but you're right, Sheridan," responded the captain; "a sailor's jacket is fit for any man or any place, had, when he who wears it loves his profession, and who is worthy of it."

That evening saw Will Sheridan enter Mr. MacKay's drawing-room, as handsome and gentlemanly a fellow as ever gave an order through a trumpet.

"Mr. Sheridan," said the kind old merchant, coming forward to meet him, "you are welcome, for your own sake, and for that of a dear old friend. You are not aware, I think, that your father and I were midshipmen together forty years ago."

Will was surprised, but gratified. He had half expected to be patronized, and indeed was more than half prepared to resent such treatment.

Mr. MacKay presented Will to his family—Mrs. MacKay, an invalid, and his step-daughter, Miss Gifford, a handsome, buxom, good-natured maiden lady of a certain age.

They were all very kind, and they treated Will as an old and privileged friend. He forgot all about the patronage, and enjoyed himself immensely. Such an evening of home life, after years of rugged seafaring, was delightfully restful.

At dinner, Mr. MacKay recalled story after story of the time when he and Will's father were carefree youngsters on His Majesty's ship *Cumberland*. Will was still more surprised to find that Mr. MacKay had recently been in communication with his father.

"I saw your papers, Mr. Sheridan," explained Mr. MacKay; "and knowing that my old friend was in the Coastguard Service in England, I wrote to him. I found I was right in my conclusion; but I thought I would say nothing about the matter for some time. You will pardon me when I tell you that I have been observing you closely since you entered the service of our Company."

This was the first reference to their relative positions which had been made. Will did not know what to answer.

"You have seen a good deal of our sandalwood trade," said Mr. MacKay, changing the subject; "what do you think of its prospects, Mr. Sheridan?"

This was too extensive a question for Will, and he faltered in his reply. He had, he said, only considered their own duties in the trade, and they offered a limited scope for observation.

The old merchant, however, returned to the point.

"Captain Mathews tells me that you have expressed to him your dissatisfaction at the management of our affairs in Western Australia."

"No, sir," answered Will with a smile, "not with the management, but with the mismanagement."

"Ah, just so," said Mr. MacKay; "we will talk more about this by-and-by."

When the ladies had retired, Mr. MacKay again took up the subject.

"You think our affairs in Australia are mismanaged, then?"

"Well, sir, it appears to me there is no system whatever on the other side, so far as the Company's interests are concerned."

"How is that?" asked the keen business man, opening his eyes.

"Does not our agent purchase and ship the sandalwood?"

"Yes, he certainly does, and that's all he does—and that's nothing," said blunt Will "at least for the Company's benefit."

"Case explain," said Mr. MacKay, nervously.

"Well," said Will, in his earnest way when interested, "as you know, the sandalwood is cut away in the bush, from sixty to a hundred miles from the shipping-station at Bunbury. It is cut by ticket-of-leave men. From them it is bought by speculators, who team it to Bunbury; and from these fellows, who manage to control the wood, your agent buys it at the wharf, paying whatever price is asked."

"You would have him do more?" asked MacKay.

"I would change the whole plan, sir, if it were my concern. First, I would lease all, or as much as I could, of the sandalwood land direct from the Government, then I would set my hired cutters to work, and then carry the wood in my own teams to the wharf. The original cost can be decreased at least 50%. And, besides this, there are other valuable substances, such as gum, tan-bark,

and skins, that could be carried and shipped at the same time."

The merchant listened attentively to the broad outline of Will's plans, which he spoke about quite freely as one outside the matter, but familiar with it.

"Mr. Sheridan," said Mr. MacKay at length, "our Company has decided to change our agent in Western Australia, and it gives me great pleasure to offer you the position. I will see," he added, interrupting Will's surprised exclamation, "that you shall have sufficient power at your disposal to carry out your ideas with regard to the extension of the trade."

Will hardly heard another word for the rest of the evening. His mind scarcely took in the change—from the poor and unknown sailor, as one step, to a man of large influence and position, for such would be the Australian agent of so wealthy a Company.

When he returned to the ship his face glowed with excitement, as he related the wonderful story to his old friend Captain Mathews, who became even more excited than Will—and declared many times over his glass of "Old Tom" that "they were beginning to see things right at last," and that "no man could do land and business so well as him who was trained at sea," and divers other sentences filled with wisdom drawn from personal pride and marine philosophy.

IV.

THE TEAMSTERS' TAVERN

"Curse that fellow!" hissed Lane Scotty through his clenched teeth. "I hate him." The word was emphasized by a blow on the rickety table that made the glasses jump.

The scene was a public house in the little mahogany town of Bunbury, Western Australia; the time, six months after Will Sheridan had assumed the sandalwood agency.

The speaker was a ticket-of-leave man, a wiry, red-eyed fellow of middle age, whose face had the cunning ferocity of a ferret. His auditors were a shaggy crowd of woodcutters and ex-convict teamsters, the latter group sitting with him at a long table.

"Don't talk so loud, Scotty," said a rough-looking man of immense stature, with an axe strapped on his back, who leant smoking against the fireplace; "don't shout so, my friend, or Agent Sheridan will hear it, and kick you out of the team he gave you for charity."

"Kick me out!" retorted Scotty, with an oath; "he daren't touch me. Curse his charity; he gave me a team for his own interest."

"Bah!" said the big woodcutter, without moving, "you were always a brag. He gave work and wages to you and a lot of your ugly gang there, for downright charity; and, like the hounds you always were, you have no thanks in you."

Though the gang so broadly referred to were at the table with Scotty, no one resented the woodcutter's epithet, though dark looks were flung at him.

"This agent has ruined the sandalwood trade," said Scotty, addressing himself to the aroused woodcutters. "Before he came here, a poor man could earn a few pounds; but now we ain't any better than chain-gang men."

A murmur of approval from the teamsters followed the remark, and Scotty felt that he had struck a popular note. Even one or two of the woodcutters at another table struck the board in approval.

"No, you ain't any better than chain-gang men, that's true," said the brawny bearer of the axe, still quietly smoking; "nor you never were. There's where the whole boiling lot of you ought to be still. You talk of ruining poor men," he continued, slightly shifting his position, so as to face Scotty; "these damned foxes! I know you—and these men know you," pointing to the group of woodcutters. "Before this new system came with this ticket-of-leave man, you and your rats there had the whole trade in your hands. You bought from the cutters at your own price, and you paid them in rum. You cheated the woodcutters and swindled the dealers, till the wonder was that some day you weren't found chopped to pieces for your villainy."

"That's true as Gospel," said one of the woodcutters who had lately applauded Scotty. "You're an infernal set of vipers, you are!"

Scotty and his ill-looking crew realized that the woodcutter had got the drop on them, dead sure."

A stamping and tramping in the outer room or store suggested new arrivals, as the place was a kind of inn. All eyes were turned on the door, where entered, one after another, about a dozen powerful fellows, in the picturesque garb of stockriders, who noisily but good-humoredly sat themselves down to the large central table, and called for something to eat and drink.

The interrupted discussion was not resumed, but a whispered and earnest comment on the new-comers began among Scotty's gang.

"Where do you fellows hail from?" asked the big woodcutter, after waiting a while, and in a friendly tone.

"From Dardanup," said one of the stockriders. The whispering between Scotty and his friends ceased, the last word passed round being strongly emphasized, "Dardanup Irish."

There was a colony of Irish settlers at Dardanup, free men, who had emigrated there forty years before, when the Western Colony was free from the criminal taint. The families were all related to each other by inter-marriage; and the men of the whole settlement, who had been born and reared in the bush, were famous throughout the colony for strength, horsemanship, good-fellowship, and hard fighting qualities.

"From Dardanup—eh?" said the big woodcutter, with a mischievous smile at Scotty's group. "Then you be Agent Sheridan's new teamsters, be ye?"

"Ay, we're going to take these teams up tomorrow," said a strong fellow; and then, to call the waiter, he hammered the table with his enormous fist.

"Why," said the woodcutter in his bland way; "it might be as you're the Maguire boys from Dardanup?"

"Only eight Maguires in this crowd," said the table-hammerer, with a pleasant look round the circle.

Scotty and one or two of his friends here lightly left their seats, and sauntered toward the door.

"Don't go," said the woodcutter pressing; "don't be in a hurry, Scotty, man; why it isn't 10 minutes ago since you wanted to chaw up that d—d Sheridan and his teamsters."

Scotty scowled at the woodcutter. "A man can come and go as he pleases, can't he?" he growled.

"O, ay; but don't leave the friends as you wanted to meet, just now. Here, you Dardanup men, this is your ganger in the teams; this is your boss, as Yankee Sullivan says. This is the fellow that Agent Sheridan daren't order him, and that the agent went down on his knees and begged him to drive his black ox team."

"He'll never drive it again," said one of the Dardanup men.

"Why won't he?" demanded one of Scotty's friends.

"Because I'm going to drive that team," said the six-foot Australian, wheeling his seat with ominous velocity.

"Ho, ho! ha, ha!" roared the big woodcutter, enjoying the fallen crest of the bragart; "but you can't have the team, Maguire; Scotty will make ribbons of you."

And the man with the axe heavily stamped on the floor in his boisterous enjoyment of Scotty's discomfiture.

The Dardanup man rose and walked toward Scotty, who sank back with so sudden a shock that he stumbled and fell headlong, while he waited, entering with a tray of plates and glasses, tumbled across the prostrate bully.

At this there was a loud laugh, and the six-footer from Dardanup sat down again. Scotty, too, was wise enough to profit by the hilarity. He picked himself up, laughing with the rest.

"Come," he cried in a jolly tone, but with a humiliated aspect, as if he feared his offer would be refused, "let us have a drink and shake hands, no matter who has the teams."

"Bravo!" cried the Dardanup men, who were just as ready to drink as to fight.

The bottle was passed round, and every man drank with Scotty, except the big woodcutter.

Scotty handed him the bottle and a glass, noticing that he had not tasted.

"No, thank you," said the big man, with a shake of the head, "none of that for me."

A few moments afterwards one of the Dardanup men held up his glass to the big man of the axe. "Drink with me," he said.

"Ay, lad," said the woodcutter, "pass your bottle. I'll drink with you all night."

Scotty pretended not to have noted nor heard; but as soon as he could he escaped from the room with his associates. The Dardanup men ate a mighty supper, and afterwards had a wild time, in which the woodcutter was a partaker.

Powerful and hearty fellows, full of good-nature, but dangerous men to rouse, these young Australians, and their strong blood was excited by the new enterprise they had undertaken.

A combination had been made among the ticket-of-leave teamsters and buyers against the new agent of the sandalwood trade, who had revolutionized the old system.

Had come to a serious pass with the business, and Agent Sheridan, knowing that a weak front would invite ruin, had resolved to test the opposition at once, rather than wait for its bursting.

He rode to Dardanup, and called a meeting of the stockriders, who, though every one born in Australia, and bred to the bush from infancy, had a warm feeling for Sheridan, perhaps because of his Irish name.

He laid the case before them without hiding the danger.

The ticket-of-leave teamsters were resolved to destroy the sandalwood teams of the company, by rolling great rocks on them as they passed through the Blackwood Gorge.

The Blackwood Gorge was the narrow bed of a stream that wound among the Iron-stone Hills. In the rainy season it was filled with a violent flood; but for six months of the year its bed was quite dry, and was used as a road to reach the sandalwood districts. For more than thirty miles the patient oxen followed the ragged, bridge path; and for the whole distance the way zigzagged between the feet of precipices and steep mountains.

It would be an easy matter to block up or destroy a slow-moving train in such a gully. And that the discharged ticket-of-leave teamsters had determined on this desperate revenge, the fullest proof was in the hands of Agent Sheridan.

He had considered the matter well, and he was resolved on a plan of action. He told the Dardanup bushmen that he wanted twenty-four men, twelve to act as teamsters, and twelve as a reserve. In a few minutes he had booked the names and settled the conditions with two dozen of the strongest and boldest men in Western Australia.

The meeting in the tavern was the first intimation the ticket-of-leave men had that their plan had been discovered.

Next morning, the teams passed peacefully through the little town, while the discomfited Scotty and his friends looked on from their skulking-places, and never stirred a finger.

That evening, in the tavern, Scotty and his men were merrily drinking, and at another table sat half a dozen Dardanup stockriders. The woodcutter looked at them smoking, as he lounged against the fireplace.

"Why didn't you Dardanup boys go along with the others?" he asked the stockriders.

Scotty and his ill-looking group turned their heads to hear the reply. "We stayed behind to watch the wind," answered one, with a laugh.

"To watch the wind?" queried the big woodcutter.

"Ay," said the Dardanup man, very slowly, and looked squarely at the ticket-of-leave teamsters; "if the wind blows a stone as big as a turtle's egg down the Blackwood Gorge tomorrow, we'll put a swinging ornament on every one of those twenty gum trees on the square. The rope is ready, and some one ought to pray for fine weather."

Just one stone," continued the giant, who had risen to light his pipe; and as he passed he laid a heavy hand on the shoulder of the ticket-of-leave man, as if by chance; "just one stone, as big as a turtle's egg, and we begin to reeve that rope."

"Ha, ha! ho, ho!" roared the woodcutter, and the shanty shook with his tremendous merriment. When his derision had exhausted itself, he sat with the Dardanup men, and drank and sang in great hilarity over the routing of Scotty's gang.

From that day the new agent of the sandalwood trade was treated with marked respect by all classes in Western Australia.

TO BE CONTINUED

THE ELEVENTH HOUR

BY EUGENE T. FINN

Old St. Mary's stands in the heart of the city. Thousands pass by each day. Some look lovingly at it—others try to keep their eyes averted as if in secret shame at their own unworthiness to face God's Tabernacle, while countless numbers hurry by, giving absolutely no thought to either the Church itself or the Faith for which it stands.

And over all the figure of the Perfect Mother stands with outstretched hands, as if yearning to clasp all humanity within her circling arms.

Inside of the church all is quiet. A solemn hush falls on all who enter it as if the prayers of many years were stored within its walls. Many feet pass daily through its doors. Some have formed the habit of pausing in their daily rush for a few minutes' meditation at the feet of their blessed Lord, and some creep hesitatingly in, simply because of the shelter it affords from summer's heat and winter's snows. These are the derelicts—those pitiful beings who drift hither and thither, aimlessly, carelessly, till death puts an end to their wanderings.

The priests of old St. Mary's are especially anxious to keep in touch with such as these, and many have been reclaimed from the idle ranks to find peace and contentment in honest toil, by their earnest efforts.

One of these bits of human drift-wood was standing now within the doorway, sheltered from the pouring rain. His shabby clothes hung limply on his thin figure and he shivered with cold. His face was aged and drawn past all resemblance to a better self, yet something fine still lingered over his whole form.

It may have been his silvery hair, which gave the strange, or it may have been his eyes, as blue as a baby's in spite of the wrinkles surrounding them. That intangible something permeated the very atmosphere round him. Yet he was what all the world would call a "bum."

Father Vane hurrying back from a sick-call saw him standing there with the spray of the rain falling over him. His kind heart went out in instant sympathy and he touched the stranger on the arm.

"Won't you step in out of the rain?" he asked pleasantly.

The man seemed to shrink within himself. "Into the church?" he questioned.

Father Vane nodded. "It is warm and dry in there," he said, "and you can rest till the storm is past."

He held the door invitingly open and the man stepped in. Once there he stood hesitating, then pulling off his poor excuse for a hat, slid quietly into the rear seat. Father Vane passed on.

That was the beginning of it. The shabby figure soon became a familiar one to the daily worshippers at Old St. Mary's, and Father Vane often saw him kneeling motionless for hours at a time. Often he was tempted to speak to him, but waited, though he scarce knew why. Then one day he failed to come. Father Vane was worried, more and more, as succeeding days brought no sign of the stranger. He felt that he had lost an opportunity for doing good.

One Saturday night as Father Vane entered the confessional he caught sight of the familiar figure passing by the door, and stood a moment watching. The man passed turned back, and with the timid manner slipped through the open door and knelt in the back pew. There was no time to speak to him now, so with an earnest prayer to heaven to hold him there, Father Vane passed into the confessional. The hours dragged past. The church was crowded that night and it seemed as if the long line would never end. But at last all were gone and Father Vane stepped anxiously out. The church was empty—all save the last pew, where a solitary figure knelt, with his head bowed on his arms. So motionless it seemed that at first Father Vane thought the man was sleeping and stood looking pityingly down upon him. His eyes took in the bowed shoulders, once strong and proud. He saw the silvery head, so brightly out of keeping with the faded face and figure and he thought of the eyes, so wonderfully blue. Then with a start, he realized that the man had raised his head and was looking at him. If Father Vane had noticed the look of poverty before, he was nevertheless startled at the terrific change. Not poverty alone, but absolute Want, stared up at him. The man rose unsteadily to his feet, swaying from weakness, and smiled. Yes, smiled! Think of that, you who worry over every trifling and indulge in so much self-pity. This man was plainly starving—yet he smiled.

Father Vane fairly gasped. He held out his hand half consciously, and the stranger took it. It seemed to give him new strength and he braced back his shoulders with a gesture of manliness. Then he sank weakly down, and looked beseechingly up into the priest's face.

"Did you want to speak to me?" Father Vane asked, compassionately. The man nodded.

"I wanted to speak to you long ago," he said in a soft, broken voice, "but I was not sure. Ever since that day, when you first invited me into the church, my heart has been in a turmoil. I came in then—not because I cared to—but because I was cold and chilled and the promise of warmth appealed to me. That day was one of the bitterest of my whole life. I was down and out—hungry, cold and discouraged. I had been wandering the streets all day in search of work, but could find none. I guess my gray hair is against me, and now since through being alone and half-starved all the time, they think I'm simply a hobo and not fit for employment. But God knows, even a hobo needs work and care and human companionship to keep his soul alive."

Once I was a well-to-do man. Not wealthy, having no riches, but a wife and two little ones. Hard times came, then sickness. I don't know how it all came about, but I sank with them. I pulled away and nearly died. My wife, poor girl, did not know that. She was always glad, was Bess, and when she found out the kind of men I was working with, her heart seemed to freeze up within her, and she left me, taking the little ones with her. I don't blame her, Father, for I never told her that I had been drawn into the gang simply through anxiety to provide for her and the babes."

When she left, I realized my folly, and tried to start anew, but everything went against me. I drifted from one thing to another, getting lower and lower, till at last I lost all hope of ever getting back to my own level again. Once I thought that I might work and win her back, but I have lost all those dreams now. A few days ago I walked out to where she lives with her people, and had a peep at her and the children. They are well and not in need of me, so it is best if she thinks me dead."

That day when you drew me into the church, I had given up all hope. I felt that my life was a wreck and it had made up my mind to end it. Why I stood in the door of this church instead of crawling into some saloon I can not tell you, but I know that when you called me in, and I knelt here, resting, a feeling of peace stole over me. I can't say after that day, and the Christ upon the Crucifix there seemed to speak to me."

"And your wife—is she a Catholic?" questioned the priest. Again he shook his head. "No," he answered. "And till that time I had hated Catholicism so much that I scorned to even look at the outside of Old St. Mary's though I passed it daily in my better days."

"What are you going to do now?" Will you go back to your wife?"

A shudder passed over the stranger's frame and he looked more worn and gray in a moment. "I can't," he murmured. "I have lost all right to her, and she is better without me. But, Father, even though my life is wasted—even though this may be my last hour, for I am old and broken, can I not enter the faith? I want to feel that I have found God—even now at this late day. Surely, Christ's message means all in all to such as I am. Take me in. Perhaps I am not all

bad. I know I am a sinner and all unworthy, but, Father, my heart is filled with hope. God wants me—even me—and I must go to Him."

Father Vane's eyes filled with tears. He tried to speak, but could not, as he silently led the way back to the confessional booth. Hours later with his soul and body warmed and fed, and with a little money for his lodging in his pocket, the Derelict crept out into the night.

Father Vane and other priests of Old St. Mary's took him in hand. They found a position for him where the pay was moderate, but the honest work put new life into his worn-out body. Daily he came for instructions and at last could claim the beautiful old faith as his own. His blue eyes seemed brighter, though a shadow of pain often dimmed them for a moment. But he was always the same. His happiness knew no bounds for he felt that God had called him in a special way. He spoke of his wife and children often, but seemed to feel that they were better where they were.

Then one day Father Vane went on a journey—no one knew where—but when he came back he brought a little dark-eyed woman with him, and they met—the one-time Derelict and the little wife. What they had to say to each other no one knows. That is a sealed book to all but themselves. But somehow, through her husband, God's message reached her, too, and they were reunited under one Church and one faith. I pointed that man out to you now you would scarce believe this true. He no longer looks old and broken-down. They are not rich, but they are content, which is far better, and their children tread the path to a promising future. One little word of kindness led to all this. It seems a miracle, does it not? But to God all things are possible.

PARENTS AND VOCATIONS

Rev. Albert Munich, in Our Sunday Visitor.

The harvest fields stand white. The grain waves endless to the gray horizon's rim. Why are the reapers so few?

God alone can give a vocation, but Catholic parents can mightily cooperate with Him in preparing the souls of their children for this great gift. There is no more sublime task than to pray and labor for the salvation of souls, to be co-workers with God in accomplishing the great purpose for which He Himself came down to earth.

A deep sense of the inestimable honor and blessing implied for parents in the Divine vocation of their children is a hall mark of true Catholicity.

If the sordid commercialism of our age has corroded with its rust the hearts of Catholic parents, if the vulgar craving after social recognition in the eyes of a godless world has quenched the Catholic spirit within them, it is highly important that we seek with all our strength to renew it. Above all, we must spare no efforts to infuse into the mind of the rising generation a true appreciation of the meaning of a Divine Vocation.

Vocations, it is true, may imply hardships for parents. They may bring with them trials which the worldly-minded will fail to understand in their true significance. The Cross of Christ will ever be to them a sign of folly, as their own wisdom will in the judgment of God be the folly of follies in the light of eternal truth.

To be the parents of priests and religious, to offer up to the Lord consecrated sons and daughters, is something almost priestly in itself, something almost sacramental. It is a great privilege to have their children accepted to stand before their King forever to serve Him in His courts. A great honor indeed and a blessing beyond compare! It implies on God's part the bestowing of special graces upon parents which are like those of a newly consecrated state of life. But most Christ, of all is the joy they may rightly have in the souls that through their children shall with God's grace be sanctified and saved.

Vocations involve sacrifice, but a sacrifice that is gladly brought by the truly Catholic parent, and blessed by God a hundredfold.

Souls there seem to be whom the Lord has not led into the way of the religious life in order that they might instead labor with Him in raising up sons and daughters who shall in their turn dedicate themselves to Him by the most solemn ties. Such was apparently the manifest will of God regarding the parents of the "Little Flower of Jesus," who before their betrothal had both sought in vain for admission into the religious life. Monastery and convent were closed to them, but another great blessing was instead bestowed by the bountiful hands of their Divine Master, whose wish was their only will. Their ardent desire and prayer, in the Holy matrimony, was only that the Lord might give to them many children who should all be consecrated entirely to Him. Their petition was gloriously answered.

Yet though we may well ask from God this great favor for our children, if it be His Holy Will, we are not to force their choice. Our labor is to prepare the soil and to help in fostering the seeds of His graces, to set for our children an example of every Christian virtue, to lead them gently along with us up to those heights of sanctity which by His help we can attain, to preserve them carefully from all noxious worldly influences

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