



One of the most familiar objects, on the road to Glen Mary, was Tom McKenna, sitting astride the narrow ridge of cracked stone which ran for miles in an unbroken line along the wide turnpike, while the sound of the little knapping-hammer, as it fell in rhythmic strokes, was as much a part of the scene as the song of the birds in the branches overhead, or the whistle of the plow-boys in the fields beyond. So accustomed were we to seeing the bent figure of the small man that his absence would be commented on, and it would pass for a piece of news that McKenna was not working to-day. These absences were rare, and were due to occasional illness in the family, or the funeral of a member of the community, for McKenna made it one of the solemn duties of life to fulfil the last of the corporal works of mercy.

"It is one of the instructions of our holy religion," he would say to his wife, when she expostulated against his losing a day's work and incurring the expense incidental to a trip to the Catholic cemetery, in the adjoining county. "Even if it were not such, self-interest prompts us to pay this respect to the departed, for the day will come when we must depend on the living for a like service. When I am gone I do not want to be carried off like a dead dog, but to go to my last resting place attended by men and women who would remember that when death entered their homes, I stood by."

While Mrs. McKenna continued to argue against the practice, she did it because of the contrariness of her nature, not because she hoped ever to win her point; for, though McKenna was the meekest of men, yielding to his practical wife's better judgment and keener insight in other things, there was no force persuasive enough to turn him from any principle of truth, justice or honor. If McKenna should rise in the world, men said, it would be due entirely to his wife. She possessed a strong mind, abundant common-sense, and that gift which is nicely distinguished as the virtue of prudence, in a woman, the talent of making money, in a man. How she managed from the daily toil of the little rock-breaker to provide for seven and lay something aside in the village bank was one of those economical puzzles which only actual experience can solve. Her house was spotless, her children cleanly, if simply, clothed, and their rosy cheeks and bright eyes told of plentiful and nourishing food. Often during the long hours, sitting on the hot rock-pile, the little, bent man pondered over this ability of his wife, and his head would sink lower on his breast.

"I am not the man she should have had for husband," he would think, in humiliation of spirit. "If she had married a man like O'Connor, who understands farming and trading, instead of a fellow that will never get beyond a string of rock and a knapping-hammer, she would be wearing her silk now, and Tommie and Joe would be going to college, instead of working for farmers. I am a failure. That's what they called me at home, and I am beginning to see now that they were right, although I thought differently then. But she will make something out of the children. Thank God, none of them take after me, except poor little Arthur."

Yet it was not on the three sons, possessing the elements of success, nor the prattling daughter, who had her mother's handsome face, that the father's deepest affection was centered, but on Arthur, his fourth child,—"a second Tom McKenna," the people said, without, however, intending any disparagement. But the words had a bitter point for the sensitive soul, and his heart cried over the boy who was a copy of the patient, plodding, unsuccessful parent. Naught of this we knew, passing the lowly toiler, who would greet us with kind words and a smile, which never broke the locked sadness of his eyes, and lay on his weather-beaten face like sunlight on marble. Little we dreamed, driving over the blue stone when it was spread on the road, that the blinks which had brought it to this state of fitness had kept measure with sorrow's strokes upon the old man's heart.

The passage of time took me from the Glen, and in the cares and duties and pleasures of manhood, amid other surroundings, the scenes of the past blended into a beautiful picture. But one June day, years after, found me with my face turned toward my old home in the Glen. Though death had stillied many a loving heart, and distance chilled others, there was a steady number left to bid me welcome.

# McKENNA, THE ROCK-BREAKER.

come in tones that brought joy. "You have come in time," said my friend, Judge Randolph, whom I had left a struggling lawyer, "for the funeral of Tom McKenna. You remember him, of course?"

"The old rock-breaker? I should say so! Many a time I wished him possessed of another occupation, when the stones were spread on the road between our gate and the schoolhouse, and my winter boots were worn out. He lived to a good old age. What became of his family?"

"At my question, the Judge paused, and directing my attention to several fine business houses, said:

"Do you see that building on the corner? It is the new hotel, owned and run by Tommie McKenna. Those two stores are also his, and he owns, besides, several good pieces of real estate in the residential portion of the town. He married one of O'Connor's daughters, and they have a pair of handsome children. He is the head of the family, but the others are not failures. Joe gave his attention to agriculture. He owns some of the best land in the county, and as he understands farming he is amassing a fortune. Ed studied law, and last year we sent him to the State Senate. He'll be in Congress, some of these days. The daughter grew up into a perfect beauty. She married Gray Morgan's only son, and is one of the leaders of Lexington society."

It occurred to me that there was another child, but before I could inquire for him, we were joined by other friends, and all thought of Arthur McKenna escaped my mind. On the following day, Tom McKenna was buried. I was the guest of the Judge and went with him to McKenna's home, which stood on the edge of the town, a spacious brick house, set in an ample lawn. The Judge was deeply affected as we stood alone by the dead. In the twilight of the room, I saw him lay a convulsive hand on the toil-knotted fingers which clasped a crucifix, while broken sobs shook his stalwart frame. Afterwards, when we had found a place in the procession, which stretched for a full mile over the white road, he began to speak of the dead man.

"Life is full of strange surprises," he said, flicking with the whip an imaginary fly from the back of the restive thoroughbred. "How little Tom McKenna dreamed when he broke rock along this road, that he would be carried over it to his grave, with the pomp and ceremonial that death reserves for the great! But he deserves it all. He was a great man."

The Judge mused for a long time, then said: "People attribute all the success that came to the family to Mrs. McKenna, and while they revered Tom as an honest, upright, and honorable man, they regarded him as a failure—yes, even his wife and children! I've heard the boys say that they owe all to their mother—not by way of reflection on their father, you understand, for they are most dutiful children. Before they sought their own fortune, on reaching manhood, they made their parents comfortable, and with each step of their advancement in wealth, they surrounded the old people with luxuries. Yet, while I give Mrs. McKenna all credit as a careful, thorough business woman, a true wife and devoted mother, I know that they owe not a whit more of their success to her than to him."

"What did he do?" I asked, thinking he must have entered on some new occupation after I had left the Glen.

"He broke rock," replied the Judge, quietly. "Ten years ago, he retired. Since then he has lived in the world of books. I don't suppose you ever knew that McKenna was a scholar, did you?"

"No," I answered, in surprise. The face of the rock-breaker rose before my mental vision, and I marvelled at my dullness.

"Neither did I," the Judge was saying, "until I saw the fourth son, Arthur, sitting, one day, on the roadside, studying Latin. When I asked him who was his teacher, he said his father. Do you understand what it must mean to break rock every day at the year while your soul is crying for Homer and Virgil? Do you know that soul's hunger for companionship, which must be stilled by intercourse with the common and unsympathetic?"

I saw then why the Judge had called Tom McKenna great.

"Your mention of Arthur reminds me that yesterday, when relating the success that had attended the other children, you said nothing of him. What became of him?"

"Oh!" said the Judge, "Arthur,

you know, was a second Tom McKenna!"

I did not press the matter. I perceived that, in some unaccountable way, the Judge had been brought to know and highly rate the dead man, and that he entertained a bitterness in his heart against the community for its not recognizing his hero. The cortege had now reached the church door, and as we waited until we were permitted to enter the edifice, the Judge said:

"Observe the priest who will perform the obsequies to-day. He is Arthur McKenna. I am a dyed-in-the-wool Baptist, was always one, except to die one, but I wouldn't have missed seeing Tom McKenna the day that he celebrated his first Mass in this church, for half my fortune. The smile came into the old man's eyes that Sunday and stayed there, until death closed them."

As I heard this I realized how the Judge loved the little rock-breaker.

That night, as we sat together in the study, the Judge said, out of deep thought: "You noticed my nervousness in the church this morning? It was caused by an impulse, strong as the voice of a command, to rise up and tell those people that a great man had departed from our midst."

"Why did you not obey it?" I inquired.

"I am running for office," he returned, with some bitterness. "They would say it was a scheme to get the Irish vote. Then, those children, and their rich connections, might not relish my public reference to their father's occupation and poverty; and—well, I'd have to blow my own horn somewhat in relating the incident that made me acquainted with the heroic soul of Tom McKenna, and I've got enough merited charges against me, without inviting the slander of vain-glorious. Do you recognize this?" he added, opening a drawer in his desk, and taking out a knapping-hammer. "When McKenna laid it down, I asked him for it, and I treasure it as others treasure the sword of a great general; and I hold it worthy of far more reverence, for this was not lifted to take life, but to preserve it."

"With the rest of the world, his wife and children,—except, perhaps, the boy,—Arthur,—I saw in Tom McKenna, a quiet, inoffensive fellow, without the ability to rise in the world. I saw only the rock-breaker, never the man, until one day, pretty close to a quarter of a century ago. I had but lately hung out my shingle and as young lawyers have plenty of leisure I went out for a stroll. McKenna's string of rock lay to the right of the road. I could see the bent figure in the distance. As I drew nearer, I noticed the regular rise of the arm suddenly cease and the form droop forward until it lay prone on the stones. I supposed that the old fellow had fainted as the day was hot, and I ran to his assistance. As I came up I heard those long, smothered cries which tell of a brave man's suffering. 'In the name of God, McKenna,' I cried, 'what's the matter?' He lifted himself quickly. I tell you, my friend, I am now an old man, and have seen much of life's sorrows, but not enough to blot from my memory the picture of Tom McKenna's face. It could have given Dante a new idea of Despair."

"McKenna tried to make some excuse, but I was not to be put off; so I sat down on the rock-pile and said, 'That's not so! There's something wrong. Why are you so stand-offish?' You've known me since I was a lad in knee-breeches. I played and studied and fought with your boys, in the village school. I may not be able to help you one whit in your trouble—I certainly can't, if it concerns money, for I am as poor as yourself,—but it will relieve your mind to speak of it, and I may be able to suggest something.' I don't know which statement of my argument convinced him, but sitting there on the rock-pile, Tom McKenna opened his mind and heart to me, as I'll warrant he never did, before nor after, to any except his Maker."

"He was an Irish gentleman's son. For some service which his forefathers had rendered the Crown, they were to possess the estate 'while grass grows and water runs.' They were an easy-going, well-living people until the coming into the family of a penniless English peeress. This lady, who was Tom McKenna's grandmother, was an ambitious woman, possessed by the determination to push the family forward. She succeeded admirably with her husband and their son, and the McKennas of Drumshanbo were beginning to be a force to be reckoned with, when the family received a back-set by the appearance of Tom on the stage of life. He would inherit the estate, but instead of the aggressive, shrewd, am-

bitious nature the fortunes of the family required in that period of its evolution, he was backward, undetermined, finding pleasure only in scholarly pursuits. He carried off first honors of college, and it might have been that the house should have received its crowning glory from the literary or scientific fame the boy would have achieved, if the ambitious, meddling old English grandmother, aided and abetted by his parents, had not interfered with the designs of Providence. They had no sympathy with the scholar, and forced him to become a man of affairs. Of course he failed, dismally failed. Then they blamed him. The money expended on his political ventures crippled the estate, the family began to lose prestige. When an opportunity came to him to retrieve this loss by an alliance with a lady of wealth, he refused to perform his part, believing that marriage, without mutual love, was a sinful union. We can imagine what this sensitive soul was made to suffer from his uncomprehending, ambitious relations; especially since there was another son who possessed the character into which they tried to mould Tom's."

"What always angered me with Tom McKenna," said the Judge, sharply, "was that he let his mind be warped by those fools, and believed with them that he was a failure, and had destroyed the fortune, political and financial, of the family. This conviction took such a grasp on him that he relinquished his title to the estate in favor of his brother, and came to America with five pounds in his pocket. He was a failure! The conviction knocked every hope out of his heart. It did not matter that he carried more Greek and Latin in his head than many a college principal, and that those strange dreams out of which the poets weave immortality were to him what realities are to others. He was a failure, as a politician; perhaps he could succeed as a rock-breaker. He came to Kentucky, where they were building new roads, and drifted into Glen Mary, with his knapping-hammer. For thirty years he sat on a rock-pile. Think of it! A man who was more familiar with the Greek and Latin poets than I with the authors of my own tongue, who could solve a problem of Euclid while I was getting my wits together, who could have taught me, a graduate of Kentucky's ancient University, points of law—this man breaking stones on the common highway! I was young and impulsive then. I remember that I jumped to my feet and swore that if I had the money, I would go to Ireland, and clean out the McKenna clan. Well, I did go to Ireland afterwards. I visited McKenna's old home. I found the brother a prosperous gentleman, with his son in the House of Commons. He told me what a failure Tom was, that the family would have been beggared if he had not had the honesty to hand over to others the duties for which he was unfitted. I was older then, so I did not attempt to enforce an appreciation of Tom on the McKenna family by my first-desired methods. I found St. Paul's persuasive words of human wisdom more suitable to my years and dignity; but when I departed from McKenna Castle, its lord felt smaller and meaner than if I had horse-whipped him from one end of the estate to the other. Next to my wedding day and the day I won my first suit in court, that was the happiest of my life!"

The Judge leaned back in his chair, drawing deep puffs from his cigar, enjoying, in retrospect, the humiliation of the proud, self-satisfied, patronizing usurper of his brother's rights.

"McKenna's wife, as you know, was a careful woman. I have never heard grander praise given to a woman than the poor rock-breaker paid to his wife that day. She no more comprehended the soul of her husband than I can comprehend the plan of the universe. Very likely, if the truth were known, she also regarded him as a dismal failure; but not a thought of blame ever crossed the mind of that chivalrous gentleman against the woman he loved. Their children were like her, he said, and he told me how they had saved their wages until, with the money their mother had managed to hoard, they had been able to buy and pay for Don Clay's farm. There was no doubt that they would succeed. But Arthur—he was another failure like his father. He had no grasp like Tom and Joe, and no ambition like Ed. Yet good as were all the children, the old man said, he was the best of them. But no one understood him, except the father, and as him, and were assuming an air of

Arthur was now eighteen, the others

beginning to get-to-work-or-get-out toward him. Yet the boy was industrious. If set to a task he fulfilled it conscientiously, but it was evident that he worked from a sense of duty, not inclination. He had a way of hurrying from work and meals to books that the practical-minded mother and brothers resented. If his studies were directed, like Ed's, toward a definite object, they would have encouraged him, but he showed no inclination to make any use of his knowledge.

"The state of affairs finally drove the father to expostulate with the son. He told me definitely how he had undertaken the delicate task of pointing out his duty to Arthur. I took him aside, one morning," said the old man, "and told him what I have now told you. I showed him what a failure I was, and begged him, in the name of God, to avoid my example. I told him that the crowning sorrow of my life would be to see that I had perpetuated myself in the child I loved best. He did not say a word, but looked at me with love and pity; then, turned and went to the field, with his brothers. A few days later, Arthur came to where his father worked and said that he wanted to become a priest. The happiness the information brought almost overpowered the old man. A failure? Who would dare say that he was a failure when he had given a son, whom men called 'a second Tom McKenna' to the Church? He assured me that often when alone he cried for joy, because of Arthur's intention."

"But where was the money to come from? He could not expect Tommie and Joe, with their own future to build, to give over their earnings for five years to the brother who had done so little toward assisting them in paying for the farm for their parents; and Ed had his own college expenses to save from his earnings. Yet he felt that the boy must not be thwarted in his pious desire, for he had seen, and heard of, the sad ending of lives that turn, or are turned, from their proper calling. Though he did not say it, and perhaps did not think it, his own case was a strong example. What would he do? Then it occurred to him to write to his brother, in Ireland, to whom he had given up everything. He was now prosperous, for he had wedded the heiress. Never doubting that he would gladly assist his nephew to an office held in such regard by the Irish people, McKenna wrote his letter. He said nothing to the family, not even to Arthur, for he had planned a glorious surprise when the answer would come from the lord of McKenna castle. We can imagine the rose-hued world in which he lived, for we have all built our castles in the air. That day the letter had come—a crushing, brutal letter, a letter calculated to turn into gall the mills of human kindness, in the old, gentle heart! It would not have been well for the Honorable Mr. McKenna to have encountered me when I finished reading his reply to his brother.

"When I handed it back to McKenna, and understood now what had stamped the despair on his face, a love, such as I have never felt for one not of my blood, sprang up in my heart for the noble man, I then and there made two speedy resolves:—one, that Arthur McKenna should be a priest; the other, that I should go to Ireland some day and tell the Honorable Peter McKenna my opinion of him. Thank God, I lived to see both determinations executed!" and the Judge leaned back in his chair, with a smile of peace.

"After I had expressed myself rather freely to McKenna about his cad of a brother," again began the Judge, "I said, 'I it hadn't been for the d-d war, Tom, you'd never again sit on a rock-pile, after what you've told me! All I got out of my father's estate were a hundred acres of land and two thousand dollars. I spent the money on my education, but the land's left and unencumbered. To-morrow there'll be a mortgage on it for the amount required to educate Arthur for the priesthood. If more money is needed than I can get on the farm, I'll borrow it on the honor and honesty which was bequeathed me by my father.' 'You'll do nothing of the sort, Willy Randolph!' he cried. 'See if I won't!' I replied. 'The old man began to get excited. 'You shan't beggar yourself for my son!' he said. 'I'll not accept it! What I wouldn't ask, nor expect, his own brothers to do for him, I won't accept from a stranger.' I told McKenna to sit down and hear me out. 'I don't ask you to take the money as a gift,' I said,

"I simply give it to you as a loan, which you, or Arthur when he is a minister, can repay. It will not inconvenience me any, for I am earning enough at my profession to meet my present requirements, and it will save him.' I showed him how solemnly I regarded life, and told him that my conscience compelled me to insist that he should not let any foolish notion stand between his son and the desires of that son's soul. It was about three o'clock when I reached the rock-pile, and it was nearly nine before I left it. I reckon I'd have been there yet, if I hadn't won my point, for I never permitted over-comable obstacles to thwart me."

"Well, McKenna accepted my loan, with the understanding that it would be drawn up in perfectly legal manner, with security, and bearing interest from date. As our relations brought us together, I gleaned, from their attitude, that none of the family approved of what the old man had done for Arthur. 'I thought,' I said once to Mrs. McKenna, 'that a Catholic mother had no higher wish for her son than to see him a minister of the Gospel?' She replied that she would rather see her four sons the humblest priests, than millionaires or presidents; and if it were any of the others she would go down on her knees to thank me for what I had done. 'But it's throwing money away to try to make a priest out of Arthur,' she said. 'He'll never amount to anything, any more than his father before him.' I knew that it would be waste of energy and time to try to make a woman of her cast of mind, see, even dimly, the worth of her husband. I simply expressed my willingness to stake my farm on it that Arthur would not disappoint his father."

"The following September, Arthur entered college, and in five years he was ordained. I think I could forget my marriage day as readily as the Sunday on which Arthur celebrated his first Mass, in the little old Church of Glen Mary! Tom dragged me down to the front pew with him, and I'll swear I sat there crying like an old fool. To this day I never could find a reason for my making such an exhibition of myself, unless it was because of the transformation which the first sight of that vested priest made in the rock-breaker. He did not shed a tear, but there was a light on his face which burned out the sadness from his dark eyes. When it was all over, when we had witnessed Arthur's first Mass, received his first blessing, as we walked down the aisle, between the two rows of smiling people, the old man clasped my hand and whispered, 'NOT a failure, Willy!'"

The Judge's snowy handkerchief was now in his hand and he was not ashamed to raise it to his eyes and wipe away the tears that memory had called up.

"The money was paid back, of course?" I said.

"Every cent of it!" answered the Judge. "Do you know how? By this!" and he lifted the little knapping-hammer. "For the first few years he could scarcely meet the interest. Then, when Tommy and Joe were doing better, the father could give all his earnings towards the reduction of the debt. Afterwards, when the boys were independent, and Arthur was in his parish, they wanted to liquidate the remainder, but the old man refused to accept their assistance. 'It's my debt,' he said, 'and I'll pay it. I'll not fall here.' When the last dollar was turned over to me I gave him the note, and he gave me the knapping-hammer. That was ten years ago. Then he went back to the world there, as you have found returning to Glen Mary. But as you see still the eternal earth beneath and the eternal sky above, so he met unchanged and unchanging, the poets of the past, immortally young throughout the generations!"

The Judge was touching, with gentle fingers, the little hammer.

"Yet," he said, turning toward me with an angry light in his eyes, "all, except Arthur and me, regard this man as one who did not succeed. As the world looks at it, Tom McKenna was a failure! If failure means to give to the State a posterity of honest sons and virtuous daughters, to the Church a zealous minister, to bear through life a stainless honor and unshaken loyalty, to hold unswerving faith in God and perfect love for man—if failure means to be a hero, I ask no dearer boon of God, next to salvation, than that on my tombstone men may write, 'Will Randolph. Failure!'—Annie C. Minogue, in Donahoe's Magazine."

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