

A LUCKY DREAM.

HOW CONNOR McDERMOTT HEARD THE
MIDNIGHT MASS.

"You'll be careful now, Connor dear—will you not? And you will not allow yourself to be led into drinking and foolishness this blessed night?"

Norah O'Brien's beautiful dark eyes were raised with an appealing glance to the handsome russet-tinged face of her stalwart young lover.

"Never doubt me darling," was the reply, as Connor drew her to him and kissed her blooming cheek, "you know I never broke my word with you."

"I do trust your brave, honest heart, Connor. But the city beyond is a gay place, full o' temptations. Jack Halligan, too, is a wild, roystering, harem-skarem fellow; and he might lead you into danger without your knowing, if you didn't keep a sure guard upon yourself. And on this blessed and holy Christmas Eve, it would pain me sore to see my dear good boy staggering home like any no'er-do-well o' them all."

"My wise and loving little woman!" said McDermott tenderly, "You need have no fear. It is only a drive of five miles; and when we get all the things we want, I promise you I'll not let Jack or the other boys linger long about the streets. We'll be home safe, please God before the first faint echo o' the joy bells reaches you."

"Hallo, Connor," shouted a loud hearty voice, as a genuine Irish "jaunting jar" came driving up the road. It was freighted by three merry-looking young fellows, the speaker holding the reins. "Are you ready, old boy? A merry Christmas to you, Norah—we must take that big gorsoon away from you for awhile; but never fear for him; I warrant you we'll bring him back safe and sound."

"I'll trust more to his own good sense," replied Norah, "than to your guidance, mad Jack Halligan. When you and Condry Rourke there and Dan Barry are together I fear mischief."

"Oh, be the powers, boys!" exclaimed Halligan, cracking his whip indignantly, and looking the picture of injured innocence—"there's language for

you to use to the three decentest and quietest boys in the whole barony. Ah! there's nothing bates the tongue o' women for defamation of character. But step in, Connor, my lad; the mare is very fresh and wants to feel her feet under her."

And well her feet carried her, too. The well-balanced car, with two on each side, swept over the road at a rattling pace, and the good mare seemed to take her work with loving kindness.

It was a bright, cold, crisp winter's evening. The sky was almost cloudless; there was a glimmer of red still in the north-west; and there was that peculiar fresh healthful sense in the atmosphere which gave warning of a coming frost. The four young men were in the height of vigorous health and joyous spirits; and as the horse's iron-shod hoofs clattered along the hard road, they made the evening air resonant with merry jest, and snatches of song, and shout of boisterous ringing laughter.

But driving into the good city of Cork on that Christmas Eve, to make various purchases for the pleasant festival of the morrow, it was easier for Connor McDermott, or his young friends, to make promises of abstemiousness than to keep them. Many were the friends and old acquaintances they met in familiar places in the city; and it would be absurd to suppose that they could get away without exchanging the compliments of the season and indulging in more than one social glass.

It was late when the horse's head was turned for home. The moon was radiant in the clear dark blue sky, and countless stars sprinkled like diamond dust over the vault of heaven, twinkled with that bright crepuscular light which indicates a keen and cutting "Black Frost." Connor McDermott had kept his promise to his pretty sweetheart thus far that he was not drunk or tipsy—for he had a good strong head of his own and could bear a fair allowance. But he was merry enough for all that, and had yielded so far to the pressing and irresistible hospitality of his city friends that he had taken quite as much as was good for him. His three companions were merrier still, and to provide against the cold night drive, they had