

THE BLAKES AND FLANNAGANS.

BY MRS. JAS. A. SADDLER.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE BROKEN HEART—MRS. HENRY T. BLAKE ON BAPTISM.

When Molly Reynolds saw the corpse safely deposited on the pallet in her little room, she went off to ask the assistance of her old cronies. It required all her influence to induce any of them to go with her. "If the man was a good Christian, they'd be willing to wash him and lay him out, but a haythen like that, they didn't care to have anything to do with his carcass."

While their hostess was gone, the women sat around the stove, talking over the dreadful occurrence which had brought them together. Ever and anon they would cast a fearful glance towards the pallet whereon lay the dead body, carefully covered up. One gave it as her opinion that they should go to work at once and wash the body, so as to get it over and done with, but the others, on the ground that it took three hours or so to "cool the corpse."

"To tell the truth," said the last speaker, "I have neither heart nor eye in the same job. He was an unlucky vagabond all his life, and died without the rites of the Church."

"And how else should he die, Polly?" demanded her next neighbor. "Didn't he just die the death that he deserved to die, and that everybody knew he would die? Didn't he turn his back on the father and mother that reared him?—didn't he disgrace everybody belonging to him?—an' worse than all, didn't he deny his religion, and blaspheme God?—didn't he speak with disrespect of the Blessed Mother of God whenever he had the chance to fangh whenever he was in the house?"

"Whist! here they are!—not a word now for your lives!—I wish to goodness we weren't here at all, for it'll be a heart-breaking sight I know well!"

The door was slowly opened, very slowly, and Mrs. Dillon appeared, leaning on Molly's arm. Not a tear was in her eye, but her face was ashy pale, and the only visible symptom of unusual emotion was a sort of asthmatic breathing, or rather gasping. It was quite plain that she could hardly support herself, and still, Molly kept encouraging her with, "Come, now, Mrs. Dillon, dear!—come yourself!—sit down, dear, an' draw your breath a minute!"

Mrs. Dillon mechanically obeyed; her eye was fixed on the spot where the outlines of the dead body were but too plainly discernible under the clothes thrown there to hide it. A convulsive shudder crept over her; her lips trembled and grew as white as her cheeks. She leaned back against the wall. Molly hung over her with the tenderest solicitude, beseeching her to try and bear this heavy blow like a good Christian, as she always was. The afflicted mother looked up at the speaker with a vacant stare; she shook her head, and pressed her hand on her heart, as if to stop its troublesome fluttering. Molly understood the mute answer, and her tears attested the depth of her sympathy. There was not a dry eye in the room, except Mrs. Dillon's own. She made two attempts to rise, before she could succeed in gaining her feet. Then she made a move towards the pallet. Molly, seeing her intention, begged of her to wait a little longer, "till she'd be rested after her walk. She was too weak to stand such a sight!"

No, no, she was strong enough—as strong as ever she expected to be in this world. She wanted to see her son—her son—why shouldn't she see him? "Well, well, dear! have your own way; but, oh! Mrs. Dillon, dear! don't be frightened; don't look so for the love of God, don't!"

be dead; God will have mercy on your poor soul! not a word! Oh! Blessed Mother of God! Sweet Virgin! is there no hope for my poor boy! is he to be lost, lost, lost! Oh! didn't I often tell you, my son, this would be the end of it!"

Molly here interposed, and would insist on removing her, declaring that she would kill herself if she went on so. "It's a shame for you, Mrs. Dillon, to fly in the face of God that way. A sensible woman like you ought to know better. Come over here near the stove, an' stir machree! and turn your back this way."

"I'll do anything you bid me, Molly," said the poor heart-broken mother; "but what are you going to do with poor Hugh?—Won't we take him home?" There was a sorrowful meaning in the last word, that made it difficult for the others to keep in their tears.

"Well! just as you like, achorra. If you think well of it, we'll get a cartan' some of the men at once."

"You know our Jerry has a cart," said Polly, eagerly; an' "I'll go for him right off."

"God bless you an' do, then," said Molly. Polly disappeared in an instant. "Do you intend to wake him e'er a night, Mrs. Dillon dear?" inquired Molly.

"I suppose so," was the listless reply. "I don't much care—oh, Hugh! Hugh! if you had only died a Christian, she added with sudden energy, "I think I wouldn't mind—I think I wouldn't—oh, Lord! oh, Lord! is my son dead? Molly! Molly! he can't be dead—don't tell me that he died in his sins, without a minute's warning!—Oh! I couldn't bear that—no, no, no!"

Molly answer, whatever it might have been, was cut short, or rather prevented, by the sound of heavy feet on the stairway outside. "It's Jerry Dempsey with the cart," observed one of the women. But it was not. It was two constables, sent to keep the body in statu quo, till the coroner could find it convenient to hold the inquest.

"Lord bless me!" said Molly; "we were forgettin' all about the coroner; an' how long will it be before he comes, if you please, sir?"

"Can't say, sometime to-morrow forenoon likely."

"Couldn't he be taken to his mother's to-night?"

"No, he must be left just where he is till after the inquest."

Mrs. Dillon bowed her head and covered her face with her hands, but said nothing. Jerry Dempsey came with his cart, and was dismissed by Molly with a request that he would come back next day when the Coroner was gone, which Jerry promised to do. The women who had assembled to wash and "lay out" the corpse, could not be persuaded to go away, although their services were not needed for the present. No, indeed, they would stay and keep Molly and poor Mrs. Dillon company. Little notice did the unfortunate mother take of any one during all that dismal night. In vain did Molly try to rouse her from her lethargy of woe by every little kindly stratagem. There she sat in her speechless misery, if misery could be unconscious, raising her eyes occasionally to heaven, and looking every now and then towards the motionless figure on the floor; then a more deadly pallor would overspread her face; the same shudder would shake her whole frame, and she would clasp her hands still more tightly over her knees. The women were all awed into unusual silence by the dread presence of death, and such horrifying death. The policemen smoked, and chatted, and even laughed, as though nothing strange had happened. Nor was the occurrence strange to them: sudden and violent deaths were every day before their eyes, with all their direful accessories of grief and desolation. They began at one time to discuss certain notorious passages in the life of the deceased, which had brought him under the public eye in anything but a favorable light. Molly hastily interposed, and begged them for God's sake to spare the poor heart-broken mother. The men laughed. "For God's sake!—that was something new!—they guessed they never did anything for God's sake, but however, they wouldn't wish to rake up old sores if it hurted anybody." So Hugh's edifying adventures were dropped for that time.

Hugh to be buried, and how was the funeral to be "got up?" Here Hannah and her adviser found their wits at fault. "Ask the old woman!" said Watty, in a low voice. Hannah accordingly went over and shook her mother by the arm; "mother! I say, mother! what are we going to do for a funeral?—won't you go and ask Tim Flanagan to see after it?"

Her mother looked up at her with a bewildered stare, and Hannah found it necessary to repeat her question. "No!" said Mrs. Dillon, with sudden emphasis; "no! I couldn't have the face to ask a decent, respectable man like Tim Flanagan to invite people to Hugh Dillon's funeral!—no! no!"

"Dear me! and didn't he get up a fine funeral for father?"

"True for you, Hannah, he did—but your unfortunate brother led a different life what his father did—an' oh! oh! he died a different death!—his funeral doesn't make much matter one way or the other."

"Well! leave it to me then," interrupted Watty, with a sudden gust of feeling; "I'll go and hunt up some of the boys. I guess we'll not trouble your pious folk to bury Hugh—we can do it ourselves—eh, Hannah!—don't rather have us carry him to the grave than a pack of hypocritical, praying folk that he never cared a red cent for in his lifetime?" Hannah assented, with a fresh burst of clamorous weeping. All this time Molly Reynolds and two of her friends sat silent and sorrowful in a corner near the poor mourner, regarding her with looks of tenderest compassion, and occasionally offering her those little services which seemed to them useful or necessary.

That same afternoon, about 4 o'clock, the mortal remains of Hugh Dillon were laid in a grave in the Potter's Field. There was no possibility of getting permission to inter him in consecrated ground, so his miserable mother had the crowning torture of seeing him consigned to unhallowed earth. He was followed to the grave by his mother and sister, Watty Sullivan, and some two dozen of his former associates, including Jim and Bill, already unfavorably known to the reader.

As this dreary cavalcade paced slowly along the crowded thoroughfare, it so happened that Henry Blake passed it by in an omnibus. His quick eye instantly recognized Mrs. Dillon as one of the mourners, and an eye chill ran through all his veins. Who could Mrs. Dillon be following to the grave as chief mourner? He looked at the other assistants as they passed, or rather as he passed; but Hugh was not there. "God God!" he said to himself, "can he be dead?—and so soon?"

He thought of the last words he had heard him speak, and remembered the dreary presentation which had haunted his mind that night. Who could Mrs. Dillon be following to the grave as chief mourner, and inquired whose funeral that was. The answer was just what he had expected. All that day, and for many days after, Henry Blake was an altered man. Conscience kept whispering her reproachful accents in the depth of his inmost heart, and do what he would he could not stifle that hissing voice so terribly distinct. But the noise and bustle of the world—the duties of his profession, the charms of the opera and the theatre gradually drowned the troublesome voice, the "still, small voice," that is given us to salvation. A few days—a few weeks passed away, and Hugh Dillon's untimely end was forgotten, at least by Henry. His mind was occupied by new and pleasing cares.

Just three weeks after the death of Hugh Dillon, Mrs. Henry T. Blake gave birth to a son, and great was the joy of the families on both sides. Mother and child were both in the way of doing well. The third day arrived, and as there was no word of anything like baptism, Mrs. Blake, senior, ventured to throw out a suggestion that it was time to have the boy baptized. But to Henry that had the child addressed herself, but Henry referred her to his wife.

"Now, really, Henry, I think you might give an answer without troubling me. You know as well as I do that I am not able to bear much fatigue as yet."

"Why, dear Jane," observed her mother-in-law, "will he be no fatigued to you? I have the child baptized in one of the parlors below, so that you'll neither see nor hear anything of it."

"But I want to know what's the use of hurrying so?" cried Jane, in a querulous tone; "won't it just do as well to have it done when I am up able to go about?"

what religion the children were to be brought up in."

"I am really surprised to hear you talk so, ma'am," replied the daughter-in-law, with still increasing emphasis. "I'm sure I never told Henry that I had any thoughts of changing my religion. Did I, Henry?"

"Well! I understood you to say, Jane, on one occasion, just a week or two before our marriage, that you had no particular objection to the Catholic religion, and if you recollect, I observed at the same time that it would be very convenient if you could make up your mind to come to my Church."

"Oh! that was all a joke—at least on my part. I never dreamed that you were in earnest in making such a proposition, or else I should have settled the matter at once."

"Well! but seriously, Jane, I should like to have our boy baptized by a Catholic priest, if you would oblige me so far, but I know it would please my father and mother."

"And I know it would displease my father and mother," was the quick reply; "don't you think their feelings are to be considered, too? I tell you, Henry, you may do as you please with your own child; but if you get a Komish priest, you shan't be friends—that's all I have to say to you!"

Henry looked distressed, and kept his head turned away from his mother, who looked from one to the other with an anxious, troubled look. Whatever Henry was going to say, he was prevented by the nurse, who came forward in great trepidation to express her fears about the sullicant to make Mrs. Blake put an end to the conversation, and she soon after took her leave. Henry went with her to the door, at her own request, and she took him into the front parlor, to make a last appeal on behalf of the child. She asked him was he going to let his child grow up a heathen. "No, no," he said; "he would get Jane persuaded to have it baptized, as soon as she was able to go after it. He didn't like to worry her, then, about a matter that could just as well stand over a little. But, if the child died in the meantime? Oh! no fear of that; there was every appearance of life and health about him."

"And so, Henry," said his mother, rising and going towards the door, "and so you're determined to wait till Jane chooses?"

"No," she said quite recovered, motherly, said Henry, with a smile. "Well! mind, if anything happens before then, your child's blood will fall on your own head. Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Pearson has got to answer for your child—but, you that call yourself a Catholic—had you better look to it in time. Remember, the loss of a soul is no trifling matter. Oh, Henry! what's come over you at all! My heart is so full that I can hardly speak."

"I know and give you credit for all you would say, mother; but, I really cannot get into a discussion with my dear Jane at such a perilous time!"

"Discussion! why, there's no need of a discussion; just tell her that you're answerable to God for your child's soul, and that you must have it baptized right off. You'll see if she'll hold out after that!"

Henry smiled and shook his head. "Impossible, mother! I wouldn't speak so to her on any account—at present, I mean!"

"Ah! then, God mend you both!" said the mother; "there's little difference between you. May the Lord look to the poor child, amongst you, anyhow!"

It is in his pity, and not you!" Henry smiled again and bowed his mother out with a great show of respect, then went back laughing to tell Jane what she had said, and how well he had managed to get rid of her importunity. He found Jane under treatment for a threatened attack of fever. The nurse, like a good Protestant, and a skilful tender of the sick, was doing all she could to fan the flame in the interior, while she kept the head cool with vinegar, and other such applications. Mrs. Henry was quite excited, and accosted her husband, on his entrance, in no very gentle tone.

"Positively, Henry, I must decline seeing your mother any more till I am quite recovered. I had no idea that she could be so annoying. Such a fuss as she did make about that baptism; one would think it was a matter of life and death. I declare, solemnly I wouldn't be a Romanist for all the wealth of New York; they are the queerest people!—baptism, indeed! and the dear child only four days old!—what barbarians papists must be, to dip poor little infants like that into cold water!—what hearts those priests of yours must have!"

"Pardon me, my dearest Jane, if I interrupt you. I merely wish to set you right as to Catholic baptism. The priests do not dip the child into the water, he merely pours some on its head."

they called the poor infant! Oh! then, dear! oh, dear! oh, dear! I can't let the poor case to have our Henry's son called Ebenezer, and what's worse, grow up a heathen—an unbaptized heathen!—but, I'll take good care that I'll have nothing to do with him—let old Ebenezer take care of young Ebenezer—a shilling of my money he'll never handle with my consent!—eh, Miles—what do you say?"

"I say ditto, Mary!" replied her husband, quietly, but emphatically—"we'll wash our hands of the whole set, since that's the way they're turning out. But, for goodness' sake, don't say anything to Tim about this—he'll hear it time enough!"

"Oh! I never fear, Miles, I'm not such a fool as all that comes to!"

A day or two after, when Jane was considered somewhat stronger, Henry began adroitly to insinuate, it would be anything but advantageous to Ebenezer the Second, in a pecuniary point of view, to quarrel with his wealthy Papist progenitor. This was a startling suggestion to Mrs. Henry, who, having been brought up in the religion of dollars and cents, had a pious veneration for all that appertained thereto, and very naturally shrank from the prospect of depriving her beloved child of any reversibility advantages of that sort. She observed, in a thoughtful tone, that there might be something in that. She would speak to pa and ma that very day; she was quite sure they were not at all bigotted, and could easily be persuaded that it would be no great harm to have Ebenezer baptized. A few years sooner or later made so great harm after all.

That very night, when Mrs. Miles Blake was kneeling at her prayers, in preparation for going to bed, there came a loud knocking at the hall door that made every one in the house start. The door being opened by Miles himself, he was confronted by Henry's manservant, who was sent to beg Mrs. Blake to go down as fast as she possibly could, for that the child was taken bad with some kind of fits.

This was fearful news for the believing parents, especially Mrs. Blake, who forgot all her recent anger in her anxiety to administer private baptism to the child. Eliza would fain accompany her father and mother; but, as she was already half-prepared for bed, her mother would not wait for her to dress, but hastened off with Miles as fast as their feet could carry them, praying all the time that the poor innocent child might not die without baptism.

In vain did good Mrs. Blake and her more phlegmatic husband fly over the ground with a lightness that they could hardly believe possible at another time; in vain did the incense of prayer go up from the grandmother's heart and lips—her prayers were not gathered in the golden urn above—reaching Henry's house they found all in grief and consternation—the child was dead!

"Dead!" cried Mrs. Blake, snatching up the infant of the nurse's knee; "dead!—oh! sure—sure he's not dead!—he can't be dead!" The nurse shook her head, Jane buried her head in her pillows, and Henry walked to the window to conceal his emotion.

Mrs. Blake saw at a glance that it was too true. The swelled and discolored face of the child, already cold and lifeless, told its own sad story. Laying the little corpse quietly down on its cradle bed, Mrs. Blake sat down and wept bitterly. Miles would have soothed her, but, for some time, she resisted all his efforts.

"Let me alone, Miles; let me cry it out. I have good reason! Oh! I've had only taken the darling child myself, and given it a private baptism that day before I left here—I'll never, never forgive myself!"

"My dear mother!" said Henry, "there's no use in your reproaching yourself; it ain't any fault of yours, I'm sure!"

"No matter whose fault it is," observed Miles, "it's a bad business. I wouldn't be in your place, Henry, this night, for a good sum!"

"I think, father," said Henry, sharply, "you might choose a fitter time than this for making your strictures. I didn't send for you to ask your opinion of my conduct. Jane, my love, how do you feel?"

Jane could not answer; she was in a hysterical fit of weeping. Her son was dead, and she would not be comforted. Not that she had the slightest idea of his having sustained any loss in dying without baptism, but he was dead, dead when she thought him most likely to live; and, like the hapless father immortalized in Scottish song—

"—she was left lamenting."

That was a heavy blow to Henry Blake and his wife for the time being. Mr. and Mrs. Pearson, too, were, at first, very much shocked; but after the lapse of a few weeks, they all, even Jane herself, began to find consolation in the fact, that "poor baby" had not been baptized by a priest. This was, of course, between themselves, for they gave Henry credit for more Catholicity than he really possessed. As far as he was concerned, the question of baptism, or non-baptism, gave him but little concern.

lamentable effects, he had been actually conoling with them in the best of good faith. Poor, honest, kind-hearted Tim Flanagan; it was just like him, as his sister said when he was gone.

"He's a heart of oak," said Miles, with unusual warmth. "After all, there are not many like him now-a-days!"

"I wish he'd only leave off that nasty habit of thrashing his hands in his pockets," said Eliza. "It is so vulgar! I wonder Edward, or John, or the girls don't break him off of it!"

"You needn't wonder, then," replied her mother, quickly; "neither Edward, nor John, nor Thomas that's to be ordained next year—no, nor the girls neither, ever sees any fault in their father. Its proud of him they are. Eliza, not like some folks I know that look down with disdain on the father and mother that have raised them to whatever height they have!"

"Why, dear me! ma, you needn't take on so; I'm sure I meant no harm!"

"Nor no good, either, Eliza! I'll thank you to walk up stairs to your own room, if it's not too great a favor! You have a face of brass, my good girl, or you wouldn't talk to my face about your uncle Tim's 'nasty habits.' He has no nasty habits, I tell you, Eliza Blake. I wish you and your brother were only half as good, or half as respectable as Tim Flanagan is! If you were, we'd all have another story to tell!"

Eliza stood up and put by her work in silence. There was a deep flush on her cheek that was very unusual, but she said never a word, bowing stiffly and formally to each of her parents, she left the room in silence. It were superfluous to say how her parents felt, how they looked or what they said. Suffice it to say, they lay down that night with heavy hearts and sad forebodings.

TO BE CONTINUED.

HIS HEART WAS TOUCHED.

The young priest had celebrated his first Mass. The long procession of choristers and servers had wound into the sacristy. Presently the celebrant would come forth again that his hands might be kissed by the congregation, who sat meanwhile in a hush of expectancy, touched into unwonted stillness by the solemnity of the occasion. The clear, pure sunlight of a spring morning poured through the rose window above the altar, filling the little sanctuary with amber light. Although it was a parish chapel it belonged to a convent of Dominican nuns, and there was about the sanctuary and all its appointments that air of exquisite purity seen only where nuns have charge of the altar. On either side hung curtains of white and silver, against which palms and ferns were massed. The carved brass of the candlesticks and of the burnished doors of the tabernacle shone like gold in the clear light. The snowy white of the marble altar breathed spotless chastity, the air was fragrant with the perfume of spring flowers, and with the faint odor of incense that still showed dimly in the shadow. Shut off from the world by the high Gothic walls and the narrow private chapel, and the foremost of the waiting congregation could see their kneeling forms, outlined in white serge robes against the dark carven oak of their stalls.

In the front seat in the nave sat the young priest's mother, clasping and unclasping her nervous fingers, dazed with unearthly happiness in this the supreme moment of her life. Like Simone she could have sung joyfully "Nunc Dimittis," now that her eyes had seen the glorious consummation of a quarter of a century's hopes, labors, yearnings and desires. Her boy, her darling, the only child of her brief married life, had stood before her on God's altar, clothed in the priestly vestments, lifting the chalice, touching with hands that had lain close to her heart the body of the Saviour, and had begun the wonderful Mass!—Oh! that Heaven might offer Mary Gorman hereafter could touch her heart and soul to such ineffable happiness as this past hour had brought her. Long labors, grim struggles, heavy hardships were forgotten, or if they were remembered it was only to be glorified, for were not they the steps by which she had ascended to this?

In the opposite bench sat a tall, round-looking man in late middle life. Black brows marked a face of clear pallor; hair and beard, once jet-black, too, were almost white. He sat very erect, as was his wont, and stared hard at the sunlit altar, and his heart was heavy with the thought that no son of his would ever stand there robed for the Holy Sacrifice. An intensely devoted Catholic, it had been the one great wish of Dr. Nugent's life to have a son a priest. God had blessed him with three fine lads, shapely, clever, and good-looking, but to none of them came the call their father had so ardently desired. He prayed for it, he worked for it by seeking to bend their inclination whither he wished, but to no purpose. They grew to manhood, chose professions and were prospering in them, but their father was a disappointed man. He stole a glance at the homely face of Mary Gorman, and his own face grew hard at the sight of the ecstasy in hers. Here was one who had been a servant girl in the town he came from, and who now sat exalted as he might never hope to be.

In that hushed interval he went back in fancy to the little town of his birth. He saw himself the prosperous doctor's son home on a holiday from college, and Maura Raudah, as they called the red-haired Connaught servant girl at Murray's the butcher's, beeding clothes by the canal bank, or carrying water bare-footed to her master's shop. A poor drudge she was, but happy and light-hearted withal. He remembered her well because of her habit of answering in Irish the taunts about her flaming hair. There came a year when he missed her, and was told she had gone to London. For himself there were successful examinations, a prosperous practise in a London suburb, years of married happiness and fatherhood, married only by that one balked desire. But how deep was his disappointment only God and himself knew.

When he saw again the Maura