

NORA BRADY'S VOW.

BY MRS. ANNA H. DORSEY.

CHAPTER V.

But now, too great for fester grown. Too proud to bend the slavish knee. Lord Erin needs the tyrant's thrall. And firmly vows she will be free.

But mark you treacherous stealthy knave That bends beneath his country's ban; Shall he dash out the tyrant's hope? The anti-Irish Irishman!

One bright sunny morning, just four weeks after Dennis Byrne left Glendariff, he returned, footsore and weary enough. Parting with John Halloran under the gloomy circumstances of their last interview had been the saddest trial which had ever wrung the stout heart of the blacksmith of Kildare, and almost unmanly, his tears now and then fell in torrents, sprinkling the wild rocky paths he was descending. Once he met a cowherd searching for a stray heifer, and not long after, in a narrow gorge, came abreast of two or three shy, sunken-looking men, wearing a look of terror on their countenances, who, having been into the valley to buy meal and potatoes, had heard and seen enough to make them fly back to their mountain sheelings, perfectly satisfied to forego the necessities they were in pursuit of for the agreeable certainty of knowing that they had escaped hanging and quartering. Dennis soon discovered that their alarm was not groundless; for as he approached nearer to the low lan's he perceived detachments of English soldiers galloping in every direction over the country. He saw that they were stationed at the farm-houses, and at the cross-roads, and knew that, unless the providence of God delivered him, he should have a narrow escape, if indeed he did not really fall into their hands. But danger and peril awaited the edge of an Irishman's wit; his love of adventure imparted a zest to the most unequal reason; while all the chivalry and will of his nature are roused to defeat the purposes of those who would trample on him; and, when he finds that mere physical strength cannot serve him, his keen wit, like a legion, is ready to grapple with an army of difficulties. Dennis Byrne's disguise was perfect, and his limp inevitable, although it added a heavy weight to every mile; while with the vacant, simple look he assumed, and a brogue which was absolutely terrible, he succeeded in passing unharmed more than one Sixon corion, who were engaged in torturing and tormenting the harmless peasantry with an abuse of authority which the Vandals of a remote age might have been ascribed. Whenever he spied them in the distance, he began to sing, with a voice which indicated a pair of lungs as tough and strong as his own great bellows in the smithy at Kildare, some wild Gaelic song, which, to those who were near enough to hear the words, was about as intelligible as the clatter of a mill-wheel, until they surrounded him with curses and questions not a few; when, by his half-witted answers, his rough Connought brogue, assumed for the occasion, and his idiotic expressions of wonder, he not only secured the freedom of the road, but succeeded in learning much that he wished to know, and on several occasions absolutely received as many shillings as blows.

He learned that the principal chiefs in the late outbreak had been arrested and imprisoned; it was believed and hoped they would be hung, certainly transported. He heard John Halloran's name loaded with imprecations and curses, as one who had escaped; they feared he had got safe out of the country; if not, such means were provided for his arrest as must certainly prove effectual in his capture.

At last Dennis found himself within the Parkgate at Glendariff. As he approached the house, he saw at once how it was. Sentinels in the uniform of the 4th Regiment of Highlanders were stationed here and there about the mansion and grounds; and if at first he felt surprised at the circumstance of no guard being placed at the lodge, he understood it now; but he thanked God fervently that the hunted fugitive was far away, and not likely to be led unwarily into this well-concealed ambushade. As to himself, "he didn't care a snap if they took him prisoner; it was just what he wanted, unless they sent him up to Dublin, bedad! which would put another face intirely on the matter."

The shutters were all closed, and only the kitchen-door was open. Through this he saw Nora sitting around as usual; perhaps more bravely and silently, for so wild melody trilled out with the gladness of a pure and honest heart, now kept time to the motion of her busy hands. Limping up toward the kitchen, thinking at the moment only of Nora, he was suddenly grasped by the arm on one side, while from the other a bayonet presented before him glittered in his eyes. He turned, and found himself in the custody of two soldiers, who demanded the countersign.

"De what? My granny used to know all de signs o' de wedding; but I niver was wise dat way," said Dennis, dropping the corners of his eyes and his mouth together.

"Want be your business, and where be you from last?" asked the old soldier, gruffly.

"An' surely yer honor's searret me wis out o' me intirely. I a most forgot whedder I was ever born or not," exclaimed Dennis, the picture of a fool.

"Come, ye hirpin' gabrielunzie, to Captain Saunders; he'll tell that'll make ye glow'r. Heeb, s'rs! but ye'll toll him where ye come frae last," said the Scotchman, laying his hand on Dennis Byrne's ragged collar and leading him into John Halloran's library, where Captain Saunders, with one or two of his officers, was at breakfast. He was a man past middle age, with the harsh physiognomy of his nation; (it is said that the Scotch officers and soldiers, greatly to their honor, at this period in Ireland, behaved like men from whose bosom humanity had not taken flight) his hair was crisp and gray, and as close to his head as a Covenanter's, while his small, keen

gray eyes were almost hidden by the shaggy, black brows which overhung them.

"Now, I rede ye, speak the truth," whispered the sergeant to Dennis, after he had paused for an instant, bolt upright, to make a military salute to his commanding officer.

"Who are you?" asked Captain Saunders, after hearing his subordinate's report.

"Only a poor innocent bacach man, beggin' here an' there a crust an' a bone, yer honor," replied Dennis, com- piously.

"And do you know the premises you are on?" said I. could in prison you transport you, for daring to put your foot on these grounds without authority? Oa, you are a douse laddie, my ragged friend!" said Captain Saunders.

"Christ pardon an' save uz, an' where am I at all then? yer worship axes me; an' surely it's I ought to be axin' you where I be, seein' you're here, an' I, a poor bacach lad, wid his stuff an' bag, jist from de hills of Tipperary," replied Dennis.

"The devil you are!" exclaimed the captain, excited by this piece of news; and pray what were you after in that Gehenna?"

"I was a Shanghai, sir? My grannie had lots o' him, but I niver dar her mition any sich breed as dat," said Dennis, looking perfectly innocent, while the young officers, angry, but amused, endeavored to suppress a laugh.

"I say, rasal, what business had you in Tipperary?" roared Captain Saunders.

"I dunno, yer honor. I h'ard I was born dare; but, bein' a poor o'phim, I can't swear to de fact, and bo rasyon of me beravement, for I was a destitute orphan, yer honor, I had to take de wallet on me shoulder, and ax de hospitality of me neighbors an' de country peopies; but, save us, sirs! I'm driv' out o' de countree intirely by de seegerin' an' fighting dat's goin' on here. Batune de sogers takin' me for a rebel, an' de rebels takin' me for a divil of a informer; an' yer honor, I was glad to get out of it intirely," said Dennis, with an emphasis and strength of brogue which was deafening even to Scotch ears.

"Granny's sake, mon, ye deserve hangin' for de t'ud! Contend no more, de claver ye make. Can't ye speak de Queen's English?" exclaimed Captain Saunders, about the corners of whose eyes might be seen an incipient wrinkle of mirth.

"Lord's sake, sir! Can yer honor spake in de grand old Celtic diction, dat's de use to all my born days? If you can do dat, sir, I'm as your avicem mornin' till night; me tongue gets on de right groove den, sir, an' English is a furrin' lingo to me, an' my tongue goes blunderin' over de brogue of it, till I don't zactly know what I says myself."

"No; and I'm glad I don't, ye pore beg," said Captain Saunders. "Ye here, Jook Hazel, search this fellow. He's more kave than fool, in my opinion."

"It's well for them that's made so many buggars to have 'em fed. It's an old game, well understood in Ireland, robbing Peter to pay Paul. What do you want?" she said, turning her eyes full on Dennis Byrne.

"Why, ma'am," he whimpered, "I'm a poor o'phim from Tipperary, an' 'ud like a bowl o' strabout, an' a rasber, an' a mug o' ale or whiskey, an' a couid towl, if you has de likes of it by you."

"I shall have to set the table for the gentlemen from Tipperary," she said, with a light, merry laugh. "Perhaps yer honor'll take a bit of venison, and some bottled sherry?"

"Anything your ladyship plazes!" "If I was a man, I'd shake you to smitherens," said Nora, bustling around, while Sergeant Hazel, with a laugh, wished her good luck of the bargain he had brought her, and went away. Neither of them uttered a word until he was out of hearing; for he was too good a soldier to go out of sight.

"Nora dear! "Thanks be to God, Dennis Byrne, that you're back to safety." Both spoke in Irish. "D'd you see him, Dennis?"

"I did. I saw him, and think he is safe."

"O, thanks be to God!" he exclaimed Nora, while tears flowed over her cheeks. "Now toll me about it, dear." He told her. "O, how glad this news will make the broken heart in there! Dennis, she's been drooping like a flower when the bitter wind from the Keek blows in it; but, oh, Dennis Byrne, there's worse news for you to hear."

"What?" he asked, while his cheek paled.

"The lady and her children are poor—so poor—so very poor, Dennis. You and I, with our strong arms and stout hearts, is richer than they." said Nora, with a short sob. "Glendariff is their home, and so what Mrs. Halloran, I'd scorn to touch him with my hand," said Dennis, bitterly.

All this time, and it was not long, Nora was getting a meal together for the beggar-man, and the soldier from his post watched them narrowly.

When you put that plate down beside me, a sushill mahul apus mahree, (Light of my eyes and heart) take up de lock of hair I'll put down. It's his. Take it to Mrs. Halloran, and give it to her with his love, and tell her he's safe, and by this time is across de sea."

Nora did as she was directed, with great dexterity, and thrust it into her pocket just as Sergeant Hazel came into the kitchen, ostensibly for a drink of water, but in reality to see what was going on.

"An' now, yer pittique," broke out Nora, "there's a dinner for a king; and if you're a good Christian you'll thank God for it. And you're welcome in His holy name. Could you stop a minute, sir? I have a favor to ask of you. I'm run up and see what Mrs. Halloran wants; may be it's a dish of tea, poor lady; she didn't ate a morsel to-day, by rasyon of the headache that's racking her, havin' the heart-ache out of the bargain; an' there's heaps of silver layin' about on de dressers, spoons, and de like that it would be easy to slip in a wallet like this."

Dennis Byrne's honest, handsome face had a sad expression. He could pretend to be a fool, a wandering beggar; but, when it came to thief, he could scarcely hold his peace. But he did, rigidly, manfully, and Nora, with a mischievous twinkle in her eyes, ran up to cheer Mrs. Halloran with the tidings she had to impart.

She was lying on her couch—the same low couch that her husband had left her sleeping on, the night of his departure. She was very pale and still. She had shed but few tears, and exhibited scarcely any emotion. Father McCarthy had seen her every day; but even he could not rouse her from the passive heaviness of her grief. The delicate bloom had faded and faded entirely from her beautiful face, her eyes had grown larger and brighter, and her fingers were often in motion, tapping on the back of a book, or wringing and twisting around each other, or tearing to shreds, scraps of paper and the fivers that little Gracie brought her every day. She never spoke unless some one addressed her, but lay, the live long day, silent, pres- enting an hopeless, a withering, a little child, and she would kiss them gently and send them away; and the innocent ones, awed into silence by her strange mood, would slip away with noiseless steps, glad to go from the darkened room out into the air and sunshine.

"How are you feeling now, ma'ne, bairn—my own dear, loving bairn?" asked Nora, kneeling down beside her, and taking up the long, slender hand to caress.

"Well, — well enough," she said; without unclosing her eyes.

"I have news—good news," whispered Nora.

Mrs. Halloran started up, and, pushing back the long curls from her face, gazed wildly at Nora, then, letting her hand fall heavily on the girl's shoulder, whispered, "Is it real, or am I dreaming? I have had so many dreams like this."

"It is no dream, asthore, but awake you are; and don't for the world's sake cry out, for fear that that's on the wall will suspect us. Dennis Byrne's come back. He saw him; he is well, and is by this time over de sea."

"Escaped! Alive! Well!" gasped Mrs. Halloran. "My God, I thank thee. But is there no message—no—"

"There is," said Nora, interrupting her while she took out the crisp, glossy curl of hair. "He sent this to you with his heart's love; an' that is all I know. We watched all the time, an' it's all I could learn."

Mrs. Halloran laid the curl in the palm of her hand, and gazed fondly and dreamily on it, then pressed it to her lips, her forehead, her bosom. "Oh, John! my John! my husband! my husband!" she whispered; "my noble John!" Then a tear like a single, heavy rain-drope fell on the dark hair, where it lay like a gem.

"Yes," said Nora, who saw that coat, and hope it was the harbinger of others; "for such a one as he to go wandering in a strange land—may be sick, and anywise lonesome an' homeless!"

"Oh, my husband! why cannot I be with you in poverty and exile?" Then tears began to flow more freely. "Where is he, Nora Brady?" "I don't know, ma'am, only that Dennis Byrne seen him in Ballyhowry Mountain, where he came to hide."

"Hide! John Halloran, the noblest and best of God's creatures, skulking like a hunted beast!" cried Mrs. Halloran, while torrents of tears drenched her cheeks.

"Nora was satisfied. "The tears will do you good, dear lady," she said, and in a little while I will send poor Gracie and Desmond up. The children's lost their smiles and color, and goes moping around like orphans."

"Yes, send them up—poor little ones!" said Mrs. Halloran. "But one word, Nora: where is my cousin Donald?"

"Faith, ma'am, he's been away these three days. Mrs. Shea says he has gone to Dublin; anywise, it's a good riddance."

"He's safe—my husband! my heart's own love—safe said Mrs. Halloran, clasping her hands together. "Angels of God guard and guide him! This news gives me life. I defy all now, and, trusting in the providence of my Father in heaven, I, His creature, will bear all in His holy name."

Ever long the sound of little feet outside and a timid knock at the door was heard. Mrs. Halloran went with feeble steps to open it, and found the two children standing, with a half-frightened look, on the threshold. She stooped and kissed them tenderly, and, holding the little soft hands in hers, led them to the couch, where, leaning against pillows almost exhausted, she gathered them to her bosom in a long, tender embrace. Desmond was a noble child. He was now eight years old. His eyes were large and blue, his forehead bald and broad, surmounted by a coronal of short, crisp, curling hair. His nose harmonized with his other features, while his mouth, with its sweet, earnest smile, and his childlike, wore an expression of frankness and sweetness truly remarkable. Gracie was five summers old. Her crown hair was smoothly braided back from her round, childish forehead; her eyes were blue, and full of thought and gentleness, and her complexion very fair and pure. But there was a deep, earnest earnestness in the child's countenance, a tender grace and a calmness in every movement, which had gained for her throughout the demesne the sobriquet of "Little Lady." Her father used to call her "Little Poet"; for not only would the fair and beautiful in nature call forth sweet responses from the child's soul, but her language often expressed the most exquisite ideas. A bright star, a rainbow, a rich sunset, the singing of birds, the rustling of leaves, and the odor of flowers, were the quiet raptures of a life which was full of heaven.

Mrs. Halloran, while holding them in that warm embrace, spoke cheerily to them, asked them a thousand questions which dispelled their timidity and soon won them to smiles.

"But, what in the world's name are you after, Mrs. Halloran?" "Nora, listen my friend, we are to leave Glendariff; it is ours no longer."

"Sold, ma'am?" said Nora, choking back her tears.

"Sold! Yes. Sold for John Halloran's life; the purchase money is paid in his exile and the ruin of his family. My cousin, Donald More, is now master of Glendariff," she said, bitterly.

"The black, murdering informer! May St. Patrick's curse rest on him!" cried Nora. "Is just what I thought he'd do, so I did. I knowed he was false-hearted to the core; and now he's robbed what's worse than the widdy, for whin a woman lays her husband in a quiet grave, knowin' his soul to be in the hands of a merciful God, she knows that what's done is right an' best, an' not like he was driv' out into the wide world, without home or friends, in a strange land, havin' his wife an' children disolate an' broken-hearted, with a traitor to the fore to rob an' rack-rent and present his orphans. O'hone!" cried Nora, wringing her hands. "It's a hard trial, ma'ne, an' asthore, my darling, but there's a God above us, an' He hears me now," she said, snatching Mrs. Halloran's crucifix from the cratory, and holding it up toward heaven, "and the Blessed Virgin hears me say, on the cross of her dear Son, that I'll spend the rest of my life for them that's been all to me, nor think of me own until they come to their rights ag'in. Now rest easy, Mary asthore; ye're not friensies; an' that Nora Brady says, that she'll do."

"Nora! Nora! Why did you do it?" exclaimed Mrs. Halloran. "I cannot permit it. Your life and happiness shall not be wasted because mine are. We have a home—a poor one, it is true—where, by the sale of my jewels, we can live. The old Abbey still stands, and as give us food. You shall come with me—and Dennis Byrne."

"Dennis Byrne! of course Dennis will stay there; he can farm and do the likes; but for me! I'm going to look for Mister Halloran the mint we hear he gets to Ameriky, an' work my fingers off till there's a home there ready to bring ye all together once more—That's what I'm going to do; for Ireland's no longer a place for the Irish, an' you an' the childer shall not stay here like outcasts. When I do all I want to do, if I'm not too old, an' Dennis Byrne does not change his mind, we'll go before the priest."

"I fear—that is—she—I believe not, madam. There is a rumor that he has escaped."

"Thank you, I am quite well," she replied, courteously.

"Let us see that get ready to leave Glendariff. Tell Dennis and Mrs. Shea—"

"Mrs. Shea, madam! Mrs. Shea will stay to keep some of the burn villans that's coming," cried Nora. "O, it was beautiful, sure, to see what cronies they got to be, an' how polished she was with the sogers! Mrs. Shea, indeed!"

"Well! well!" said Mrs. Halloran, wearily; "let us prepare to go."

"Of course you must, ma'am. I wish it was to night, since Glendariff's no longer in the family. My price's up; an' if I only had Donald More here now, I'd make his hair rise on his head with the baranage I'd give him."

CHAPTER VI. "I'm biddin' you a long farewell. My Mary, kind and true; But I'll not forget you, darlin'. In the land I'm going to. They say there's a hard work for all. And the sun shines always there; But I'll not forget Old Ireland. We'll stay till they come."

The next day a police-constable, attended by four subordinate officials, made his appearance at Glendariff. "He had been sent down from Dublin," he informed Captain Saunders, "by Donald More, Esq., to protect the property, and see that nothing except Mrs. Halloran's personal effects were removed from the house."

"You've come on a brass errand," said Captain Saunders, with bitter irony, "an' one well suited to such a noocie crew. There na mickle to fear for yer thrappe, and there's only a desolate laaye and two bairnies to spend yer valor on. Yes, yes, your documents are all correct. You will have perfect indemnity for any accident you may commit; but, I rede ye, no insult to the lady. None of us! and a burning spot glowed on the cheeks of the honest old Scotchman—"some of us were sent here to interfere with her."

The brutal countenance of the man expressed merely a black and passing look of amazement and annoyance. He evidently had not expected such a reception, and could be but the drawing-out the meaning of the old officer said, he would have sent up to Dublin no favorable report of his loyalty. As it was, the cool irony of his tone, and the unaccountable reception he gave him stung him in such a manner that, had he been with his equals or his inferiors, he would have given vent to the rage which he had thought it was most prudent to suppress.

"It's the law, captain; it's not me, sir. It's the law. They might all go to the devil, sir, headlong, if the law let 'em, an' I don't put a jock-straw in their way," he replied, sullenly. "But somebody must see this Mistress Halloran, and read these documents to her."

"Come with me," said the old soldier, rising from his chair, and striding through the hall toward the drawing-room, which he had seen Mrs. Halloran enter, with her children, a short time before. He tapped lightly on the door, which was opened by Desmond, who sprang back, and stood scowling at him while the veins in his forehead swelled out, and his clinched fists were extended forward. Captain Saunders laid his large, brawny hand gently on the boy's head, and passed in. Mrs. Halloran arose, with her accustomed grace and courtesy, to receive him, although the appearance of a stranger with him evidently agitated her. She was every instant expecting news from her husband, and if this was the messenger who had come to tell her he was taken, she must die. So she thought, and Captain Saunders, who read her fears in her pale, anxious countenance, hastened to relieve them, by saying—

"Do not be alarmed, madam. This gentleman, who is of the law, has only come down from Dublin on a mere legal formula, which, I believe, is usual on such occasions; and I, thinkin', perhaps as you have—ahem—no friend near ye, took the liberty of breaking the business to you."

"Thank you, from my soul, sir," replied Mrs. Halloran, with a grateful look, and inexpressibly relieved. "What is your business with me, sir?"

"I was sent down, ma'am, from Dublin, by Donald More, Esq."

"To drive me from the shelter of my own roof," she said, in a calm but bitter tone. "It was a needless pretentim, however. I shall leave, as I intended, in the morning. It bein' his, even though unjustly, would be sufficient to drive me from it, if I had no other shelter than those hills below us, or the vastness of the hill."