

THE BLAKES AND FLANAGANS.

BY MRS. JAS. A. SADDLER.

CHAPTER XV.

THE SCHOOL QUESTION TURNS UP AGAIN—RETRIBUTIVE JUSTICE.

About the same time that Mr. Henry T. Blake was giving his attention to Repal, there arose, in the very heart of New York, another agitation on a question of vital importance to the Catholic body. This was the School Question. The evils which I have faintly and imperfectly sketched in my opening chapters as growing out of the iniquitous propagandism of the Common Schools, had continued to increase in magnitude with every passing year, until it was found absolutely necessary to keep Catholic children, at any cost, from being exposed to their pestiferous influence. Fortunately for the young Church of New York, God had placed a few years before under the guidance of a prelate whose indomitable energy and singular prudence gave weight and effect to his other rare qualities. To his penetrating eye, the pit prepared for the faith and morals of his people was clearly discernible, and for years long he bent all the energies of his vigorous mind to save the Catholics of the United States, and of New York in particular, from the fearful abyss opened beneath their feet, by the paternal kindness of the State. "The year 1841," says the historian of Catholicity in New York, "was made famous, in New York, by the agitation of the 'School Question,' as it was called. Previous to that time, the public instruction had been in the hands of a close corporation, under the title of the Public School Society, which administered and distributed the funds provided by the city for the purpose of education. The books used in these schools abounded with the usual stereotyped falsehoods against the Catholic religion, and the most vexatious and open system of proselytism was carried on in them. The evil became, finally, so great that no alternative was left for Catholic parents, but, either to prevent their children from attending the Schools at all, or to cause an entire change to be made in the system. Under the advice and active leadership of the Bishop, a systematic attempt was made to call the attention of the community and the public authorities to the subject; and, after a severe contest, it resulted in the establishment of the present Common School system. Experience has since shown, however, that the new system, though administered with as much impartiality and fairness as could be expected under the circumstances, is one, which, as excluding all religious instruction, is most fatal to the morals and religious principles of our children, and makes it evident that our only recourse is to establish schools of our own, where sound religious knowledge shall be imparted at the same time with secular instruction." (Right Rev. Dr. Bayley's History of the Catholic Church on the Island of New York, pp. 111-113.)

Yet, even this Common School system, objectionable as it still is, is unquestionably an improvement on the system by which it was preceded. What, then, must it have been?—what a nursery for young Catholics? The Public School Society, mentioned in the above paragraph, was, to all intents and purposes, a close corporation, and exclusively anti-Catholic. When one of its members died and went "to his appointed place," another was elected in his stead by the members themselves. Thus, the whole management of the schools, funds, teachers and all, was in the hands of this corporation, and an evil job they made of it, as the Church and the State have since learned to their cost. Many and many a Hugh Dillon was turned out on society from the classes of the Public Schools, and not a few of Henry T. Blakes mounted to fame and honor on the ruins of those religious principles instilled into them in childhood by Catholic mothers.

In the struggle so long carried on between the Bishop, on the one hand, and the dogged spirit of fanaticism, leagued with infidelity, on the other, it is a well-known fact that some who still called themselves Catholics were actively opposed to the great champion of Catholicity. Amongst these was our friend Henry T. Blake. Whatever influence he had in the Democratic party was all thrown into the scale in favor of the Common Schools. It was his boast that he had received a great part of his education in those very schools, and he thought there was no Catholic parent who might not send his children there with safety as well as profit. He was opposed to Separate schools on principle, because the effect of such education was to contract the mind within the narrow limits of an antiquated bigotry, unworthy of the glorious nineteenth century.

These sentiments Mr. Henry T. Blake propounded in broad daylight, at a meeting held in Tammany Hall, for the express purpose of condemning the course pursued, by the Bishop, as the head of the Catholic party. On that memorable occasion, Mr. Blake was vociferously called for by "the boys," and could hardly get a putting in a word for several minutes, till the steam was "blown off." Then Mr. Blake commenced with his lowest and longest bow, thanked the meeting for the cordial reception given him, and declared that it should ever be his highest aim to gain a continuance of their approbation. They had come together that day, he said, on a great question, a question which involved the well-being and prosperity of the great Republic. He, for one, felt deeply grateful to that venerable body, the Public School Society, for their unparalleled exertions in the cause of education, and he rejoiced to have that opportunity of bearing public testimony to the excellence of the schools over which that body presided. Some individuals there might be who opposed those schools through a narrow feeling of bigotry, and, he thought he might add, of fanaticism, but in the breasts of free-born Americans, no such feeling could ever find a resting-place. He was a Catholic him-

self and yet he was educated, for the most part, in a Ward School. (A voice: "You're a credit to the Ward School, Mr. Blake!") He could, therefore, prove from experience that boys might grow up Catholics, and good Catholics, at the Common Schools. (Another voice: "Yes, such Catholics as you are—to be sure they might!") Mr. Blake suddenly stood still. He said he could go no further, unless those ill-mannered individuals who thus disturbed the meeting were at once expelled. A scene of indescribable confusion followed, during which it appeared that there was quite a number of the "ill-mannered individuals," and, moreover, that they did not choose to be expelled. Some called out for Mr. Blake to continue, others hooted and hissed, and cried "shame! shame!" On the whole, Mr. Henry T. Blake thought it most prudent to retire, and leave the field to some other common-schoolman.

On the following evening Tim Flanagan dropped into Miles Blake's, hoping, like Paul Pry, that he didn't intrude. Oh no, on the contrary, nothing could be more acceptable than his visit. "In that case," said Tim, "I'll make myself comfortable." So he established himself in an arm-chair near the fire, which blazed up merrily in the grate, as though rejoicing in the genial presence of a man with a real heart. "Where is Eliza from you?" said Tim; "I haven't seen her this many a day."

"Oh! she's over at Henry's," replied Mrs. Blake. "She spends most of her time there."

"Humph! I suppose so!—Well, Miles! I see by the papers this morning that Henry made a great speech at the meeting in Tammany Hall last night. He's coming out strong against the Bishop."

"So I see," said Miles, and he began to stir up the fire at a great rate. "He has got into a bad set somehow or another."

"I never knew him to be in anything else," said Tim, coolly. "I wish to goodness he'd come out like a man, and declare himself a Protestant."

"There's not much fear of him doing that," said Miles, warmly. "I don't know that, Miles!—he has a Protestant wife, and he keeps none but Protestant company, and depend upon it, he has a Protestant heart—if he hadn't he could never have the face to come out openly against the Bishop as he does!"

"Well, but the Bishop goes too far—he objects to every system of education that leaves out religion—I suppose he'll be for getting up Catholic schools all over and commanding the people to send their children to no other!"

"And if he did," says Tim, "isn't it just what he ought to do? Now, I ask you, Miles Blake, on the word of an honest man, are you as much in favor of the Common Schools as you were ten years ago? Come, now—yes or no?"

"Well, I can't say I am altogether as favorable to them, but still I don't go so far in condemning them as the Bishop does."

"Now, Miles Blake, just listen to me!" said Tim, and he drew his chair nearer Blake. "You often told me in former times that Harry would grow up as good a Catholic as any of my boys, though he was educated by Protestants. Answer me, now—and mind, there's no shirking the question!—do you think Mr. Henry T. Blake is as good a Catholic as Edward Flanagan?"

"You're a hard-hearted, unfeeling man, Tim Flanagan—that's what you are, or you wouldn't come into my own house, and tell me such a thing to my very face."

"As to my being hard-hearted," observed Tim, "that's a charge nobody ever brought against me before—at least to my knowledge, and I don't value it much from you, because I know I never deserved it from you. But you know in your heart I'm saying what's true. Still, perhaps, I'm wrong in reminding you of your misfortunes when it's too late to remedy them. All you can do now, either of you, is to leave your children in the hands of God, and put them under the protection of the Blessed Virgin—though it's little respect they have for her themselves!"

"But tell me one thing, now!—what's the reason you don't come to our house oftener than you do?—many a pleasant evening we have of it with Edward and his wife, and Mr. O'Callaghan. They either come to us, or we go to them nearly every evening. Can't you come sometimes when you're sitting here looking at each other, and fretting about what can't be cured?"

Mrs. Blake looked anxiously at her husband. "Well! I'll tell you what, Tim," said Miles, after a short pause, "we will begin and go to you oftener—God knows we want a little amusement now and then—if you'll only promise to come here in your turn."

"What!" cried Tim, who could never resist the temptation of cracking a joke. "What! Sheridans, and Reilly's and all?"

"Yes, by George! the whole set—Mary and I have pleased the youngsters too long in choosing company. Now we'll choose our own again."

"All right," said Tim, aloud; but in his own mind he enjoyed the sly joke which he did not choose to put into words. "No thanks to you now when you can't help it. When your children turned their backs on you, welcome Flanagan, Reilly's and Sheridans—better old friends, Irish though they are, than none at all!"

Mrs. Blake was quite at the arrangement, and Tim had to take a tumbler of punch on the head of it, before he could get away.

Now let us return to the meeting at which Mr. Henry T. Blake made himself so conspicuous. It so happened that Zachery was unable to attend, owing to some previous arrangement for the evening. Henry was, therefore, the only one present, and he was, at once recognized as Hugh Dillon. Blake involuntarily quickened his pace, but so did Dillon, too. They were still side by side.

"That was a great speech you made," said Dillon. "I guess you're about tired of passing for a Papist. Why not come at once to the priest, and say you must pay a d—n for priest or Bishop! That's my way, Blake, and you'd get along better if it were yours, too. We 'free-born Americans,' as you justly called us, have no notion of such shilly-shally work. You must be either for or against us—that's the chat—d'ye take, old fellow?"

Henry was by no means pleased with rationally familiarity of the other, but this was hardly said to resent it. "You are very kind, Mr. Dillon," he began, but Dillon interrupted him with a hoarse laugh.

"None of your fine lingo to me, Blake. Folks never think of calling me mister. Such nonsense don't suit me! I hate titles as I hate hell! We were schoolmates once, Harry Blake, and I never liked you then, although you did busy yourself too much about religion. You've got over all that, though, and I added, with a diabolical leer, "and I own to a seat of a liking for you. Didn't you see me at the meeting to-night?"

"I can't say I did."

"You can't say I did. Well, more shame for you. I brought some of our 'b'boys' there, just to give you a rousing cheer. You can't say, indeed! I guess I was near enough to you, then, just right in front of the stage. If it hadn't been for us, those rascally Irish, who went there out of spite, would have hissed you off the stage. But we bussed you louder than they did. Ha! ha! ha! You see I don't forget old times; eh, old fellow?"

On them when they're attacked by tyrannical priests or Bishops—oh Harry, my boy? A friend in need is a friend indeed—ain't he?"

"Very true, Dillon, very true!" said Blake, as he rang the bell at his own door with very unusual haste. "We must sustain them at any cost!" "Sustain them! yes, I guess we must! I'd lose my life for them! I would!"

These were the last words Blake heard as he closed the door. He had all along feared that Dillon might invite himself into the house, and was much relieved when that patriotic individual walked away, with these ominous words on his lips.

All that evening Henry Blake felt an unaccountable depression of spirit. In vain did Jane and Eliza put forth all their talents to amuse him. Music had no charms to soothe his mind, and do what he would he could not converse with his usual ease or cheerfulness.

At last Jane began to pout. She was just then in an interesting situation, and thought herself entitled to an extra share of attention, which, to say the truth, Henry was usually quite willing to give.

"Why, I declare, Henry, you are quite stupid to-night! What on earth ails you?"

"Nothing particular, Jane," said Henry, with a forced smile. "Do I not look as well as usual?"

"Look! why, you just look and act like an old dried-up mummy!"

Harry and Eliza both laughed at the old similitude. "I wasn't aware, my dear Jane, that mummies either looked or acted; but let that pass. I must try and make 'Richard himself again,' for your sake at least."

"Well! but I want to know what vexed you out of doors," persisted Jane.

"Did the meeting go off well?" inquired Eliza, who had been thinking more than she said.

"Very well, indeed, Eliza. To tell you the truth, my dear girls, it was that fellow, Dillon, that threw a damper on my spirits. He accosted me soon after I left the Hall, and would keep up with me all the way home. He is certainly a low ruffian, and the whole tenor of his conversation was highly offensive to me, though I believe he meant to be quite friendly. But familiarity from a fellow like that is at all times disgusting to me, at least. I confess I am not demoralized enough to place myself on a level with such rowdies, even for the sake of popularity."

"Oh! if that be all," said Jane, laughing. "I do not pity you much, you want to use such ploys. You must pay the penalty—so I often heard father say. They will not serve you at the polls unless you come down from your dignity so as to suit their taste. If it be only Hugh Dillon's over-familiarity that troubles you, we won't take that as an excuse. Here's Zachery coming, I declare, so no more dallyness for this evening."

Still Henry could not forget Dillon's parting words. Not that he attached any particular signification to them, or that they excited any new ideas to his mind, but they seemed to haunt him, as it were, and kept ever ringing his ears like a funeral bell. "Confound the fellow," said he to himself, "I wish he hadn't come in my way—that deep husky voice of his seems to have found an echo in my ear." Poor Henry! I have a great deal to say about your slumbering conscience!

Henry Blake and Hugh Dillon met no more on earth.

in poor old Ireland before anybody'd use me that way. Oh! I wish I had it the queer country all out, where fellows like them can ride roughshod over decent, quiet people, that's mindin' their business an' nothing else! An' to think of that blackguard Dillon—oh, dear! oh, dear! what is he goin' to turn to—every day an' every hour he's gettin' deeper an' deeper into the mire! Sure enough, God has great patience to let him run so long! But God pity me! what am I to do now, at all, at all?"

Little did poor Molly, our old acquaintance, think, when she gave vent to this sad soliloquy, that the reprobateness of her race was already run—that the Divine patience of which she spoke was at length exhausted, as far as she was concerned. Molly had lately taken up her stand at the corner of Grand street and the Bowery, and when "the b'boys" gallantly demolished "every stick of it," they next proceeded to pay their respects at a German tavern in Elizabeth street. Now it so happened that there was a ball in the house on that night, and the Germans had no mind to admit such visitors into their social circle. The accordingly resisted their entrance. This roused the ire of the rowdies, who immediately went off to recruit, and very soon returned with a strong reinforcement. They at once besieged the house with a shower of stones and every other missile that came to hand, shouting the most fearful imprecations and all manner of vengeful threats. But the Germans had carefully barricaded the doors and windows, so that the only glass, not so by the assailants; the crash of shattered glass following their first volley was almost instantaneously answered by a discharge of fire arms from within, a yell of anguish rung through the air and the leader of the band fell heavily to the ground. (This is a positive fact. The son of Irish Catholic parents—his mother, too, a widow—was shot some years ago in New York in the manner above described. The circumstances is, doubtless, within the recollection of many of my readers. I have merely altered the name.) Consternation and bodily fear took possession of his comrades. They fled in all directions; leaving only a few, who, bolder than the rest, determined to wait and see whether their fallen chief was really dead. Turning him over, for he had fallen on his face, they saw at a glance that life was gone—the unhappy young man was shot through the head. "Is he dead?" asked one from behind. "Dead!" cried another; "I guess he is—dead as a herring! what are we going to do with him?"

"Why, take him home to be sure—he has got an old mother, I think."

"The duce he has! where does she hang up?"

"Can't say!"

"I know where the old woman lives?" said one young fellow, coming forward; "it was Watty Sullivan; 'come, give me a hand of some of your till we take him home!'"

"Oh! for God's sake, don't!" cried an agitated voice at his elbow. It was that of poor old Molly Reynolds, whose stall had been so lately demolished. "Don't take him home dead to the poor heart-broken mother that he treated so badly in his life-time. It would be the death of her—it would, indeed. No, no, bring him somewhere else, and God bless you!"

"Go to the d—! you only hag! where can we bring him to if not to his mother?"

"If there's nowhere else," said Molly, stoutly, "you can bring him to my little place down the alley here. I'll get one or two of the neighbor-women to stay with me, till we can break it to his mother. It's a thing I don't like to do, especially as he didn't die a Christian death, but I'll do it for God's sake. Come on, I'll show you the way!"

TO BE CONTINUED.

A PAINTING OF CHRIST.

A man who tottered as he walked, whose dress was so shabby that it was long past even the appearance of gentility, whose unkempt hair was but half concealed by a battered and greasy hat and who wore his coat collar turned up and tightly pinned beneath his chin to conceal the fact that his shirt was collarless, paused before the entrance to one of the great uptown churches of New York city, with bloodshot eyes, vestibule through the doorway into the vestibule. Several moments he hesitated. Then, with an unconscious gesture of latent dignity, his form straightened and with head erect, he passed into the church.

The chimes had long since ceased to ring, the priest was already in the midst of his sermon, and as the human devil had drifted into the rear-most seat of that vast auditorium he heard from the pulpit, in stentorian tones, these words: "Christ being risen from the dead, dieth no more; sin hath no more dominion over him."

It seemed to the weary man as though these words were addressed personally to him, and, as he knelt for a moment and with bowed head whispered a prayer that had not recurred to him in many years, something like a glow thrilled him so that presently he leaned back, and, fixing his tired eyes upon the preacher, he listened with concentrated attention to every word of the sermon. So wrapped was he in what he heard and so intense were the emotions engendered by it that he was not conscious of the end of the discourse, and it was not until many moments later, when almost the entire congregation had left the church, that he remembered where he was.

He started to his feet then with sudden energy, intent only upon leaving the church before he should be recognized, for there were many present who had known him in the past; but the throng of people in the aisles was too dense for him to penetrate, so he sank back upon the cushions again and with bowed head waiting.

Presently he was startled by the touch of a hand upon his shoulder, and,

looking up quickly, he started to his feet, shamefaced and flushed. The hand that touched him was now stretched out, palm upward, for him to take, but he pretended not to see it. "I should have avoided you," he said drearily. "Believe me, Roderick, I did not mean that any one should recognize me. Do not know why I came here at all to-day." And then, smiling bitterly and with irony in his voice, he added, "I did not even know that it was Easter until after I entered the church."

"Will you go home with me Philip?" asked the other, still keeping his hand extended, as if determined that it should be seen and taken.

"I come with you? No, thank you all the same."

"Then let me go with you."

"I am sorry Rod, but I have no place to take you," was the reply. "It is so long since I possessed a studio; longer since I held a brush or a palette in either hand. The only home that I know now I find in the back rooms of gin mills. Does not my appearance vouch for the truth of this statement?"

"Then let us sit here for a little while, for I want to talk to you, Phil. For months I have tried in vain to find you. Here we will be quiet and undisturbed."

"Are you willing to be seen in the company of such as I, Roderick?" asked the artist tensely. "Do you remember what I was, and do you realize what I am?"

"Yes, both."

"I doubt it. Yet it was kind of you to speak to me to-day; kinder still to wish to help me, for that, I know, is your wish; but I am beyond help from others. The only chance left to me now lies within myself."

"Have you forgotten, Phil, that this is Easter Sunday?"

"No; I have just remembered it."

"Why then that dead past behind you to-day and rise from this living death, as Christ rose 1900 years ago?"

"If I only could, if I only could!"

"You can if you will."

"How?"

"You say you have lost your manhood. Have you also sacrificed your talents?"

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