



The True Witness

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JUBILEE BOOK,
CONTAINING
INSTRUCTION ON THE JUBILEE,
AND PRAYERS RECOMMENDED TO BE SAID IN THE
STATION CHURCHES;
To which is prefixed the Encyclical of
His Holiness POPE PIUS IX.,
For the ARCHDIOCESE of TORONTO, containing the
PASTORAL of HIS GRACE ARCHBISHOP
LYNCH.
For the DIOCESE of LONDON, containing the
PASTORAL of HIS LORDSHIP BISHOP
WALSH.
For the DIOCESE of HAMILTON, containing the
PASTORAL of HIS LORDSHIP BISHOP
CRINNON.
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MURTHAS MISCHIEF'S:
OR,
THE MATCH-MAKER'S BARGAIN.
BY THOMAS SHERLOCK.
(From the Nation.)

CHAPTER I.

About forty years ago, in a district among the western Kerry hills, which we shall call Ballycorra, there lived and flourished a rather notable personage, by name Mary Murtha. She was a woman of great penetration and shrewdness; had a wonderful flow of high animal spirits; and liberal powers of graphic narration; was always brimful of news, had the art of dressing up like a born American reporter; and was mistress of an unctious compound of flattery, with which, whenever she chose, she could smooth down the roughness of the most sturdy and angular natures—or, to put it in the strong fashion of the place, "wheddle the birds off the bushes."

Obviously Mrs. Murtha had no special occupation, though she frequently bore a little flat basket on her arm, in which eggs and poultry were supposed to be for sale, but much more often was seen nimbly working a pair of knitting needles through the loops of her worsted thread, which grew into socks and stockings under her hands with a speed that was almost a challenge to the loom. However, Moll Murtha, as she was invariably called, had an occupation which was the real business of her life, and to which her huxtering and knitting were merely masks. In the present day, and in higher grades than that of the peasant, she would be called a matrimonial agent; in her own time and sphere, she was sometimes, though rarely, spoken of as a "matchmaker."

On account of one or other of her many engaging qualities she was a welcome guest to both males and females by every farmer's hearth within three or four adjacent baronies. There would have been nothing surprising to a spectator, therefore, in the fact that one summer's evening, as she approached the lone cabin of Dinny Horan, even that well-known miser—of whom it need be said that "he would skin a flea for the sake of the hide and fat"—came running down the breen in haste to meet her.

"What news have you for me, Moll?" was his first salute, squeaked out in a shrill, rasping tone.

Dinny Horan was a small meagre, wiry-looking, saffron-faced man of about forty years of age. His appearance seemed to proclaim that he fed on nothing but three potatoes a day, and that even those three did not agree with him.

Mrs. Murtha drew up her well-padded, ample form stately, as she heard his question, and flung a glance of scorn at the little farmer as with a toss of her head she returned:

"Musha, better manners to you, Dinny Horan! That's all I'll say, since I know you're a decent father an' mother's son. Couldn't you bid me the time o' day itself?"

"Arrah, what's the use o' tormentin' me?" he whined back. "Don't you know I'm dyin' be inches about the girl; an' she won't even look at the side o' the road I'm on."

The mobile features of Moll Murtha's big, soft face expressed a sovereign contempt for the miserable specimen of the lords of creation who stood before her. She regarded him in silence for a while, and at last said slowly:

"I've a great mind to leave you to yourself."

"Whisht, Moll! whisht! don't say that," he replied, with a trembling earnestness which was grotesquely pitiful to behold. "If you lave me, I dunno what I'll do at all."

"Why can't you have a little sperrit?" she questioned back, scornfully. "You're more like a mouse than a man."

"Moll, Moll!" he piped out testily, "isn't it enough to have her breakin' me heart, without you helpin' her? Sure you see yourself the way I am about her?"

"I see, it is plain as Knockcorra forrest us," she returned, "but why can't you be a man, an' have some sperrit, I ax, again?"

"What do you want me to do? Didn't I promise

you ten yellow guineas if you'd get her to have me, and do you think I won't be as good as my word? I'll give you wan now as earnest," he said, fumbling in one of his breeches pockets, from which he dug up a chamois leather purse, confined at the neck by numerous coils of whip-cord, which fastening he undid as slowly as if he were turning a winch having twenty tons weight depending from the chain, and with as much cheerfulness as Jemmy O'Brien displayed on the day the populace of Dublin had the pleasure of seeing him "brought to his own funeral."

"There!" exclaimed Dinny Horan, as he laid a guinea in her palm, "that's showin' sperrit, I believe, an' you doin' so little for me to boot."

Moll Murtha threw up her eyes and shook her head complacently, as if inviting some spirit whom she saw floating in the air far above her to take notice of the ill treatment she was receiving. Then suddenly reverting to the being before her, she began with indignation:

"To think of you sayin' that, Dinny Horan! You above all men! On'y I wouldn't insult you, I'd throw your dirty guinea back at you. Me doin' so little inagh! Do yez hear that?" she exclaimed, looking all around, as if the whole hillside swarmed with witnesses of the interview, and she was appealing to them for judgment.

"Musha, Moll," whined Dinny Horan in great distress, "what ails you at all, this evenin'? Can't you be easy? You know yourself I don't know what I do be sayin' when I'm thinkin' of her. You're doin' your best for me I'm sure."

"Best," she exclaimed; "best is no name for it. I never done as much for any livin' mortal before—man, woman, or child."

"I know, I know," he replied, gloomily. "But it's all no use as long as your own son Dan Murtha, is to the fo' e. It's him she's sett on. That's why she thrates me like a dog."

The brow of Mrs. Murtha clouded.

"Lave him to me, Dinny Horan," she said; "he'll not stand in your way for long. A lone widow woman, like me isn't goin' to let her only son pick up with a girl that hasn't a shillin' that'd jingle on a tombstone."

"That's right, Moll," Dinny Horan squeaked in ecstasy; "stick to that; tell her that. An' tell her, too, that I have thirty acres that's now as good as any hand round for as many miles, though it was little more than bare mountain when I got it over fifteen years ago. An' tell her that I have it at a fair rent under a good landlord, who doesn't ask to rise too often. An' tell her I have cows an' sheep an' pigs, an' a horse an' a couple o' poules, an' maybe I'd get a jaundin' car, an' improve the cabin, if she'll only say she'll have me. You'll tell her that, Moll, won't you?"

"An' more," she replied with emphasis. "Tell her! ow-ow! Lave the tellin' part to Moll Murtha."

"An' see here, Moll," the little man went on, while his voice sank to an ecstatic whisper; "if you get her to have me, I'll give you fifteen-ay, twenty guineas! Twenty yellow guineas—do you hear that, Moll Murtha?"

"It's a bargain, Dinny Horan," she answered, spitting slightly into her palm, and offering it for his grasp. "It's a bargain," she repeated; "take me hand on it."

Dinny Horan spat solemnly into his open hand, and with equal solemnity grasped hers.

"The bargain's closed," he piped out. "Do you keep your part; I'll keep mine. I haven't one in the world belongin' to me," he went on—"not wan; not a stiner that cures whether I'll be dead or alive tomorrow. The boys all about jeer at me, an' call me a naygur to my face, because I'm not big enough to bate them for d'nt it; and the girls jeer me worse, and laugh at me to boot! The on'y wan that ever said a kind word to me was Kitty Donohoe want; an' though she won't look at me now, I never saw a girl I could care for but herself. If Dan Murtha wouldn't go statherin' her with his soft talk she'd be civil to me agen, I think."

"Lave Dan Murtha to me I tell you. I'll see him in half an hour," Moll replied, "an' you'll either see or hear from me to-night if I have good news. It won't be my fault," she added grimly, "if I haven't."

In justice to Mrs. Murtha it must be said that the promised bribe had but little to do with her desire to put an end to the courtship between her son and Kitty Donohoe. The former was but a "laborin' boy," the latter a servant in the "big house" of the district; and Moll's experience as a "matchmaker" had made her as firm an opponent as Malibus himself of marriage under circumstances which did not reveal, at least in prospect, sufficient means of support for a possible family. It cannot be wondered at, then, if she strove to prevent her only child from "leppin' into misery for life." But while her desire in this matter was one that would meet with approval from many, the same cannot be said of the means she employed to give effect to it.

When she entered her little home, and found lusty young Dan at his frugal supper, cheerful in spite of hard work and meagre fare, she began a series of strange manoeuvres. She moved about the room as if intent on domestic concerns, but pausing often to give a mournful look at the young man, and heaving sighs of pathetic sound at each such glance. At length Dan stopped a piece of potato in its passage to his mouth, to ask with a look of real concern:

"What ails you, mother? Is there anything the matter?"

Moll Murtha flung down her duster, ran over beside him, caught his head between her hands, kissed him again and again on the forehead, then throwing her arms about his neck, rocked him a little to and fro, murmuring in her most soothing tones:

"My poor boy! my poor boy! my brave Dan! Then, a little louder: "Ochone! Kitty Donoho, you'll have a great dale to answer for."

"Mother, mother, what do you mane?" the startled young man exclaimed, endeavoring to free himself. Rising to his feet, in spite of her efforts to keep him seated, he held her at arm's length while with pale face he asked: "In the name of goodness, mother, what's this all about?"

"O avic machree, it's bad news I have for you, an' a sorry day it is for you to have to hear it. Oh! vo! vo! I a cushla machree! But sure you have your poor old mother left."

"I can't make out what you mane, mother," he said; and in spite of a brave effort to be firm his voice trembled. "What's wrong with Kitty Donoho?"

"O my poor boy! my brave Dan! Hould up your heart! There's as good in the country as ever she was—an' better."

"Do you want to thrive me mad?" he asked with some impatience. "You've tow'd me nothing."

"Thrus for you, my son, I was afraid to tell you all at first. How will you be able to bear it at all, my poor fellow?"

The agitation of the young man overmastered him in spite of his efforts to command self-control. He sank into his seat, asking huskily:

"What's wrong with Kitty Donoho? Tell me that."

The appearance of Moll Murtha was that of a woman wholly distracted. Without giving a direct return to her son's question she yet contrived to answer it with effect by pouring out rhapsodically:

"Ochone! ochone! to think that the girl my brave Dan thought so much about!"

She broke off artfully.

"Spake! spake!" he said hoarsely.

She leant over until her mouth touched his ear, and whispered a few words rapidly.

"What!" he thundered, leaping to his feet once more.

"My poor Dan!" she said mournfully.

The blood flamed up to his temples.

"I'll go over this mornin' to the big house, an' ask herself!" he said.

"What!" she shrieked. "Is it a Murtha demane himself that way? Go, then, Dan Murtha, ax it's plainst to you; but you're the first of your name that ever done like."

The young man sat down once more, and rested his head between his hands on the deal table.

"Mother," he said, in choking tones, "if it was anyone but yourself that told me that I wouldn't believe it—no, not if they took an oath on the vestments."

"Avic machree," she said, while her voice seemed melting in sympathy, "my only child! my brave Dan? good reason I had to tell you to hould up your heart. Go to your bed, ovic, an' rest. You want it."

The young man remained motionless, and said never a word.

"I can't stay in the house an' see you that way," she whimpered snatching up bounet and shawl, and rushing through the door.

Though satisfied with her success so far, a lingering fear that her son might yet take it into his head to go straight to Kitty Donoho—a movement on which she had never calculated until the moment when she heard him propose it—kept her from going to announce to Dinny Horan the good news she had instructed him to expect. She therefore stayed in the near neighborhood of her home—keeping strict watch the while on her own door—in the hope that some chance passer by would offer to convey the intelligence she wished to send.

Not long was her eye scanning the road when a lad riding one of the famous Kerry mountain ponies came into view. His spirited little steed was bearing not only its rider but a couple of wicker baskets stuffed with hay, as it ambled easily up the ascent of the road.

CHAPTER II.

No sooner had Moll Murtha caught sight of the pony than she strained her eyes in the hope of discovering in the rider some one who might be trusted with the message to Dinny Horan.

"It's Lanty Quinn, I declare," she thought; "an' he's the very gorsoun that'll do. Hi, Lanty! Lanty Quinn, I say! Make haste!" she cried, when the lad had come within halting distance.

"Do you want me, Moll?" he shouted back.

"Yes."

Half a minute brought Lanty Quinn to her side.

"Lanty," Moll Murtha began, "would you like to get a shillin' for as good as nothin'?"

"Av course," he answered with an incredulous grin.

"Well, ride hot-fut up to Dinny Horan's, an' tell him I sent you with good news."

"Who's to give me the shillin'?" Lanty asked.

"Dinny will."

"Is it Dinny the naygur? You're jokin'!" the lad returned with a stare of incredulity.

"I'm not," she replied seriously. "Say I sent you, an' you'll get it—two if you ask for it."

"Well, begorra, a shillin' from Dinny will be worth a guinea from any one else, so here goes to thry for the fun of the thing," said Lanty, with a face brimming over with amusement. "Hoo-up, Pauden," he exclaimed, giving the sturdy little animal a smart thwack; "stir your heels, you divil, till we see the color of the naygur's money."

As pony and rider went clattering up the road, Moll Murtha, relieved in mind, returned to her cabin. She found her son still with his face lying on the table.

"Poor Dan," she exclaimed. "I couldn't stay out with thinkin' of the sorrow you were in. Come, avic, show the brave heart of the Murthas—don't give in that way. Come, mo cushla," she continued, putting her brawny arms around him, and half lifting him up from his stooping posture, "come to your bed; you'll be better after you get a sleep."

Thus adjured, the young man rose silently, and allowed himself to be led to the door of his bedroom. At the threshold the mother once more flung her arms around his neck and kissed him, murmuring:

"Never forget, avic, that you have your poor old mother left yet that loves you."

"There's no love like the mother's, after all, I b'lieve," he returned in a desponding tone, as he passed into his little chamber.

While he lay groaning on his pallet, the mother sat on the edge of her bed, pondering and planning. The task to which she had set herself was a hard one, she thought, but not impossible. The first step had been taken, at all events, and she felt a peculiar pleasure as she dwelt on that. True, it had crushed her son more heavily than she had foreseen, and her heart yearned strangely to lighten his sorrow, even by retracting the calumny which had caused it. But no. Dan Murtha and Kitty Donoho must be parted: it was the best thing that could happen to themselves, poor creatures; and they ought to bless her for their dying day for saving them both from the life-long misery that must follow an imprudent marriage. Truth to tell, her conscience was not wholly easy in regard to the course she had taken to reach her object; but Moll

Murtha was not the woman to falter in a crooked way if it promised to disclose a pleasing prospect at the end. The thing was hard on poor Dan, no doubt—much harder than she had before supposed; but he was young and soft, poor boy; he would get over it in a few days; and then may be he wouldn't be thankful to his old mother for saving him from folly! O-ow-ow! Besides, the twenty guineas she was to get from Dinny Horan! Why, it was a fortune! It was impossible just then to calculate all that could be done with so much money; but at any rate Dan could buy a couple of Kerry cows to begin with, and they could sell milk and butter; they would have manure for their little patch of land; they could lay by something every week, and who could tell but that in a few years Dan might be able to take and stock a small farm, and hold up his head among the "saug" men of the parish, and marry at last into comfort? As for Kitty Donoho she had no ill-will to the girl as long as she kept her place; but she was no fit match for Dan Murtha; and, besides, what better could she do for herself than marry Dinny Horan, who was clean gone out of his seven senses about her, had "lashins an' Javins" of money and was ready and willing to do anything in the world if only she would become Lis wife?

In this manner Moll Murtha lulled her conscience to sleep as she sat on the edge of her bed that night; with such success that not the faintest fukking came to her of the explosion which were to be caused by the evil train she was laying in darkness with so much care. But one thing distressed her, and that was a fear lest Dan and Kitty Donoho should meet before the next step in the plan of operations had been taken. Moll Murtha felt confident enough that her son would never dream of seeking the girl's presence so long as he believed his mother's word; the high-toned pride of the Irish peasant in all that concerns female virtue was sufficient guard in that direction; but if by chance a meeting took place, explanation might possibly ensue, and then not only would the whole scheme be at an end, but Dan Murtha's respect for the mother who bore him would be gone for ever. Her heart beat wildly at the thought of such an issue; like many another, she was more anxious to appear worthy than to be so; but in a little while she regained composure, and smiled in derision of her fear as she murmured:

"Hut! I'd only have to tell him I was misled. What a fool I was to be so frightened!"

Nevertheless, she deemed it essential to set Kitty Donoho against Dan at the earliest moment—firstly, to part them effectually; and secondly, to pave the way for Dinny Horan; and she sought her couch full of the resolve that the next day should not pass away until the blow had been struck which should turn Kitty's love for Dan Murtha into hate. The astute old woman knew well every mood of the Irish heart; and felt as certain that the means she was about to employ would have the desired effect on Kitty Donoho as if the girl had just repudiated her lover at the foot of the altar.

Although it was long beyond her usual hour for retiring to rest when Moll Murtha laid her head on her pillow, sleep was tardy in visiting her that night. The schemes which she had been weaving would not be laid aside at her wish; and in spite of repeated efforts to compose herself to slumber, her brain still kept on plotting and planning in a wild, purposeless way, just as an excited steed plunges and curvets when the rider has lost control. Now and again, too, she caught a sigh or a groan from Dan's chamber, and the knowledge thus conveyed of his continued unhappiness by no means helped to put her under the influence of the drowsy god. Dawn was striving to peer through the little window opposite Moll Murtha's bed before tired nature gave way.

Noon was nigh ere she woke. Before she was fully dressed she pushed open the door of Dan's little bedroom and glanced into it, as if half-expecting to see him there, although it was hours past his time for going to his labors. Dan was away.

"Gone to his work, av course, poor boy," she thought. "He'll get over his trouble in a day or two—God bless him and mark him with grace!"

She set about preparing her frugal breakfast; and when it had been leisurely despatched she turned her attention to what she called "tydin' up the place." To say the truth, her ideas on this subject were of the crudest kind; a push here, a shove there, a puff of her lips to blow away dust where it had settled very thickly, or a rough scrape of a dusting cloth on something whose purity had been scandalously outraged—when these operations had been lastly gone through "the place was tidied up," and she could throw a glance of satisfaction around her apartment. Nevertheless, when we think of the tovels so many poor Irish women are compelled to regard as their homes—when we think of their essential squalor, their total lack of conveniences, their absolute unfitness for human habitation—and when we think, besides, of the abject, grinding poverty which weighs on those poor people from cradle to grave, we should be wanting in even the rudest notions of justice if we allowed words of blame to be called to our lips by the careless and uncleanly habits which are developed as naturally from such surroundings as the oak is from the acorn.

Her domestic duties being done, Moll Murtha tied her handkerchief upon her head, put a shawl around her shoulder, took up her knitting-needles and worked, and sallied forth from her home. Her design was to descend to the adjacent village of Kilbrandon, quarter herself there for some hours on a "neighbor," and thence proceed to the "big house" at a convenient time for securing an interview with Kitty Donoho. However, she had barely arrived within view of the scattered cabins which made up Kilbrandon, when she heard a clatter behind her, from the midst of which her own name was lustily shouted out. Turning, she beheld Lanty Quinn riding furiously towards her, the little pony covered with foam, the rider in a state of great excitement. She waited his approach, and, as he came nigh, she began:

"Musha Lanty avic, what on earth ails you? You're killin' the poor beast—that's what you're doin', you hard-hearted creature you."

"As she spoke she forced the points of her needles through the worsted ball, and, thus protected, put her work away in her pocket.

Lanty pulled up suddenly, and sprang down beside her.

"It's you I want, Moll," he said abruptly; "Dan Murtha tow'd me to tell you."

"Then he paused for breath.

"The cross o' Christ about us!" she exclaimed, turning pale, the while she signed herself piously, with an instinctive fear of dead intelligence.—"What is it, Lanty?" she gasped. "I can hardly spake."

"Dan said I was to tell you he was goin' away from here for a while."

"Where to?" she asked sharply.

"The so'ra wan o' me know's," Lanty answered, scratching the side of his head feebly. "He woke me up early this mornin', an' his bundle on his back, an' tow'd me to call on you in the course o' the day, an' to tell you he was goin' away for a while."

She sat down on the roadside. Her limbs refused to support her; her head grew dizzy; her eyes swam. Mastering her weakness with a great effort, she fixed her gaze beseechingly on the lad.

"Lanty," she said, "did you never ax him what he was going to do wud himself?"

"I did, but he said he didn't know yit. Maybe he'd list, he said, and maybe he wouldn't."

"An' you dunno which road he took?"

"No. Didn't I tell you I was in bed when he woke me?"

She began rocking herself to and fro as she sat on the roadside; but not a tear came from her eyes, and not a word from her lips. Unskilled as Lanty Quinn was in the signs of female woe, he began to think it would have been more natural if she had wept and howled aloud. Sympathetic moisture gathered in his eyes as he gazed.

"Don't, Moll," he snivelled, passing the cuff of his coat across his face, "don't take on that way. He'll come back. He said it was on'y for a while."

"Help me up, Lanty," she said. "Me heart's broke."

Lanty assisted her to rise.

"Where are you goin'?" he asked.

"I dunno, Lanty, I dunno." Then pressing her temples with both hands, she went on, after a short pause, "I'll go to Kilbrandon. I couldn't face home now."

"Are you able to walk?"

"Ayeh, why wouldn't I?" she replied dreadingly, as she turned towards the village. "God be wud you, Lanty."

Lanty, taking this as a hint that his companionship was no longer required, remounted his pony, and moving slowly up the hill, sang out: "God be wud you, Moll. Keep up your heart. He'll come back soon. He said it was on'y for a while."

Moll Murtha wended her way into Kilbrandon.—In spite of her wrapt preoccupation of mind, an unusual commotion about one of the cabins caught her glance, and she gladly welcomed the passing distraction.

"The widow Driscoll must be dead," she thought. "Poor woman! she lasted a long time with the decline on her."

Pushing up to the house, she was at once surrounded by a group of women, who confirmed her surmise, and tried altogether to narrate every detail in connection with the widow's decease. But Moll's eyes fixed on a boy, not two years old, who was held in the arms of a strong and good-natured looking young woman, and who kept turning a pair of big brown eyes about, as he lipped in half-wailing tones: "Where's mammy? where's mammy?"

"Gi' me the child, Biddy Heerlaby," Moll said abruptly. "You have enough o' your own." And she stretched out her arms.

"If I have I've enough to feed them, too, thank God," Biddy Heerlaby returned somewhat tartly, retiring a pace.

"Give him to me, Biddy a cushla," Moll Murtha entreated. "I'll take him an' do for him the same as his mother. Dan Murtha is gone away from me, an' I'm lonesome now," she explained, still with outstretched arms.

"What med Dan leave you, Moll?" came in a chorus from the women.

"Ayeh, how would I know?" she returned without bitterness. "To seek his fortune, I b'lieve." Exclamations that meant either commiseration with her or indignation against Dan poured on Moll from all sides; but her eyes still remained fixed hungrily on the orphan child.

"Here, then, Moll, take him an' welcome," Biddy Heerlaby said; "I meant to do for him myself, but you have a better right to him than I have."

Moll Murtha clasped the youngster to her breast, wrapped him in a corner of her shawl, and with an inclusive salute of "God be wud yez all," left the cabin. She turned towards her mountain home, talking tenderly to the child until he fell asleep in her arms; and then mechanically, and from sheer habit, she resumed her knitting, while her mind listlessly wandered to and fro between the child of her own flesh and the child of her adoption, drifting helplessly before the first fury of the storm she had herself invoked.

It was thus that Dinny Horan beheld her, when, after waiting in the neighborhood of her cabin for half an hour, he moved down the road towards the village in the hope of meeting with his able ally.

CHAPTER III.

From the moment that Lanty Quinn had borne him the promised message of "good news," the little miser was in a fever of anxiety to learn the extent and nature of Moll Murtha's success. When, therefore, he beheld her advancing slowly up the mountain road, he ran forward to hasten the moment of meeting. But the matchmaker was not just then in the mood to receive him amiably.—Above all other men's presence was unwelcome.—The very sight of him was irritating. As he came near, panting and well-nigh breathless with exertion, his small, lean figure seemed to her more utterly insignificant than ever; and a rush of scornful feeling surged over her at the thought that this poorly-favored, middle-aged creature dared to dream of wedding a girl who had won the regard of her young, lusty, and handsome son. So, when Dinny Horan, having come up with her, gasped out in a voice more thin and harsh than ever, "What's the good news, Moll? Tell me all about it; I'm dyin' to hear," her reply was of a nature to exhaust the little breath left in his lungs.

"Whether misfortune for ever attend the day I