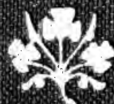
THE BECKONING OF THE WAND



THE BECKONING OF THE WAND

SKETCHES OF A LESSER KNOWN IRELAND

. . . . . A piteous land,
Yet ever beckoning with enchanted wand."
—R. J. Alexander.

St. Louis, Mo.

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THE BECKONING OF THE WAND

I

My Dear Joan,—You ask me to pity you for having to live in Ireland. You send me a little brown-covered book called "Letters from Ireland," and you say, "I have been in this country for two years, and have seen with my own eyes much—and far more than I wish—of what is described in this book with such photographic distinctness. Although the author is an Irishman he abuses his country as it deserves, but then his eyes have been opened by living in America, and he, at least, has the

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courage of his convictions. You cannot deny that his pictures of idleness, apathy, and dirt are drawn from the life, then pity me for having to live among such people."

Now I am going to surprise you. I am going to be perfectly frank with you, and, as I do not feel that the cap fits me, I am going to ignore your insinuation that the writer of "Letters from Ireland" is unique in having the courage of his convictions, and—I am going to pity you for having to live in Ireland!

My dear, I do pity you from my heart for having lived for two years in a country where, in spite of evils I do not attempt to deny, there is so much, so very much, that is good and beautiful, yes, and deeply spiritual, to see—and not to have seen it.

You have read with evident attention the pages of the little book that you send me to-day, but, Joan dear, do you not think that a portrait is a truer likeness than a photograph, and

would you not rather have a full instead of a one-sided representation of anything, even of a nation that you do not love? You already have the photograph. All the evils which are only too painfully apparent, and blot the surface of Irish life, are faithfully portrayed in these so-called American letters. My portrait may be ill-drawn, the descriptive strokes may be feeble and blurred; yet if I can express anything of what I feel, what I know to be true, you will have to own that there is a something in the Irish character which makes them a people apart from and, in their innate spirituality, above all others.

"Letters from Ireland," which, by the way, was obviously never penned by a man, is a most useful and—alas! that I must own it—a truthful little book. The copies of it that fall into the hands for which it is intended cannot fail to do a part at least of the good that its authoress, a practical lover of her country, wishes.

But when her readers fail to grasp that she is writing solely from a materialistic point of view, and that abuse of her own country—for which she is doing good work with tongue and pen—is not intended, then her little book needs some amplification.

That the state of things she describes and deplores, that she is working to improve, is the outcome of past oppressive laws, cannot be denied, but this is no excuse for the continuance of a state of things which, as she says, is a disgrace to a race entitled on other grounds to so high a position in the grades of nations. All lovers of Ireland should therefore welcome a book which will help to improve the material well-being of Ireland, no matter how humiliating it may be to our national pride.

It is a well known and a very true saying that Saxon and Celt might come to the under-

standing they have so long sought and always missed

> "If England would remember,
> And Ireland could forget."

England at last *is* remembering. In her Saxon fashion she is doing all she can to atone for the faults of the past, and Ireland *must* forget. We can only hope that with increasing educational and material advantages she will soon arrive at this desired point of forgetfulness. Otherwise the blame for our shortcomings, which for so many generations we have comfortably saddled upon England, will have to be taken on our own shoulders, and we shall have, in common honesty, to remain silent when such accusations as yours are levelled at us.

Even now we cannot deny our faults, but still there remains another and a higher side of Irish nature which must not be ignored, if, even without being merciful, we wish to be just, to

our own. I am an Irishwoman. I will admit, if you like, that I am consequently idle, apathetic, and dirty, but I do claim some redeeming points. So it is with us all, and the consciousness of these redeeming points, hidden though they often are, should help us to bear with our national failings, and nerve us to greater efforts in the cause of rational regeneration as championed in "Letters from Ireland."

The time for silence has not yet come, so bear with my garrulity, and read how personal experience has taught me to look on Ireland, her virtues, and her failings. The facts that I shall set down must speak for themselves, and the vaunted justice of the English nation will be belied, if, when you have read, you cannot spare some little admiration for the country that, from a thorough knowledge of it, I have learned to love so dearly. To love one's country, seeing nothing beyond the American photograph, would be impossible — though pity is supposed to be

akin to love—but it is quite possible to see its faults and yet to love it for the sake of the high and really beautiful qualities that some of the individual owners of these faults possess. Scripture tells us that "A little leaven leaveneth the lump." As you have to live in Ireland, Joan, may I help you to see that leaven?

Do you remember when you first went to Ballynaraggit, I asked you to go and see old Paddy Farrell, who lived on the Doones? The description that you gave me of your visit was something like this:

'I have been to see your old man, but I do wish, my dear Patricia, that your *protégés* lived in more accessible places. The so-called road was ankle deep in mud, and what the mayor and corporation, or whatever your local authorities call themselves, are about, I can't imagine. Then there are no gates or even stiles, and the horrid untidy bushes in the gateways scratched my legs and tore my clothes.

As for the old man's house when I did get to it, I can only say that I would not shut my eyes all night if I thought Toodles or Wowsey (I forget which was the canine treasure just then) had to sleep in such a place, and yet when I told the old man that he ought to go to the workhouse he was almost rude. As for his clothes, they were absolutely *too—too—*. Really, darling, I can't imagine how you can even pretend to like such creatures."

Now, Joan, I am going to tell you something more about Paddy, and to begin with, let me describe one of my visits to him.

The road to Doone is almost always muddy, but there are stretches of grass on either side of it which enable a rider to canter even before leaving the highway. Beyond this point no tiresome gates or stiles get in one's way. The gaps are stuffed with a couple of bushes that just make a nice little hop for the pony. The last fence has no gap, but it is only a tiny

ditch and bank, and the clatter of stones on the landing-side brought Paddy out to welcome me.

"God's blessin' be about you, and you on a peaceable baste for the onct. When I see the big red divil (my poor chestnut!) under y'r honor, me heart gets shifted, an' I'm like to die."

Paddy had had trouble lately. His precious spectacles "got broke on him 'twill be two weeks come Sunday, and ne'er a stim good bad or indifferent can he see."

I had a pair of glasses for him in my pocket, and these he hastily and gratefully put on.

"Grand then, grand entirely," he murmured, and out of a rag-covered recess in his coat he produced a well-thumbed, a most unclean copy of the penny prayer-book. "A prayer—before—mass—give—us—O Almighty—and eternal——"

He read aloud in a monotonous sing-song voice, ending up with "grand, grand entirely."

Then looking up at me, an expression of blank amazement overspread his countenance. "Glory be to God, y'r honor," he ejaculated, "I never knew you had so big a face on you before."

Even when the glasses with their marvellous magnifying powers had been laid aside, he could scarcely be reassured as to the normal proportion of my features, and to distract his attention I began to enquire after his health.

"'Tis grand I am, thanks be to God," he said. "I'd be as soople as them boys in the hurley field of a Sunday, an' me eighty-one years of age, if it wasn't for the pains that ketches me in the back, and has me destroyed."

I offered him some red flannel, usually an eagerly accepted panacea for all rheumatic affections, but to my astonishment Paddy demurred, hesitated, and finally refused my offer.

"You wouldn't take a bit of flannel from me, Paddy? Now, why is that? Do you think it would be troubling me, or why?"

"Well, it's the truth I will be tellin' y'r honor an' no lie. I haven't a whit o' aches or sufferin' on me barrin' them pains I do be tellin' you about, and if I lost the only thing that likens me to the Son of God, I'd be fearin' maybe that God Himself had forgotten me."

Joan, dear, is any pretence needed about loving a saint when one is fortunate enough to know one?

I suppose you did not trouble to go up the Doone against the side of which Paddy's miserable little cabin is built. From above it looks like a heap of dead grass and rushes, but it is his home, his very own, come to him from his father, and from seven generations before that.

A stretch of bog-land lies at one's feet, brown and yellow. Fading to buff near at hand, it turns to deep brown, deep brilliant brown, merging into purple, which changes to indigo against the blue hills of the horizon. The dark green of a clump of fir-trees tones down the almost too

vivid emerald of the meadows beyond the stream whose waters glisten here and there like diamonds in the bog. At one side there is a chain of lakes. The tall reeds that edge the nearest are distinguishable, waving gracefully, while round the further ones they merely show as a softening fringe. But the lights, the indescribable lights—purple, blood-red, golden, silvery-grey, all soft, all beautiful, mingling with one another—are the crowning glory of the scene. You did not see all this, Joan, I know, because Dora Sigerson's lines to Ireland are so true:

> "God has made you all fair,
> You in purple and gold,
> You in silver and green,
> Till no eye that has seen
> Without love can behold."

No, poor Joan, as yet your "eyes have not seen."

I expect that at the time of the big storm they told you that Paddy Farrell was found dead, but did they give you any details? The

facts have reached me here. The local colouring I can picture for myself.

He had been into the town to get the pittance allowed him as "out-door relief" from the Union. Six coppers were found afterwards in his pocket; the rest of his weekly income, amounting to another eighteenpence, had been spent in buying a tiny packet of tea, a candle, some sugar and an infinitesimal twist of tobacco. These also were found upon him. Even the tobacco was untouched, though it had evidently been fingered, but, as he possessed no matches, the luxury of a pipe had been denied him.

Can't you imagine the wind on that night of storm along the road from Ballynaraggit? Coming unchecked from further than eye could reach, gaining force with every mile of open bog that it traversed, the gale burst upon the solitary eighty-one-year-old traveller who was slowly and painfully making his way to Doone.

Why did he not stay the night in town when

such a storm was threatening? Who knows? Perhaps he felt the shadow of death upon him, and a blind animal instinct may have dragged his unwilling feet, his weary aching body homeward. Perhaps he foresaw that the home of his seven generations was destined to destruction, and pride of race bade the last of the name to be present at the fall. No one knows where the breaking of the storm came upon him. Not far from home, probably, for he was able to drag himself to the shelter of the high bank that rises up where bog gives way to meadow land, and there, in the bottom of the ditch which winter rains had not yet flooded, Paddy sat down to rest—and die.

What were his thoughts, crouched there with the storm roaring and thundering above him? Was he troubled with regrets for the priest at whose feet he had knelt in his rags month after month these years past? for the brown habit of Mount Carmel, bought with his scant savings to

die in, and now lying useless in the cabin over the fields? Did the sins of his past life crowd round and overwhelm him? For he knew that death was at hand. He had no habit to put on; then the Mother of God must own him by the scapulars that he wore. Painfully, with stiffening fingers, he drew the brown braid from his neck, kissing the badges reverently, and then clasping them closely to him. Round the other hand was turned and twisted his old black rosary, and if there was no light to see, still his lips could feel the well-worn figure of the Saviour, Who, alone also, had suffered the pangs of death for him. Then he closed his eyes, but his treasures, scapulars and rosary, were still kept tightly clasped, and in the morning, when they found him—dead—they could not, did not seek, to rob him of them.

Joan, dear, don't you think, when the angels came to take the soul away out of the dark cold ditch, that they thought less of the unwashed face,

the clothes that were really too—too—, of the coppers taken in dole from the Union, than they did of the prayers that rose to Heaven, of the pains gladly suffered because they likened the sufferer to Christ, of the rosary and the crucifix that claimed the last material thoughts of my friend, Paddy Farrell.—Your loving

PATRICIA.

II

My dear Joan,—You are wrong in thinking that I am trying to refute the allegations brought against the Irish race in those other letters. Alas! I could not do that because—and again alas! alas!—their truth is borne out by the lives and behaviour of far too many of my countrymen to allow of any wholesale refutation.

What I want to prove to you is, that in spite of all our faults we still have redeeming points, and that life in Ireland is not necessarily unendurable. To a philanthropist, *pur et simple,* work amongst the Irish poor must, I fear, be very despairing, in spite of individually successful cases. There is the quickness to grasp, the ability to perform, even the intelligence to admire

better things, yet put these in the balance, and they are utterly outweighed by the faults that you are inclined to exult over, but I and the writer of the American letters deplore.

As a nation we have many faults (that we have them as individuals goes without saying, for no one supposes we were born without original sin), but in order that you and I may be able to bear with these faults and do our little best to counteract them, let us be willing to see that good qualities exist as well as evil ones. Hidden they may be, but they are still there. To find these good qualities we must look to individuals, not to the nation as a whole, and having found examples of them here and there, we must take them as "a little leaven" to leaven the lump of our national imperfections.

So it comes back to that with which I started.

I do not try to meet the accusations of the American letters, much less do I try to refute them.

I only ask for a little leniency, in spite of

the faults of our many, because of the virtues of our few.

I wish you could have come with me upon a round of visits I paid one summer day not long ago, for I think even you would have been interested, would have seen some of the attractions that, in spite of needless dirt and poverty, make Ireland

> "—— A piteous land,
> Yet ever beckoning with enchanted wand."

A narrow lane leads from a high road through lovely green fields down almost to the edge of the bog. Here in the yard of a "comfortable" farmer the cart track—it is little more—ceases to exist, and we must continue our journey along a grassy footpath until our feet rest on the crisp, springy heather where only one to the country born can make his way dry shod. The cottage which was our destination differed little in appearance from the neighbouring turf clamps. The door was closed, but a slight

push enabled us to enter, with heads bowed by the remembrance of past knocks from just such sooty rafters.

The Widow Hanratty is generally on the threshold to greet us, but to-day the kitchen was empty and fireless, and a voice came feebly from the gloom of the inner room.

"Who is it I have here? Then praises be to God for sending you, an' me with not a bone in me body but's broke since the nanny-goat threw me in the gripe."

The "gripe" is a mearing fence, both wide and deep, and the nanny-goat's horns had left severe bruises behind them, besides dislocating the poor old shoulder. Nothing had been done to ease the pain, although a week had passed since the accident happened.

"The boy (aged sixty) was for telling the ladies the way it was with me," so she recounted, "but then he didn't like for to be troubling. 'Tis the good son he is to me, fixing me up

finely and setting the holy water beside me and the cup o' tea too before ever he goes out to work of a morning."

The tea-cup was now empty and we set to work to fill it again. The fire in the kitchen, however, was out, and no match forthcoming, so, tin can in hand, we retraced our steps to the farm at the lane end, where we were made welcome to a "live" turf, which we carried carefully back, all glowing, under a layer of ashes. A mug full of bog water did not take long to boil, and soon, with the help of a "grain" of tea and a small bottle of milk, produced from our pockets, it made a cheering cup, which was eagerly drunk by the invalid.

The "wrapper," which was the widow's chief article of wearing apparel, showed comparatively white against the smoke-grimed, straw-filled sacks and coverlets that formed her bed, but it had got so wound round the uninjured arm that this was as helpless as the other, and it was no easy task

setting it to rights. The slightest movement was pain to her, yet she begged us to dive into dark recesses all about her to find "her one comfort," the rosary beads that had slipped from her fingers.

A few days later we met the doctor, who at our request had paid a visit to the Widow Hanratty, and with dexterous fingers set the dislocated limb. He spoke with so grave a face that we feared she must have succumbed after all.

"Indeed you cannot go there again," he said; "I could not answer for the consequences if you did."

Visions of the most infectious diseases rose up before us, and we begged for further information. At first he would say no more, but at length we forced him to speak:

"The truth is," he hesitated even then, "the truth is that in that house there are myriads and myriads of fleas!"

This was a fact of which we had not been allowed to remain unaware, and one which the nuns, too, were not long in finding out, when, a few days later Mrs Hanratty consented to be carried ten miles off to the workhouse infirmary.

The next house, also a turf-walled, sod-roofed cabin, was the home of the saddest of all our acquaintances. Biddy Muldoon was alone in the world, and the dread disease that had attacked her face debarred her from a welcome in any of the neighbours' houses, although every one around was willing to help her as best they could.

She was a pitiable object as she crouched at the door of her hovel, and when the breezes blowing over the bog raised the dirty rags that covered a part of her face, we could not resist drawing our hats over our eyes, anxious not to hurt poor Biddy's feelings, yet unable to gaze on so terrible a sight. But her senses were keener than we thought, and a skinny arm was extended to thrust back the sheltering brims.

"Is it from the likes o' me you come to learn manners?" she asked reproachfully. "Have you never been taught to look a body in the face when you speak to them?"

But it was not in body alone that Biddy suffered. She was one of the very, very few—of the two or three out of six hundred in the parish—who had not approached the Sacraments for years. By her own act, poor soul, she deprived herself of what ought to have been her greatest consolation. Repeated pleadings had been fruitless, and at last one day something urged me to speak more plainly than ever before, more plainly than is usually advisable.

"The truth is, Biddy, that you have been ill so long that you forget how dangerous your illness is. Don't you know that at any moment now a blood vessel may be touched, and then you will bleed to death before the priest can come to you, or before you can even call one of the neighbours to send for him?"

A half-hearted promise to send for the priest "some time" was all we could extract at the moment, but that night a horse's footfall on the frost-bound road told of a sick call in Biddy's direction, and we hoped—and rightly, thank God, as we afterwards learnt—that our words had been spoken in time, and had had more effect than we imagined.

Not many days after, and before we were able to get down to the bog again, a passer-by on that lonely road, seeing no smoke rising from the hole in the cabin roof that did duty for a chimney, forced open the door. He found Biddy lying on the cold hearthstone, alone, stiff, quite dead.

Mrs Brolly, the next door neighbour of poor Biddy, was standing at the door of her comfortable cottage as we passed by, and we stopped, just to "bid her the time of day." She is well to do and comfortable enough, with steady sturdy sons all earning for her. There is only one gap

in the family circle, and this was caused by the death of a boy in the South African war. "But I can't complain," Mrs Brolly had said to us at the time. "God has been very good when He didn't leave me stript entirely, like Lord Roberts."

She eyed us with certain disfavour as we stopped to accost her.

"Where's this your sister is, miss?" she asked. "It's not me own lady I have to-day at all."

The absence of her special friend being explained to her, she was seemingly content.

"Sure isn't she the beautiful lady," she murmured half to herself. "When she comes in here to me, isn't she for all the world like a fallen angel!"

Further on was a house that claimed from us that most painful of duties, a visit of condolence. The newly-made widow came out to greet us with four or five of her ten fatherless children clinging to her skirts.

There were no words of complaint. She

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listened quietly to our halting words of sympathy, and then spoke resignedly, merely stating facts.

"And I'm not the only one left desolate in the parish," she said. "There's Margit Carmody gone, God rest her soul, an' she leaving a houseful of children after her, an' they do say Hugh M'Gloyne is going, an' him with five young gossoons. Oh, 'tis a terrible year of orphans, that it is, God Almighty help us all."

Another long lane, this time leading back from bog to uplands, took us to the home of Ellen Muldoon which she shares with a blind old friend—or rather cousin—Margaret Flynn. It is a good house, but Ellen, who is over seventy and is doubled with rheumatism to within three feet of the ground, is not able to keep it as she would wish. "It has pleased God to leave me very small," she told us once, peering up into our faces, "but what matter! His holy will be done."

She is a lone woman, the last of an old

family who have come down in the world. She has worked hard all her life, but has kept a brave heart, aye, and a merry one, through all.

"You wouldn't think to see the place now," she said, "that 'twas meself was reared in it, so tender, under fourteen cows. But God's good," she added cheerfully, "sending poor Margaret to keep me company when He took the last of me own to Himself. That was me sister Marcelle, an' she after lying there twelve years an' not a stir out of her, hand or foot, the creature!"

"And you minded her all that time, Ellen, did you?" we asked.

"To be sure an' I did, then. An' now it's Margaret I have to mind. She gets that fretful time an' again," she added in a lower voice as a querulous voice comes from the kitchen, "and what wonder, with her affliction, but one must be doing something for God's sake."

Margaret was sitting despondently over the

fire, her beads in her hands. She was cheered by the sweets we had brought her, and after eating a large and very strong peppermint lozenge, she began to talk in less doleful tones of bygone days. Her stories had been told to us many times before, but it pleased her to repeat them once again.

"She'll be heartened up this long while, so she will," Ellen assured us, "after her chat with you to-day."

It was late when at last we reached the village, and, climbing a short steep staircase, entered a spotlessly clean room, where Rosie Macminn lay dying. She was quite young, not much over twenty, but the hectic flush on her wan face, the thin white fingers that clasped our own, told their tale of the ravages of decline. A heap of booklets lay ready to be returned to us, and eager eyes sought out the new ones we had brought. In husky tones she begged a favour: might she—her time was now so short, and, unlike most

consumptives, she recognised the fact—might she keep one little book, her favourite. It was "Aline," published by the Irish Catholic Truth Society. "I like to read what she suffered," Rosie whispered, "for it helps me to thank God that I have no pain to bear, only just to lie here and wait." Yes, truly her time of waiting to see God would be short. Angels seemed already to be watching for that patient soul.

The last house on our round though poor was clean also, and fairly well aired, and here again a young woman was waiting for death. We told Mary Dowd of those others whom we had visited, of the girl only a few years her junior who, like herself, was dying. Her disease is usually a most painful one, but, thank God, Mary had been spared from very great suffering, and through all, through weariness, through discomfort, through pain the same words were ever on her lips.

"If He would take me to Himself wouldn't it be good for me, but His holy will be done."

Once again she said this as we bade her good-bye and turned our faces towards home.

Ah, Joan! they do make one feel ashamed of oneself, these patient sufferers!

The sun was sinking in the west, the rooks were cawing lazily in the great, overhanging trees, the water of the river glimmered under the crimson and gold of sunset, the air was filled with summer scents and sounds; then a wave of thanksgiving rose up within us, and three words came to us suddenly, "Laetus sorte mea." Yes, Joan, in spite of the sad deficiencies of Ireland, I say and feel it, "My lines have fallen in pleasant places, and happy is my lot."—Your loving

PATRICIA.

III

My dear Joan,—You say that my friends live in inaccessible places, but it really is not the case with all of them, for old D'Arcy, "the widow-man's" wife, was one of my friends, and you know where his house is. It stands alone, apart from its neighbours, a slated building showing white against a lonely background of green. The waters of a wide lake lap the causeway leading to it, and the cry of the seagull, the coot, and the plover make its solitude seem deeper than it really is. Mrs D'Arcy was the mother of seven sons, but God had sent no daughter to her, and in her old age she was left to the rough tenderness of her old husband, whilst the two boys spared by the emigration fever worked for their parents.

When first I knew her she was tall, almost stately in her carriage, with smooth, olive skin and black eyes that betrayed a dash of gipsy blood. She was never quite like her neighbours, and from the time of her illness this difference gradually increased. I had known her all my life. I remember as a little girl clattering on a shaggy pony along the stony causeway near her house to borrow one of her snowy muslin caps for private theatricals and receiving, with the cap and many blessings, a piece of home-baked oatcake, liberally covered with brown sugar. But our real friendship began only about six years ago, when first she fell ill.

No one seemed to know what was the matter, but the pains that bowed the once straight back and bent the once active figure were put down to the close proximity of the lake, and it was only after weary months had passed that the symptoms of creeping paralysis disclosed themselves. Day after day, week after week, she sat

in the chimney corner, growing more and more helpless, more and more suffering. At first her mind was clear and active. The enforced idleness was physical pain to her, and the least wrinkle in her kerchief, the least unevenness in the goffering of her muslin cap, washed, ironed, and made up by the clumsy, patient hands of the old man, were causes of querulous complaint.

The new housekeeper was wonderfully skilful in his work. At first he kept the house as clean as when "herself" was about, but by degrees, as the disease crept slowly on, things went worse. She needed more attention than at first; over and over again in the night she called him to her, only, perhaps, to smooth a sheet or raise a pillow, but his rest was disturbed, and he became older, more broken, ever less able to do the work that grew and pressed upon him. The boys were out from early dawn to dark, and sometimes Mrs D'Arcy was left quite alone. Then if I came by, there was a search for the cottage key, for, like

a child, she was locked in. Under the black pot, in the potato basket on the wall, in the tufts of marsh grass near the gate, every possible hiding-place was searched, and usually with success. Entering, I used to find her sunk in her wicker chair, veritably doubled in two, and fastened round her waist, to the ladder leading to the sleeping loft above. This was a necessary precaution when the fire was so near: once, indeed, I found her with her sacking apron smouldering unnoticed at her feet, and a live ember lying upon it.

"Who is it I have?" was her invariable question as I opened the door, and the answer always brought me the same greeting: "God be good to you, daughter machree." Then sitting in the close dark kitchen I had to listen to her moans. She could not, could not, resign herself to powerlessness or to suffering. I had to feel her fingers, to raise her poor bowed head, that of itself could not keep straight, and with those

pleading, agonised eyes upon me, how could I tell the naked truth, and say that I saw no improvement, knew no cure was possible? And so my words of comfort came stumblingly. It seemed so meaningless for me, sitting still for half an hour, coming in from the outer sunshine, from the living interests of my own life, to speak to this rigid pain-racked prisoner of her purgatory in this world, of the crown that suffering alone can win. And what I said never brought her consolation. Only a torrent of tears and sobs that shook and weakened her, and the ever-repeated cry: "Why should I be taken so, daughter dear? Why should it just be me?" They grew more painful, these visits, as time went on, and often I let weeks pass without going to see her, thinking it was better so. But always when I met the old man he used to say that she was asking for me, and again I went, and again came the hopeless questionings, the seemingly useless replies.

It was in Holy Week, four years ago, that I went, and at last I had found words—not my own—to answer her. I gave no time for more than the usual greeting.

"I have brought you a book to-day, Mrs D'Arcy," I said. "It is Good Friday, and I am going to read the Passion of our Lord to you."

And, sitting on a stool, with the firelight playing on the pages where in the morning I had read to myself the inspired lines, I now read them to her.

She listened attentively. From the first her mind, cleared for the moment of the cloud that was growing over it, seized and understood the Evangelist's words. The light outside was fading, but the turf gleamed bright about us. A cricket sang in the chimney, and a half-starved kitten, climbing to my knee, was purring unsteadily towards the flames that it loved. All else was silence.

"And Pilate took Jesus and scourged Him;

and the soldiers plaiting a crown of thorns put it upon His head, and they gave Him blows." And so through all the story of that supreme suffering. "Jesus therefore said, 'It is consummated,' and, bowing His head, He gave up the ghost."

Then in the silence came the well-known sound of weeping, but looking up I saw an unknown light shining through Mrs D'Arcy's tears.

"Ochone! Ochone! An' all the tears I've wasted on meself! An' all the complaints because He likened me to Himself by suffering. I know it, daughter dear, but tell me again. It *was* for me He suffered?"

"Yes, Mrs D'Arcy, it was for you."

No days of respite came, no hours of relief. Only as time elapsed the actual pain was less as one by one her limbs grew numb and dead. I visited her often, heard how this new pain and that had taken her, but for four long years since that visit at Passiontide I never heard

one word of repining or of complaint to pass those lips. Resignation, complete and heroic, had sealed them for ever. For some months her speech had failed her so much that only with the old man's help was I able to understand her. Her mind too was growing more confused, yet she knew me to the end of this living death.

Once again I went that way. The sun was setting, a golden ball sinking into the waters of the lake with a gleaming path of light leading to it.

A black figure came out of the white-washed house, and, approaching each other, we met upon the causeway. It was the priest.

"Yes, she is dead," he said, then, raising his hat, "and blessed are the dead who die in the Lord."

PATRICIA.

IV

My dear Joan,—I wish you had known Mrs Dirrane; she would have softened your heart towards Ireland better than any letter of mine could do. The whiteness of her frilled cap would have appealed to you, and the neatness of her red petticoat and fawn-coloured shawl could not have escaped you, even if you had not noticed the expression of her face. The leading note of her life was the praise of God. I will explain to you what I mean by this. My knowledge of Gaelic is slight—very slight—still I can follow the words of the "Hail Mary" which Sunday after Sunday I hear murmured in tones of varied intensity by the tightly serried ranks of patient, benchless men and women kneeling on the cold cement of the

chapel floor, with faces upturned towards the altar, but eyes that look beyond and above it. Betty Dirrane, pressed against the sanctuary rails, gave me, and every one else around, the benefit of her prayers. As the well-worn beads of her rosary passed slowly through her fingers it struck me that her words did not fall in with the rhythm of the others, and, listening, I recognised the difference.

"Betty," I said, when next I met her, "will you tell me why it is that you say the 'Hail Mary' twice to every once you say the 'Holy Mary'?"

"Daughter dear, I'll tell you, an' no lie," she answered. "Isn't the 'Holy Mary' nothing but a trouble to the Mother of God, askin' her prayers and the like? and I'd be ashamed not to be praisin' her twict with the two 'Hail Marys' for the onct I'd go troublin' her wid the 'Holy Mary.'"

Ballynaraggit was never Betty's home. She lived away on the coast, and her only son,

Coleman, was a sailor in the Royal Navy. But even in foreign parts he never forgot his mother. News came from him at distant intervals, it is true, yet with a certain regularity. He sent her money in the spring to pay for the setting of "the lock o' praties that was her whole dependence," and in the autumn to provide for the cutting and saving of the turf. It was this autumn letter that was missing in the last year of Betty's life, and as the days passed by its absence brought two anxious puckers that furrowed round her patient eyes.

Whenever we met I used to ask her if she had had news of Coleman, and the same answer always came: "Sorra a word, asthore. But there'll be a letter comin' to me from him against the Chris-e-mas."

It seemed cruel to go on asking, and as time went on and I saw the puckers deepen I gave up my query, but Betty noticed my omission at once. "There's no letter still from Coleman,

daughter dear, but there's one acomin' to me against the Chris-e-mas."

It was this hope—nay, more than hope—this firm conviction, that God would not leave her lonesome at Christmas, that kept Betty Dirrane alive during those winter months, but the silence on the part of her boy was telling on her sadly. She was growing frailer and more bent, and, though she never complained, the exertion of the long walk to Mass on Sundays, which, wet or fine, she never missed, was paid for by the aching of her weary limbs. I met her on Christmas Eve and noticed how she had altered.

"No, then," she said, answering my unspoken question, "I've no word from Coleman, but, praise be to God, I'll be hearin' from him in the mornin'."

It was not going to be a white Christmas, as you know we seldom have lying snow in the West, but I remember that there was frost in the air. A wintry sun was glimmering upon

the waters of Galway Bay and lightening the grey haze that enshrouded the grey distance of this grey country where wall after wall of granite boulders bound the view on every side, excepting towards the sea.

The chapel walls, grey granite too, were a shelter from the strong, yet soft western wind that blows in to us persistently from Arran. Inside the church the priest was seated at the altar rails hearing confessions, for confessionals are unknown in our parish, and besides those kneeling at the farther end of the chapel, there was a waiting group without. These were chiefly men and boys, clad in loose white "bawneen" jackets, made out of locally woven homespun flannel, and grey-blue or white trousers of the same material, cut on no scientific principle, and patched on no pre-arranged system. Betty and a few other women were busy at the gate putting on, before entering the House of God, the boots and stockings which they had carried

under their arms whilst they walked barefoot for miles down the boreens and over the boglands to "make their souls" for Christmas.

"It's to the Midnight Mass I'll be, please God," said Betty, "and I'll wait then in Flynn's below till the post comes in with Coleman's letter. God's good, asthore! He'll never let the Chris-e-mas over me without word from the boy."

It was always the same with her. She *knew* that God would not fail her, and surely such faith would be rewarded. But in spite of her brave words, of her simple trust in the goodness of God, I saw more plainly than ever how these months of silent waiting had aged and altered her. Could she ever walk the two long Irish miles that lay between her house and the chapel in time to assist at the so-called Midnight Mass on Christmas day? It was a Midnight Mass in name alone, for seven o'clock was the actual hour at which it began. But it was night and

dark night when we left our homes to assist at it, and so it kept the name of what it represented.

As I rose to leave the chapel on the 24th I saw Betty kneeling in a distant corner. Her face was upraised, her lips were moving. I could not hear the torrent of soft Gaelic that was pouring from them, but I knew that interspersed through her praise were prayers—to which for her sake, I added my mite—for news of the absent Coleman.

One by one the men and women, after going to confession, finished their prayers, and passed out of the chapel. Only Betty remained motionless there, whilst a stream of newcomers took the place of those who had already "been with the priest."

Before me as I walked down the path leading to the road was a man I knew well by sight, Mike Carroll, a weak, good-natured creature, everybody's friend except his own. At the gate

a passer-by stopped to speak to him, and as I approached he was evidently trying to persuade Carroll to go to Galway with him, probably to join in a Christmas spree, but the answer was decided enough.

"I will not," said Carroll.

"Where are you goin', then?" asked the tempter.

"Home," responded Carroll shortly. "An' get along wid you. Don't you know that I'm in a state o' grace and I don't want to get quit of it?"

Thank God, there were very few in the parish that night who were not in a state of grace, and next morning, in the deep darkness that precedes the dawn, they made their way over hill and stony valley, along rough boreens and high roads scarcely smoother, from their white-walled yellow-thatched homes to the poor chapel, which was the finest dwelling that they could provide for their Best Friend. Yet in

that bare, barn-like building a heartier welcome awaited the Christ-Child than many a stately Church can offer Him. They were quiet and orderly, but so tightly packed together that, looking down the chapel, it seemed like a sea of faces, showing sickly yellow in the flickering of the dip candles, which, stuck in the tin sconces along the skirting board of the walls, formed all the illumination we could boast of. All through the Mass there was a continual murmur of prayer, but at the Elevation the voices rose, the words became articulate, and, as the priest held up the Sacred Host, from four hundred lips came forth the greeting, heart-stirring in its intensity: "Caed mille failte!" A hundred thousand welcomes to the Christ-Child come again to earth.

We were still sitting round the remains of our Christmas turkey, when a message came to me from Betty. It was Gilbert Dirrane, a friend, or as you would say, a relation of her late husband's, who had brought it.

"Betty wants to see you."

Such a call on such a day was very unusual, and it occurred to me at once that there had been no letter, and the blow, the disappointment had been too much for her.

"Was there no word from Coleman, then?" I asked.

"Oh, there was word, fair and clean, yer honor," replied Gilbert. "Thank God, 'tisn't the heart but the ould back on her that's broke, the creature! 'Twas this way it happened, not to be delayin' yer honor. She'd got her letter below in Flynn's, an' I seen her meself go hoppin' down the street wid it, as proud as you please, for all the world like a newly married flea! when — bad scran to them gossoons who'd been slidin' down the toe-path—away go the two legs from in under her, and she kem a heavy fall on the flags."

"Oh, poor old Betty!" I cried. "And is she badly hurt?"

"Badly is it? Sure it's the life itself that's knocked out of her! But the whole thing that's troublin' her now is Coleman's letter. We were for to carry her into Flynn's again, but she gave us no peace until we left her home in her own place, where she thought to find the specs of her. But—glory be—weren't they in her pocket all the time, and smashed to smithereens in the fall. An' now there's not a one but yer honor that she'll ask to read the letter for her, an' she holdin' to it all the while, wid the dews o' death on th' ould fingers of her."

I went, and when I entered, the neighbours who were in the cottage moved away and left us alone. Gilbert Dirrane was right. Even I could see that "the life itself was knocked out of her," and the hand that feebly held my own was, as he said, already growing cold and numb. She gave me the letter, and at a glance I saw that no village lad had written the address, scored over with blue pencil marks in correction

of what had been first set down. Her eyes, bright and searching, the only living things about the rigid old body, were on me, and under pretext of seeking more light I went to the window. God had indeed not left her over the Christmas without news of her boy. But could I, dared I, must I tell her what the letter contained? It was short—only a few lines from the chaplain of the station whence Coleman last had written. It told of fever, of a lingering illness, borne bravely, of a young sailor's death, in a foreign land, 'tis true, but with a priest beside him, who had helped him into the Harbour over the Bar.

"What's the news, asthore? What's the news that Coleman's sent me for the Chris-e-mas?"

The weak voice reached me only in a whisper, and for a moment I could not answer.

Then I went back to the bedside.

"It is good news, Betty," I said. "The priest

beyond has written to give you news for Christmas, because he says that Coleman—that Coleman has gone home."

"Coleman comin' home! Sweet praises be to the Great God and to His Son, a Child to-day on earth for us."

She went off into Gaelic, communing with God and thanking Him. Her eyelids fell, leaving her face like that of one already dead. I did not regret what I had said. Truly it was good news, and soon, when she learnt the deception of the way I had told it to her, I knew she would forgive me. But sooner than I thought did the real truth come to her. The Angel of Death had already entered the cottage, and perhaps it was some light from him that revealed it to her.

Suddenly she opened her eyes widely and looked up at me.

"Don't be afraid, daughter dear," she said. "It's goin' to God I am, so tell me the truth.

Is it home to Ireland, or home to God, that Coleman's gone?"

"Betty dear, Betty dear, 'tis home to God."

"Oh, the goodness of Him. Oh! the goodness to the likes o' me. Sweet praises be to Him——"

Gilbert Dirrane's wife had crept back into the house, and now she came over to me.

"She wouldn't miss y'r honor now," she whispered, "if you'd be for to go."

I knew what she meant, but just then Betty opened her eyes and spoke in the voice I knew of old.

"Christ Himself is waitin' for me," she said; "Christ Himself—and Coleman."

Then she lay still and again young Mrs Dirrane motioned to me to go.

"It came against the Chris-e-mas." Betty's voice was a whisper now, clear, but so faint as to be hardly audible. "Sweet praises be——"

I went out, and away home, for her own

people could do more now for Betty than I could. I was awestruck, perhaps, but hardly saddened, for I knew that Betty and her boy would spend their Christmas night together — in the "Harbour over the Bar."

They told me, afterwards, that she never spoke again. I had heard her very last words.

"Sweet praises be to God."

PATRICIA.

V

My dear Joan,—You say that people like those I have described to you may have lived in Ireland in the good old days, but that, as all my friends are dead now, what I say of them counts as nothing against the disagreeables of to-day. You are wrong. All my friends, I am glad to say, are not dead, and I will tell you of one who is not only still living, but even now is little more than a child. Andy Connell's Mary does not live at Ballynaraggit, it was away in the south that I made her acquaintance.

At the place where we were staying a thick yew hedge skirts the home coverts, broken only at long intervals by high wooden gates. The gloom of the woods, low-lying, and of luxuriant

growth as they are, is in such strong contrast to the sunny, heather-clad bog outside, that when we left the shade of the pine-trees, and crossed out through the gamekeeper's yard on to the open land of the turf beyond, we were half dazzled by the brilliant colouring of the scene that lay before us. Every shade was there, from palest yellow to rich red-brown; the purple heather; the grass, late summer though it was, still a vivid green in places; the silvery glimmer here and there of pools and streamlets, and in the far distance a range of deep blue hills.

As soon as our eyes had grown used to the radiance of the sunshine, our attention was caught by a spot of colour in the foreground. A child, pink-clad, stood upon a felled tree that spanned the first bog drain, her brown bare feet clinging to the rough bark—a graceful little figure, swaying slightly to keep its balance, with arm upraised to shade the sun off the uncovered head.

As the little group of guns and ladies

approached, followed by keepers and dogs, the child turned towards us, first frightened, then half smiling though still shy.

Our host was well known to her, but his guests were strangers. As her retreat was cut off, she shrank back to where her father, the head man amongst the keepers, stood, and from his side she fearlessly returned the friendly looks that were cast upon her.

"Well, Mary, are you coming to show us where your daddy has all the birds in waiting?" said our host as he passed her by, and in reply she made the little curtsy that her mother had taught her always to make in his honour.

She was close to me now, and I could not resist stretching out my hand and laying it upon her head. "What hair!" I exclaimed to my companion as the silky strands of gold slipped through my fingers. Then turning to our host, "Fancy Lady Emily's joy at finding this head," I said, referring to a fellow guest whom even the

beauty of that morning had not tempted out. "Why, she'd give its weight in gold for such a crop!"

Our host smiled in return, picturing perhaps the difference between this bogland fairy, with Nature's gift flowing free on the breezes, and the world-worn woman who tried so hard to make up the deficiencies of her own head by the help of the hairdresser's art.

"Do you hear that, Mary? You need never be in want of money, for you carry a gold mine in your wig." He laughed again, but Andy Connell looked grave.

Perhaps he was right in thinking that such jests, which she only half understood, were not good for his little daughter, and he bade her run off quickly and go home to her mother.

As she turned to obey I bade her good-bye. "Good-bye, Goldylocks," I said, and my greeting was replied to by a dimple of pleasure in her rosy cheeks.

From what I learned later from Mrs Connell I can quite imagine what happened between then and my next meeting with little Goldylocks.

On reaching home Mary told of the meeting and what we had said to her. A look of gratified pride sprang up in the mother's eyes, but to Mary it seemed as though she, as well as her daddy, were not quite pleased at what had passed.

"Handsome is as handsome does, child," was all she said. "Don't forget that the more God Almighty has given to you, the more He will expect you to give Him. Hair or no hair, all I ask is that you'll grow up to be a good girl."

So the matter was dismissed and Mary went on to speak of other topics.

"Mother, there's no smoke comin' out of Lukie's chimney. Is it ill do you think he is? I was looking for it on the foot-bridge when the ladies and gentleman came by."

"No smoke, is it? An' he maybe lyin' helpless, the creature! Run over, Maineen, and see

what's on him, then. Here, you can take a sup o' milk along with you and the full of your bib of new potaties."

Thus burdened Mary set forth towards the old man's dwelling, which was distant only half a mile along the bog edge. From afar the house looked like a heap of loose stones with grass and weeds growing over them. No window was to be seen. No chimney showed where the fire-place lay, the hole by which the smoke escaped being invisible. A few fowls were gathered round the doorway. Except for these no sight or sound of life was there.

"Are you within, Lukie? It's Mary you have, and me mother's sent you a drop o' milk an' a wee lock o' praties."

No answer was forthcoming, and after a moment the child entered the hovel. On some grimy sacks, filled with straw that covered a broken wooden bedstead, the old man was lying. At first Mary thought he was asleep, but, drawing

nearer, a sound as of low moaning fell upon her ears, and she saw that, with his face turned to the wall, he was crying silently and bitterly. She had never seen a man in tears before, and her own sprang, in ready sympathy, to her eyes.

"What is it, Lukie?" she cried. "Are you sick? Are you hungry? Oh, tell me what I can do to make you better?"

"'Tis Maineen, is it? God bless you, alanna, and God bless them that sent you to a poor old dying man."

Dying! She had heard the word too often to fear it, yet there was awe in the thought that her old friend was soon to be claimed by death.

"Is it dying that makes you cry, Lukie?" she asked. "I thought you wanted God to take you."

"It's dyin', then, an' it isn't dyin'," replied the old man, half comforted. "For indeed I'll be better off, please God, beyont than ever I was here, but oh, Mary, me heart is broke entirely,

to think that the last o' the name should—should lie in a parish coffin'."

And, the words spoken, so full of shame to one whose family had been known and respected for generations unnumbered, once more Luke Gibney lifted up his voice and wept.

Then Mary, kneeling beside him, mingled her tears with his, and, heedless of the potatoes that rolled away as she loosed hold of her apron, listened, breathless, to his tale of woe, sympathised, wept again, and finally tried to comfort.

He had always hoped, aye, and worked with that end in view, to lay by enough to bury him beside his forefathers, in a coffin bought and paid for. The neighbours, in charity, would carry him to his last resting-place, and his ashes then would mingle in peace with those others of his family whom in life or death he had not disgraced. But the struggle was too hard. How could he, old feeble and alone, keep body and

soul together, or much less save for that future event, which was coming so certainly towards him. A pound, a whole golden pound, would be wanted to bury him as he wished, and he had scarcely seen the glint even of silver for years.

Mary, her faith boundless in father and mother, promised in their names that Lukie should be buried "dacent"; that his name need never figure on the workhouse list, but keen as were his shame and sorrow, rending his heart and embittering his last days on earth, he would not listen to this proposal.

Andy Connell and his wife were no longer young when the child had been sent, a heavenly gift to them, and well the old man knew that every spare penny in the gamekeeper's house was wanted to assure the future of their darling.

As Luke spoke, an idea, bright and beautiful, yet bringing with it a strange sharp pang, rose up in Mary's mind.

"You need never be in want of money, Mary, you have a gold mine in your wig." And again, "Lady Emily would give all she possesses for such a crop of hair." And lastly, her mother's words, "Hair or no hair, all I ask is that you grow up to be a good girl."

"Lukie," whispered Mary, and her voice was trembling, "if I had the money, twenty shillings of my very own, not belonging to father or to mother but only to me, would you take that to buy a coffin and then would you die content?"

Even in his sorrow the childish earnestness touched the old man.

"I couldn't refuse my little Maineen. I'd take it gladly if she had it to give," he said, laying his shaking hand on the child's brown clasped ones.

Her sympathy did much to console him, though he thought the possession of a sovereign was as far from the child as it was from him himself, and solely to please her he accepted the impossible offer.

Even to her mother Mary did not speak of what she meant to do. A struggle was going on in her heart, the hardest struggle her young life had ever known. On one side was her hair, the soft, warm, golden fleece that she loved as, consciously or unconsciously, each one loves and clings to her own beauties. And on the other side was—Lukie.

She thought of her head, cold, ragged, shorn, and in contrast came the words that I had spoken laughingly in farewell, "Good-bye, Goldylocks." Never again would any one call her so, never again, for years and years and years.

She was quiet that night, subdued, unlike herself, but her mother put it down to sorrow at old Luke's approaching end, and she thanked God for giving her child such a tender, loving heart. How tender, how unselfish even she did not yet know. She did not see the tears that wet the pillow, did not hear the choking sobs that shook the childish frame as she and Andy

sat at their supper below in the kitchen when the little one had gone to bed.

At eight o'clock in the morning, the postman, another friend of Andy Connell's Mary, passed up the avenue to the "great house." At the darkest part of the road, where the undergrowth is rank and wild and covered in by the drooping branches of over-hanging trees, a little woebegone figure awaited him. A big pair of scissors hung, points down, half open from one hand; a brown paper parcel, soft, pressing inwards where the twine passed round, was in the other. Summer though it was, a woollen tam-o'-shanter was dragged down to the nape of the neck behind, whilst in front it rested almost on the delicately pencilled eyebrows.

"Put it in the bag, please, Patsey. 'Tis a parcel for her ladyship," and, pushing the packet into the postman's hands, she darted off, and was lost to sight in the sheltering green of the shrubbery.

For a few moments she continued running, then, reaching a favourite moss-grown haunt, she threw herself face downwards on the ground. "Goldylocks!" she sobbed, "they'll never call me that again! Oh! my hair, my hair, my hair."

The post-bag was opened in the "great house," during the course of a late breakfast. There were no letters for me, and Lady Emily, who was busy with a pile of correspondence, nodded a careless acquiescence when I offered to undo her parcels for her. The first one I took up was soft and bulgy, with no stamps upon it, and two wet raindrops blotting the address.

I held it up to have the string cut by our host, who was helping himself to a Scotchman's share of porridge at the side-table, and there, with my back turned to the others, I opened it. A scrap of paper lay on top, and under it lay masses upon masses of golden hair. Luck had favoured me. Fancy if Lady Emily had opened

the parcel before us all, or even if the others had seen and laughed!

Quickly I slipped the paper covering out of sight under the table, but my lips brushed the soft contents as I hid it away.

"My Lady, Madam," so ran the note in laboured, childish characters, and there were the same marks—but now I knew they were not raindrops—as had blurred the address, "this is my hair, please, as I do want money: a gold pound to buy a coffin to bury Lukie decent, so he'll die happy.—From Andy Connell's Mary."

Again fortune was kind. Lady Emily's letters drove the parcel from her mind, and after breakfast I was able unnoticed to take it from its hiding-place and carry it out to where our host was waiting for me on the lawn. We walked together to the keeper's lodge, and I laid the parcel silently in Mrs Connell's hands.

"May I have a piece to keep," I asked, after

a moment's pause, "to keep for my own?" and Mrs Connell, raising a lock of gold, laid it in my hand. Then she told me all.

"We have brought Mary what she asked," I said as she finished her story, for before this Mary had confided everything to her. "Please—may we——"

"Mary!"

Shame-faced, still tear-stained, but with the glimmer of golden stubble on her head, the child came, answering her mother's call.

I held the coveted piece of money out to her, and there was an instant's silence.

Then slipping on to the flagged floor beside the child, I put my arms about her.

"Oh, Goldylocks," was all I said, "oh, Goldylocks."

PATRICIA.

VI

My dear Joan,—So you have gone back to your exile, and you tell me "there is nothing on earth to do." I wonder what you will think when I tell you of the first morning I spent after an absence like yours. I had been away for nearly a month, and the darkness when I arrived might have been supposed to keep my return a secret, so I sat down at my writing-table hoping for a morning's peace.

One window of the library looks out, as you know, on the terraces that lead to the river, the other is on the same side of the house as the hall door, and although trying to persuade myself that our return was not yet publicly known, experience warned me that before long this

window would frame the figure of some not especially welcome visitor.

Nor was I mistaken.

The crinch-crunch of the gravel that first fell faintly on my ears grew louder and more decided, a shadow fell upon the grass, then those sounds ceased, but the pause was not a silent one. A self-announcing cough, deprecating, yet insistent, fell with irritating regularity on my ears, and when I looked up a familiar figure greeted my eyes. Betsy Magee was an old pensioner, nay, an old friend, and with a sigh of resignation less deep than most others would have called up, I raised the low window, and the morning's levee began.

"I'm glad to see you up and about, Betty. I hear you've had a bad turn whilst I was away."

"I had, then, glory be to God, but still now that I am out of it, I can't complain."

Unconsciously Betty was a veritable heroine, for once the terrible accesses of pain that attacked

her from time to time were over, no word of complaint ever passed her lips.

"God's good," was her repeated cry, "and why would I be talking when what He's sending will bring me all the sooner to Himself."

"But I was terrible lonesome, jewel machree, when I thought I was going, and you from home. Whisper now," and she lowered her tone as she drew still nearer. "You won't be forgettin' what I told you, and the bit of money that's in the weeshy canister on the dresser."

"I won't forget, Betty. You know I've promised you ever so often."

"But, daughter dear, you might be forgettin' what you've promised, and you in foreign parts."

"I have it written down, and when you die, wherever I am, I promise you'll be buried in a coffin bought with your own money, and that you'll lie beside your father and mother in the old churchyard at Carriglea, and that the rest of the money—eleven shillings, isn't it?—that's in

the canister will go to the priest for masses for your soul, and you'll be prayed for on Sunday like the best in the parish. Now, I haven't forgotten, have I?"

"Thanks be to God and His Blessed Mother, and amn't I the great old woman to have the likes o' you to do my bidding," and the habitual smile that only intense pain, or the fear of being buried in a pauper's grave ever banished, returned to dimple the rosy old apple face, and she added a formula used many a time before, "I can die content now I've heard the words from your lips."

Our conversation was put an end to by the appearance of a second visitor. Neal Cornealy's repute was none of the fairest. His children were the wildest and worst attendants at school and catechism. One of them had recently been banished from my class as utterly hopeless, but before his expulsion he gave me an answer that I must tell you.

"What are sins of omission?" was the question, and half-a-dozen grimy hands were held up to show that their owners knew the answer. Amongst these volunteers, for a wonder, was Shawn Cornealy—he who usually knew nothing when he was asked.

"Well, then, Shawn, tell me, what are sins of omission?"

"The sins I ought to have committed, and didn't commit," came the glib reply, accompanied by a broad grin of delight at such superior knowledge.

"I came to ask y'r honor, me lady, for a bit of a note," Neal Cornealy explained after a greeting that was intended to be very respectful; "just a bit of a note for the Magistrate, him that comes out on the bicycle from Ballynaraggit. You might have heard about a little matter of a harness for the ass beyond," pointing vaguely up the avenue with his stick.

"No, I have heard nothing about it, I have

been away from home. Well, and who does the harness belong to?"

"There's the whole thing," he replied, amusement and perplexity struggling for supremacy on his face. "Bridget, that's herself (his wife), me lady, she bought a little harness from a man passing over the road, and she paid nine shillin' for it, and if it was stole it wasn't she as stole it, th' honest, decent woman."

"And you want me to tell this to the Resident Magistrate? Of course I wouldn't wish to doubt you in any way, but where did Mrs Cornealy get the nine shillings?"

Neal changed his stick from one hand to the other, and pushed back his hat, gazing vacantly round in search of an inspiration.

"Y'r ladyship disremembers that I had a son in Scotland?"

"And he sent you the money?"

"I wouldn't be after telling you a lie, me lady. He did not."

"Then, where did you get it?"

"'Twas last Hollandtide, one day I was in the town with turf, and Mr Brown comes to me. 'Cornealy,' says he, 'you had a son in Scotland?' 'I have so, sir,' says I, 'an' never a word, good, bad, or indifferent, did I hear from him, since the day he set foot in it.' 'An' not a word will you be hearin', I'm thinkin',' says he, 'for he's not in it now.' 'Where is it he's gone?' says I. ''Twould be hard to say that,' says he. So then I knew poor Paddy was dead, for if he wasn't in the lock-up, what else had the lawyers to say to him. 'Did he get the priest?' says I. An', sure enough, hadn't he the beautiful letter from the priest beyont that's been the world o' comfort to herself though she couldn't read a word of it, an' meself no better. 'Thanks be to God,' says I, 'an' were there wages due to him?' Well, not to be delayin' y'r ladyship, 'twas this new compensyation act as had the company annoyed—'twas killed workin' on the railway he

was—and when Mr Brown had done his writin' 'twas nine pound I got, and th' only thing Paddy was ever worth to me, the Lord have mercy on his soul."

"And your wife paid for the harness out of that money?" I asked.

"Well, I wouldn't go for to say it was the very same shillin's that she paid," he said cautiously. "Maybe 'twas, and maybe 'twas not. But the peelers have me harness took, an' a bit of a character from y'r honor is the only thing that will serve, or I'll be ruinated entirely."

I went thoughtfully to my writing-table and took up my pen.

"Neal Cornealy tells me he is a very honest man," I wrote, "and I hope that what he says is true."

Taking the note out and reading it to him I asked:

"Will that do, Neal?"

A grin overspread his features and he took

a greasy piece of newspaper from his pocket and wrapped the missive in it. "Thank y'r honor," he said, "thank y'r honor kindly. If that doesn't fix the job for me, may I be shot."

The interview was drawing to a close, but instead of departing he came a step nearer.

"If it's any little idea of a wild duck, or a few trout y'r ladyship would be wantin' without a word to any person, Neal Cornealy is the man to get them, private like."

Oh, keepers! Oh, water bailiffs! Oh, policemen!

I was expecting another visitor that morning for I had both seen and heard Honor Gilchreest at Mass, and her appearance in the chapel usually meant that we should find her seated on the doorstep waiting for a cup of tea when our own breakfast was over. Her chosen place in the chapel was in front of the High Altar, and here, with two snuff boxes resting on the bench before her, she prayed heartily and aloud. One box contained the snuff which was her chief comfort

and only luxury, the other was the receptacle of her well worn rosary beads. I had seen her that morning, her round rosy cheeks shining as usual under the frilled border of her white cap, but when soon after Neal Cornealy's departure I was told that she wanted to see me, I found her pale, and almost dishevelled.

"Why, Honor, what is the matter?" I asked in surprise.

"I've a buzzy-wuzzy in me heart, daughter," she murmured, sinking on to the stone step at my feet, "and a squeezin' an' a bilious-like."

"But what ails you, Honor? Did you get weak in the chapel, or what?"

"Not a weak, then," she replied, and the recital of her woes was already cheering her. "But coming along the road there, what came after me but one of them mwheelin coaches wid the devil's own cry out of it, an' I'm not the better of the fright of it since."

The hoot of a motor had reached me faintly

as I was returning from Mass, and, sympathetic as I tried to be, I could not repress a smile at such a delightfully original description. Mwheel, or mael, means bald or bare, you know. The old Irish hornless cow is a mwheelin because she is small and bare of horns, so is it also applied to a motor, which is lower than a carriage and bare of horses in front. A very strong cup of tea did much to restore Mrs Gilchreest's serenity, and then came the usual request for a pair of boots.

"But, Honor, I gave you a pair just before I went away, what has become of them?"

"I wouldn't deceive your honor, so it's the truth I will be tellin'. Didn't the unders go from me, and there's nothing left of the uppers savin' the button-holes."

And after that I don't think it was pauperising to look her out another pair. I had certainly got as much as I gave!

A woman a little over middle age was my

next visitor. She was a comparative stranger to the place, only having come into the parish some months previously as the second wife of an old army pensioner—"a hardy, decent girl" (of fifty-five at least)—so the neighbours described her—"and a comfortable wife for any man, barring her being bothered." Bothered she certainly was, if almost stone deafness can be so called, and it was this that now was troubling her.

"The neighbours do be talkin' of your honor's charity, an' I wouldn't be troublin' you only I'd be ashamed to go to the priest meself, an' me not hearin' what he'd be sayin', but if your ladyship would be speakin' for me there's not a night or morning but what I'd be prayin' for you. Now, would you ask his reverence could he free me from me marriage vows, any ways at all, for I was always an easy good-natured girl, an' I couldn't bear to be quarrellin' with any person, an' himself does get terrible rough often when I don't be hearin' what he says?"

The recollection of a conversation with "himself's" first partner came back vividly to my mind. She had come for a "rub for her husband's rheumatism," and begged that it might be a strong one. "For Michael was in the horse-soldiers," she said, "an' to hear the language that he uses to those old bones of his, well, it is surprising; 'tis raging like a mad dog he is, and I'd as soon have a Mahomet in the house any day, as himself, when the pains is on him. I'm not the better of listening to him for a week."

After many nods and gesticulations of sympathy I managed to din into the poor dulled ears that her best comfort was, that if she could hear what he said she would probably want to be released much more than she did in her deafness, and either this new view of the case afforded her consolation or the telling of her woes had lightened their burden, for she departed apparently much cheered by her visit.

A man had been waiting some time for his turn at the window. He was young, not more than twenty-five, perhaps even less, and I wondered as I watched his shamefaced amble up the avenue what his business could be.

"'Twas me brother John's wife that bid me come to y'r honor," he mumbled, and from the awkward way in which he twirled his hat, shifted from one foot to the other, and turned a dull red under the tan of his skin whilst his eyes kept roving over my head to the blank wall of the house above me, I guessed that here was another matrimonial difficulty.

"Well," I asked, "what can I do for you?" Then to help him on I made use of guesswork. "Did I hear something about your getting settled?"

A flicker of surprise passed over the impassive countenance.

"Your ladyship has it," he answered, "and maybe you heard she died on me?"

"The girl died! But how dreadful! Who was she, and when did it happen?"

"Last week, me lady, and only the day before the wedding. Your ladyship knew her well," with increased embarrassment and confusion, "but she was not so to say a girl. 'Twas with the Widow Malone they'd made up a match for me."

"What! Old Biddy Malone of Carrauroe! Why, she was sixty-five at least!"

"Oh, she wasn't that, me lady, a fine woman not much over fifty, and anyways, if it had been the will of God that she should die I wouldn't say a word, but it wasn't the will of God, but just her own contrariness, not minding herself—the Lord have mercy on her soul. 'Twas last Sunday night was a fortnight the match was made, and I was for getting it fixed up on the minute, for Mr Brown was only waiting for the marriage to make the place over on me, and the potatoes waiting to be set. But herself wouldn't set a foot in the chapel till the roof was mended

beyond, though she hadn't the money to buy the straw. So I gave her two pound—me brother John paid me the five that Anne brought him when they married—and she was to have everything ready for me o' Tuesday. Friday, howsomedever, the little lad from Farrelly's came to our house and said Biddy was bad and had had the priest, so we went over, John and meself, and wasn't the creature dead there under the fine new roof my money had paid for. And now those spalpeens of nephews of Biddy Malone's have got the whole place, and they've money enough to pay the rent of the five acres, and they took off every live beast, down to the little lucky bantam hen, fearing I'd be after them for my two pounds. I spoke civil like to young Andy about it, but what did he do but made a mock of me; and Mr Brown says I've no case for the law, for 'twas a present I gave to my intended wife, the Lord have mercy on her. But Anne said if you'd speak to the agent for me, me lady,

he'd see for to get me compensated. There's another girl beyond the town, with two acres and a bog garden, but she won't take me without the money."

It was a hard case, but I promised to do what I could, and Bartle Coffey departed apparently satisfied.

And so my morning had sped. My visitors had not been specially edifying that day, but don't you think, Joan, that they made the day at all events more interesting than the empty hours you complain of.—Your loving

PATRICIA.

VII

My dear Joan,—You ask me if there is a county town in Ireland that has no poorhouse. I fear not, and there are towns, too, which cannot boast their county court-house which yet have their grim grey Union buildings.

They are all alike, these dreary, sombre piles, some large, some smaller, but all laid out on the same plan. Some are well kept, some are not. All are forbidding, saddening, depressing, yes, and irritating too, by the very fact of their existence, as well as by the mismanagement that regulates, or rather fails to regulate, them.

I am afraid I must say that I agree with all you say against the workhouse system in general, but here again, within those grey walls, sur-

rounded by outward tokens of suffering and of sin, I have known some beautiful souls — souls that when released must have gone very soon to see God's glory.

There was a girl who lay for months in a corner bed of one of the wards in Ballynaraggit Union Infirmary. Her faith was naïve, almost childish, yet it was from it that she gained the strength to face death bravely, even gladly.

She had been born in the workhouse and had gone out as a farm servant, only to come in again to die a lingering death from consumption. One day I could not pay her my usual visit, and so I sent to Ellen a picture that I had for her, a softly coloured reproduction of one of Raphael's Madonnas.

She was holding it in her hand when next I saw her and her eyes sought mine eagerly, anxiously.

"I want to ask you," she said, "I've wanted to asked you this long time, but I was afraid.

Then you sent me this"—the picture—"an' I took it as a sign that it was you as could tell me. When I quit the school below Sister gave me a picture of the Blessed Mother of God. It was straight she was in it, an' white, an' a blue sash on her. But in the house beyond where I was hired the dog went an' ate it on me. I was terrible lonesome after it, so I was. 'Twas in the dairy mostly I'd be, an' a fine airy place it was, with the milk o' ten cows in it, an' the walls as white as paper. An' I kep' thinkin' if I'd the likeness of the Mother o' God, wouldn't I have the best of company in it. So what did I do but take a stick from the fire, an' on the wall I drew her figure. There was red raddle for the hair, an' I rubbed the blue-bag on the sash an' on the cloak. Oh, it wasn't a pretty picture"—she looked lovingly at Raphael's masterpiece—"for, you know, the likes o' me can't draw pictures! Still, it put me in mind of her. But now, when I'm soon to see the glory of God, it

comes to me that I didn't ought to have drawn her an' left her there on a dairy wall. I wouldn't have done it for no disrespect, miss, only I was lonesome without her, an' I didn't know any better that time. Do you think, now, she sent me this likeness as a good sign or no?"

I told her I was sure Our Lady had taken her picture as no disrespect, but, as it had been drawn, so it was seen in heaven.

"Didn't you pray to her oftener when you had the picture, Ellen?" I asked.

"Indeed, then, an' I did that! Every time I saw her I'd ask her to pray for me. An' the boys bringin' in the milk would say, 'So you've the Mother of God with you, Nellie.' And they'd raise their caps to her. Oh, miss, dear, my mind's made easy now to die, for I wouldn't like to go before the throne of God Almighty with any disrespect on me to the Mother of His Son."

She raised my picture to her lips and kissed

it, and so I left her. Later, when she died, they laid my little Raphael under her folded hands. It was almost her only belonging.

The cronies round the fire, talking together, chose usually more mundane topics of conversation, and sometimes their remarks were very amusing. One day that I was there the advent of a new doctor was filling their minds.

"Have you seen him, miss?" asked one, and without waiting for an answer she went on: "Isn't he the gay little fellow? In he comes wid the big coat of him buttoned up under his chin—the prettiest little chap!"

"Well, then, I'd not give much for the likes of him!" returned another. "Why, I could just take him up in me two hands for all the world like a twopenny doll! Give me the old man, God bless him, a fine stout fellow, seventeen stone weight, and every button on him doing its duty."

There was one missing that day from amongst

the group, a sad-eyed girl with a sad story. My query as to her whereabouts was quickly answered.

"Didn't you hear her man had come home to her? Glory be to God! 'Twas the fine sight to see the two of them crying like children when he came in. The fever it was that had him taken, away over in England, and he lying beyond queer in the head them weeks and weeks, an' she thinkin' him dead an' buried no less."

It was on Christmas Day that young Mrs Mahaffy had been taken to the workhouse infirmary, and a few days later I heard her story. Mere boy and girl, she and her husband had married on nothing. A cabin on the bog was their home; the produce of half an acre of garden, and whatever he could earn, their income. At harvest time he, with the neighbours, had gone off to England, leaving his young wife alone. October came, bringing back the others, but of Bartle Mahaffy there were no tidings.

He had not worked with any of the men from the district, and none could tell where he had gone. December succeeded November, still Bartle never came. The little hoard of potatoes had given out; the meal bag was empty. The few hens had ceased laying, and their mistress, worn out with anxiety, and more than half-starved, fell ill.

"I was heartsick with waiting," she told me. "For I knew if Bartle left me lonely for the Chris-e-mas, 'twas dead and gone he was from me for ever. And just as I thought to get to the chapel, of Chris-e-mas Eve, I took a weakness, and never a stir was there out of me. An' after that a great storm came, and the old beams over me was shakin', an' the wind rose in under the thatch, and, looking up, over the bed, 'twas God's sky, an' no roof I had. An' the senses seemed to go from me, an' I kep' calling to Bartle, callin' to him an' beggin' God Almighty to take me to him. An' my throat got parched,

an' I, who was shiverin' all the week past, was burnin' like a fire. An' I prayed to Jesus Christ, who came on earth that night for us, to send me some one to give me a drink. I thought maybe He could spare one angel, for I knew no man or woman would face the bog road in such a storm. An' as I prayed I saw a flock o' white doves comin' out o' the sky. They fell on my face an' on my hands, an' on the lips of me that was burnin', an' they was the softest, coolest things in life. God Almighty had heard my prayer, had heard an' answered it."

Yes, God Almighty had answered her prayer. He had laid His hands in softest, coolest touch upon her, and allayed her burning thirst. For what is softer and cooler than God's beautiful snow?

On Christmas morning the neighbours, going to Mass, had seen the cottage almost roofless from the storm, and under the snow they had found young Mrs Mahaffy sleeping as peacefully as a child.

There had been many days of pain and weakness afterwards, during which I had visited her in the grey house, but at last joy as well as health had come back to her—Bartle had returned. The cabin on the bog was roofed again by kindly neighbours, and the little home that had been overshaded by tragedy for so many months saw happiness once more.

It was on the day that I heard of Bartle Mahaffy's return that, on my way out, I met one of the few able-bodied pauper women. She was the lowest of types—degraded, repulsive. It was an absolute impossibility to her to keep from drink, and her intemperate habits had ruined her little home, and brought her to her present plight, making her, even still, obdurate to the nuns' persuasions of reform.

"Has your honor been in the school?" she asked me.

"Not to-day, Mrs Fogarty," I answered; "but I saw your boys there at Christmas."

"Pat is after makin' his First Communion, miss," she said proudly.

I knew the nuns had hoped that that day would have seen the mother reconciled to God; but there had been so many broken promises on the subject, that my faith in Mrs Fogarty was weak.

"Were you with him at the altar?" I asked.

She half turned from me, twisting her blue-check apron in her fingers.

"I — I didn't get for to go," she muttered. Then brightened a little. "But says I to Patsey, 'Don't you stop to talk nor to chat with any person, but come straight to your mother, for the first kiss of your lips, after you receive the Son of God, must be for her.' And he came."

An unknown something lighted up those poor, debased eyes. All her face was working, and as she moved away from me, I heard her murmur:

"Oh, the innocent lips of him—the innocent, blessed lips!"

And, in spite of all, there was the leaven. That act, those words, showed the faith that gives hope.

The men's ward is empty to me now, but time was when my greatest friend in the grey house lay there.

Steenie was born in the workhouse—a puny, sickly baby, who cost his mother her life, yet lived himself through all the rough handling, the careless kindness that falls to an infant pauper's lot. The nuns had come to the Union by the time that Steenie had arrived at school-going age, and with them, for a few years, he received the only tenderness that his young life ever knew. At twelve years old his comrades were hired out to farmers in the district, but no one wanted so sickly a boy as Steenie, and for three years longer he remained under the influence of the nuns. Then, humanly speaking, came the great day in the boy's life. Some one, kind and rich, proposed to send half a dozen lads to Canada, and start

them in life there. Steenie was among the chosen band; but perhaps those who have never known the lot of a workhouse child hardly realise all that such a project meant to him. A home —for the boys were to be adopted by those to whom they were sent — a place on the great ladder of possibilities: a clean wash-out of the poorhouse stain.

There was one week of perfect happiness and pleasure, lived in the anticipation of the future, in Steenie's life.

Then came the day of departure. But where was Steenie? Not amongst the band of emigrants, not in his old place in the workhouse school, but across the yard, in the grim, solitary building that stands half empty, yet ever needed from year's end to year's end. Unconscious of all around him, Steenie lay at death's door, struck down by smallpox, in the fever hospital. But the dark portals beyond, that opened for those who fain would have stayed without, were closed to him.

The fever passed, leaving him worn-out, but conscious; and at once his mind reverted to the rosy future prospects that before his illness had enthralled him. Then as he lay, too weak to move, with head and eyes still tightly bound, Sister Mary went to him.

How she told him, I know not; what she said, when she broke to him that the life he longed for was never to be his, that the small-pox demon had spared his life only to take his sight, to leave him—blind.

If, in the first moment of agony and despair he murmured against his fate no one knows, for to the Sister those were sacred moments.

"Yes, it was I who told him," she said to me. "Steenie is more than a hero, he is a saint."

It was after this that I learnt to know him. Sitting by the fire, he was always resigned, always interested in what he was told. Seemingly he was even happy, sitting there, saying the rosary, and keeping the peace. The other men were

good to him in their own rough way. His right to the warmest corner, to the least uncomfortable chair, was never questioned. But after a time he claimed these privileges less often. He caught cold and had not strength to throw off the cough that shook and exhausted him. He knew now that death was drawing near again, and I think he must have welcomed its coming. When at last the end was at hand it was a new priest who came to attend him, one who had heard his story, but who was a stranger to Steenie.

"It was such a pitiful story," he told me afterwards, "a life of such unrelieved gloom, that it seemed impossible for any one to look upon it as a great gift of God's kindness. With these thoughts—God forgive me for them—in my mind I approached that bedside, where I learned a lesson I can never possibly forget. 'You know, my poor lad,' I began awkwardly enough, 'you know that God is going soon to take you to Himself, and—and you must try to love Him.'

The sightless eyes were turned on me, and I hesitated as I thought of the past. But I needed to say no more. Surprise and reproach were mingled in the answer that reached me faintly: 'Love Him!' Steenie said, 'why wouldn't I love Him? Didn't He die for me?'"

He never spoke again. They left him in peace after he had received the Holy Viaticum. And half an hour later the Sister drew the sheet reverently over his face. Blind Steenie was dead.

These, dear Joan, are some of the lights which lighten the otherwise overpowering shadows of workhouse life.—Your loving

PATRICIA.

VIII

My dear Joan,—You wonder that I do not claim to having a miracle to tell you about. A miracle! well, perhaps not a miracle, but I can tell you of the faith of which miracles are the crown.

I did not often see Honor Guinty, for she lived so far away, not in the parish of Ballynaraggit at all, but away beyond Dereen.

In the good old days when such things were, her father had been our great grandmother's postillion, otherwise we should hardly have known of her existence, for her cottage stands quite beyond the circle of our usual rounds. For the sake of old lang syne she was on our Christmas list, and if any of us passed

her way, we sometimes stopped to speak to her, but it was only a few years ago that my acquaintance with her ripened into friendship. Her story came to me in scraps, but, put together, I think you will agree that there is "leaven" in it.

When first I remember her, and for long after, she had a little old brother living with her. He was half crippled, the youngest, weakest, and last of a band of boys. It was when he died that I first heard something of Honor's past.

I was paying her a visit of condolence, and, sitting in the kitchen of her tiny two-roomed dwelling, she told me of the others, of Brian, and Christie, and Mosheen, fine men all, who had gone away and died years ago in America.

"Had you no sister?" I asked in all innocence, and it was only a look, come and gone in an instant, on the old face, that showed me I had unwittingly touched an unfortunate topic.

"I had, then, daughter," she answered, and then stopped abruptly. Her thoughts had so

evidently flown back to the time, long years ago, when she and the unmentioned sister had been girls together, where to-day she sat a lonely old woman, that I said no more.

"I had, then," she repeated, after a moment's silence, "an' she the prettiest girl from this to Ballynaraggit. God ——" I thought — fancied perhaps—that there was a moment's hesitation, and I somehow expected the formula, beautiful in itself, but sometimes used mechanically, "God forgive her," but instead came the prayer, heartfelt and earnest, "God bless her." And my curiosity was aroused. I suppose I showed it in my face, for of her own accord Honor went on: "It was your grandmother herself, may God give glory to her soul, that could have told you of Catty Guinty, for there was great talk of her 'twixt this and the town the onct, an' this day I'd dare to say there's not one in the parish remembering her name, barrin' meself.

"This place was too dull for a pretty one like

herself, an' she went away to service, but your grandfather, God be good to him, brought home a soldier servant to the town, and—and—him and me was for getting married. Maybe he wasn't much of a chap, only the world never held another for me, only him.

"Then Catty came home, for the boys were in it that time, and with me gone there'd have been sorra' one to keep house, and—'twas she that was the gay gartlaher and me but a homely piece—and so she and Tom went off and got married one morning. The neighbours had the talk of the world about it. They thought, God help them, to cheer me wid saying this thing and that, an' me with a hurt within me that no pity could heal, without it was the pity of Christ."

"And did you, could you forgive him?" I asked. Her plain bald statement brought it all before me far better than any flowery explanation could have done.

"Daughter, I loved him."

I was young then, and the implied reproach was lost upon me.

"And her?" I persisted tactlessly.

"Forgive her!" she repeated. "Wasn't it God's will, asthore? And isn't it the grand thought entirely that the cross of Christ Himself was less weighty for the trouble He put on me?"

Then she told me that when he married, the run-away bridegroom had given up my grandfather's service, and for all the long, long years that had passed since then, nothing had been heard of him and of his wife. Honor did not even know if they were alive or dead, and so, she told me, she said "God bless them," for that was what would serve them best either here or hereafter.

A long winter passed before I saw Honor again, and one spring day, riding past her lane end my heart smote me, at first slightly, for my neglect, but when I turned down the bye-way,

meaning to rectify my omission, with a pang of real regret. Before me, blocking up the narrow pass in front of the cottage, I saw the poor man's van, that peculiar, dreaded vehicle which since the evil day that workhouses were started in Ireland had carried unwilling, and too often, unclean paupers to the hated grey house that stands on the outskirts of Ballynaraggit. At once I concluded that poor old Honor was going to spend her last days in the Union, and knowing how unwelcome any witness to her departure would be, I turned my back on the black box, with its ancient horse and still more ancient driver, who clung ape-like to his tiny seat upon the roof, and retraced my steps to the high-way, reproaching myself bitterly as I went for having done nothing since Christmas for my old friend. A week later at Ballynaraggit workhouse I found out my mistake. I asked for Honor. She was not there. I asked the reason of the van's visit to her house, and learnt that it had taken a

passenger from, not to, the Union. Catty had come back. Not the selfish beauty of long ago, but an old, crippled, fretful woman.

I think Honor's surmise must have been right. The soldier cannot have been "much of a chap," anyhow the end of Catty's life in England was the poorhouse, and thence she had been sent back to her native Union. Had I not believed in Honor's forgiveness of the past, it would have been proved to me now many times over, in the way she took her sister home, and tended her. For, although Catty was some years the younger, she looked and seemed much older than Honor. Her life had evidently been the hardest, after all; and now, when Honor was still able to keep her little house going, Catty could only sit by the fire and grumble.

And that she did. Poor old soul, I suppose it is always harder to be forgiven than to forgive.

Several years went by, and the two old sisters lived on together, then after one winter Honor

was again left alone. Catty can never have been a cheerful companion, but Honor had borne with her, and now that she was gone she missed her sadly.

The two extra shillings that no longer came in outdoor relief were a loss, even with a mouth less to feed, and when I saw Honor in the spring-time, she was praying hard that God would send some one who would keep her company in her old age, and help her to dig the little garden, or cut the turf from the bank against which the house was almost built, according to the season.

She never doubted but that in God's good time her prayers would be heard and answered, but neither she as she spoke, nor I as I listened, was aware that something had already happened, which, miracle or no miracle, was destined to bring about what she prayed for.

Her house, as you know, is made principally of mud, floor and walls alike, although there are stones here and there to strengthen the latter. The

kitchen gets a little light from the ever open door, but the inner room depends on a piece of glass some twelve inches square, and fixed immovably, for all its lighting. Honor, I am sure, swept and dusted her house occasionally, for outwardly all was as clean as circumstances allowed, but it was really no wonder that a little green plant should sprout up in one corner, and grow there unseen until its topmost leaves reached the table.

On this table—the only furniture except a bed and a box that the room contains—stands a statue of the Blessed Virgin. Once it was a white figure of Our Lady of Lourdes, now it is smoke-grimed to brown in spite of the protecting veil of net that always hangs over it. Two very hideous vases stand beside the statue, and there are holy pictures, once of gaudy colouring, but dingy now, hanging in frames against the mud wall. This is Honor's altar, and here, after Catty's death, when she was alone, and too feeble to walk the four long miles to Mass at Dereen Chapel,

she spent most of her leisure moments. I never remember seeing flowers in the vases, so probably Honor did not think much of decorations, but when of its own accord, a pretty green plant grew up out of the mud floor, or rather from a crack between the wall and the ground, and spread itself out at Our Lady's feet, she left it there, and even took a certain pride in its growth.

At the feet of the statue the single stalk divided into five parts, but these, having nothing to support them, twined together, growing up behind the statue, until they rested on the veiled head of Our Lady's figure. I saw it there. The stalks were hard and fibrous, the principal one seemed to be of woody growth, but the leaves were soft and very green, with tiny prickles round the indented edges, that showed the thistly nature of the plant.

Whether consciously or unconsciously Honor had helped the direction of its growth, I cannot say. I can only tell you what I saw myself. The

foot-square window let in its little share of sunshine exactly opposite the altar, and yet the plant grew behind the statue and away from the light.

I saw it in May, and as the days passed by it began to be whispered around that there was something miraculous in its growth. How the report arose I do not know, but the neighbours first, and then people from a distance, began to visit Honor, and some amongst them, after praying before the statue, asked permission to light a candle and leave it behind them, a silent prayer that flickered upwards, and surely reached to Heaven at last.

The little room, close and airless at the best of times, grew unbearably hot in June and July when these candles increased in number, and the plant, showing perhaps its ordinary nature, began to droop, and the leaves shrivelled up and dropped off.

Honor's prayer for company had indeed been answered, and although it was not in the way

that she had intended, still many, nay most of her visitors, left her something in the shape of money, which, all put together, made a little nest egg that would help to feed a permanent companion, if such a one presented herself.

I did not go to Dereen during the summer months. Honor now had little need for visits, but I heard in August that a sixth stalk had made its appearance, this one growing in front of the statue and reaching to Our Lady's hands.

Then came the part that to me seemed nearest to a miracle.

The plant, common weed of natural growth though it may have been, was to Honor in all sincerity a Heaven-sent companion and messenger, and the prayers that she and many others sent up to God before that little altar were heartfelt and true. But of the numbers who came to see it some were urged by curiosity alone, and as the popularity of the plant increased, so too did the takings of the publican

at the cross roads, a lonely spot where '*bona fide* travellers' could refresh themselves undisturbed on Sunday afternoons.

The priest at Dereen spoke more than once of the abuse of what might have been a good thing, but even if his own parishioners heeded his words, those who transgressed came, for the most part, from places beyond his influence.

I do not know how he did it. I do not know if he regretted having to hurt the poor old woman so sadly. I only know that, words having no effect, he was obliged to have recourse to deeds.

He went to the cottage, pulled up the plant, and, green leaves and brown stalks, burnt it on Honor's hearth with the turf-sods she had laid down to cook her potato-dinner.

If she had thought only, or even most, of the money it brought her, she could not have borne the loss of her plant as she did.

"God sent it, daughter," she told me, "and

His own priest took it from me. Sure, I couldn't have a surer sign but that He'd done His will with it."

And, going home, I thought to myself that whatever the plant may have been, here was faith that in these days of carelessness came little if at all short of a miracle. I have not heard of Honor's death, so I suppose that she is still living. The last time I saw her she had found a companion, "a lone dissolute (desolate!) woman like meself," she said, and the little hoard, brought to her by her much loved plant, had been enough up to that to supplement their weekly pittance. All they need is a small sum in hand twice a year, once for potato-setting, once for turf-cutting, and as long as the priest whose duty made him burn the thistle is in the parish, I know that Honor will never go without those sums.—Your loving

PATRICIA.

IX

My dear Joan,—Although I must and do admit that as a nation we are less truthful than the English, I most emphatically deny that this unpardonable and maddening failing arises from any innate national depravity. The force of circumstance began it, and habit has now, unfortunately, grown to be second nature.

Do you remember that for six centuries—that is for some eighteen generations—our only means often of saving our lives, always of saving our belongings, was either in word or in act to lie? It would, of course, have been far nobler to sacrifice life and property to truth, and many of our forefathers did so for the sake of religious truth, but human nature is weak,

and we succumbed to the temptation of saving ourselves by falsehoods. Now we are reaping the punishment of our weakness by having to submit to the stigma on our national name, and not being believed when we do speak the truth.

Don't think that I am a champion of false-hood, but I wonder sometimes when I look on the impassive countenances of the Georges and the 'Arries, who crawl along the country roads in parts of England, seated on their heavy farm carts behind their heavy farm horses, if they were able to turn their thoughts from beer, and think of an untruth quickly enough for it to be of any use to them, whether English love of truth or human love of gain would be the stronger. Seriously, however, I own that the love of truth for which England is famous does not yet exist in Ireland; but, remember, it is only sixty-eight years since we were given Catholic Emancipation, and we can only hope

that in the course of five centuries more, the truth that has been forced out of us will return. As yet I fear the value of truth is not appreciated. Only lately a man was asked why he told such lies, and he answered quite openly, "Isn't it hard enough for the likes of us to live an' we lying? Where would we be at all if we told the truth?" I own, however, that besides the political inducement to lying, which is now no more, we have two characteristics which impede our reform in this direction.

One is the dislike, unless roused to anger, that the average Irishman has of saying an unpleasant thing, and the other is the vivid imagination with which so many of us are gifted—or should I say afflicted?

I am not speaking of the educated classes, of the writers and song makers, but of the uneducated, of those who, maybe cannot even read or write. I do not know whether their perception of the unseen in religious matters is

the cause or the effect of this imagination, but I think that one must have to say to the other. You know old Maureen Costello — the woman who enquired after your incubator as "the box where you make chickens by machinery with the help of God." You would never think that she was endowed with a vivid imagination, but she is.

She told me—perhaps it is not true, for alas! I have come to be sceptical as to much that I hear — she told me that no one else had ever heard this story, which illustrates what I mean better than any words of mine could do, although I fear I can give but a feeble rendering of her most graphic narrative.

I had taken refuge from a storm one day in her cottage, and seated on two creepy stools before the glowing turf that burnt upon the hearth, we began to talk of her neighbours, the Lees, and I think as she spoke she almost forgot that I was there.

"They were kind neighbours to me always, were the Lees," she said; "kind ever to the lone old woman who never had man or child of her own. And the reason for that same God knows — and Mark Lee — never another. But Mary was good to me too, and I don't begrudge her what her money got her. She's had him these twenty years and more, but I know well 'twas never Mark's heart that chose her. Maybe that's why I can love the boy that's her's—and his.

"I never had but the one secret all me life long, now I have another, an' I'll keep it too, God willing, for it's no manner of use to go talking of such things, only I thank God that He let me do it.

"The rain was drivin' over the bog, just as it is to-day, but 'twas night-time, an' the wind howled on the face of the hill. There was no light in the room here but the glow of the turf, an' all at once that was dimmed with the cloud o' grey ashes that

swirled up from the hearth. 'Lord save you, whoever you are, and out of such a night,' says I. 'Close the door, you omadhawn, unless you want to send me clean and clever up the chimney.'

"Then when the ashes fell I saw it was Dan Lee I had, the lad from over the way.

"'Well, Dan,' says I, 'and what's brought you out this night?'

"'May I sit by the fire, Maureen?' says he. 'I'm off to America in the morning.'

"I never heard that voice on him before, but many's the time I told Mark, aye, and Mary too, that they were too hard on the lad, and he their only one, and now, be token, they'd learnt it for themselves.

"'That's sudden,' says I, quiet-like, for I seen that 'twas more nor talkin' that would be needed to check him now. 'An' why isn't it beyond you are, the last night maybe ever you'll see the old folk?'

"'I've broke with them, and that's the truth,'

he lets out. 'You may quit your talkin', for I've me mind made up. I'm goin' to America, an' you'll waste your time if you go chatting to me, Maureen. You'd do better to be sayin' your prayers,' an' he took up the prayer-book that lay on the ledge of the hearth and commenced turning over the pages.

"'Is it reading this you be at night?' he says, showing that 'twas not of himself he was going to speak. And humouring him, God gave me the great thought.

"'Times I do,' says I, 'and more times 'tis in the fire I do be reading.'

"Lord forgive me that same, though true enough, many's the picture I've watched fallin' to ashes in the red o' the turf.

"It caught his fancy. Well I guessed it would, an' he asked me to read what I saw there then.

"'You must pass your word,' says I, 'that you'll not speak till I'm done, that you'll hear me to the end.'

"'Ah, then,' says he, 'I'll listen.'

"'On your faith,' says I.

"'Ay,' says he.

"'I see a big city,' says I, 'with folk hurryin' up an' down, an' all busy wid their own concerns. I see a lad walkin' amongst them. He is alone. No one cares what he is about, or what comes to him. There are miles and miles of streets in the city, an' more folk live in it than you nor me have ever seen; yet there's not a soul to bid the lad the time o' day, or to care if he's cold or ill, if he's starving or dying.

"'Now I see some folk beginnin' to look at him, but they all have bad faces, wicked bad faces. The good folk pass him by, because there are little devils sittin' on his shoulders, an' they drive everybody from him that hasn't got other devils on their shoulders too. There's the devil of disobedience has a seat close to the collar of the lad's coat, and near by is the devil of disrespect to parents.'

"I saw Dan look up as if he was going to speak, and I minded him of his promise.

"'There's obstination, too,' says I, 'and ill-temper, and pride, and others quite at home, and they keep calling to their friends on the other folks backs. Drunkenness and idleness, and gambling, stealing, and all badness come round the lad; but when honest men look at him, his devils pull him away from them. I see this goin' on, only the coat where the devils is sittin' is growing shabbier. It's wearin' into holes, but there is so many devils on it now that I can't say is it the same coat at all or not. But now the figure of the lad is fading, and I see nothing but the flames, burnin', burnin' all before them, except the little devils, an' them dancin' for joy in the heart of them, for haven't they got more fuel for the fire of hell?'

"I looked up at Dan, but his head was down on his breast, and never a bit of his face could I see.

"'Here's another picture,' says I, and I stirs the turf, 'it's in another country, it's nearer home. I see a house, a lonely house. There's not a one in it but an old woman, with white hair on her and a sad, patient face. It is a poor place, want and misery show out upon its walls. A cup of black tea stands on the hearth, there is no milk, for the cow was sold long ago. A crust of bread is on the table, but the old woman only looks at it with hungry eyes; it is the last thing to eat left in the house, and maybe some one is coming who will want it more than she. After a while an old man comes in, he is bowed and bent and terrible thin. He eats the bit of bread and drinks down the black tea. I see him lay his hand on the old woman's shoulder and speak to her, and oh, the sad sight! the tears are falling down his cheeks. I see a gombeen man come in, he pokes around and tosses the bits of furniture about; they are poor things in his eyes, but they are the old

mother's treasures. I see the old father and mother alone again in the bare kitchen, but far away in the distance, I see the poor man's van coming to carry them off to the Union. I see them look around to choose what little thing they can take away with them to the miserable place they are going to. The old woman goes to a cupboard and takes out a bundle of clothes. Her own? The old man's? No, just the outfit of a gossoon before they put him into suits. There is a pair of socks amongst them, a pair of baby's socks. The old man is lookin' over her shoulder, an' his face is drawn an' grey. She lays one sock in the hand that he puts out to her. Is the boy that used to wear that sock dead an' gone? Surely he must be, or his parents would never be in such straits.

"'The sound of wheels is heard outside, and the old father slips the baby sock into the breast of his poor coat. Oh! I can almost hear

the words he mutters, "God forgive me, me share in what is past."

"'But the other sock? It is in the mother's keepin'. It is pressed to her lips. It is wet with her tears. Their home is taken from them. They have lived in poverty and hardship. They are too old to work, and they are alone. Everything is gone from them, everything only the two baby socks that were worn long ago by the son who has deserted them.

"'The sound of wheels comes nearer. Trembling, heart-broken, shoulder to shoulder, with the baby socks restin' on their hearts, they totter across the threshold——'

"But then young Dan would hear no more. 'No no, no,' an' I saw the hot tears drop down upon his knees, 'Never that, never that, God forgive me.'

"The storm was past. There was no rain now, an' the moon came in through the window an' fell across the floor. He'd forgotten me,

had Dan, but, thank God, he'd forgotten his plan for travellin' too.

"'You'll get home before they've shut up for the night, Dan,' says I.

"'I will, Maureen, God helpin' me,' says he.

"I watched him till he was swallowed up in the shadow of his own house beyont. But you'll hold your whist on what I'm after tellin' you, daughter, for no one knows why he went back to them, no one, only God an' him an' me, a lone old woman."

PATRICIA.

X

My dear Joan,—I cannot undertake to answer your question as to where faith ends and superstition begins, but one thing I can say is, that if you had ever visited the Holy Island in Lough Derg you would not speak of the superstition attached to the performance of the pilgrimage.

The anxiety that each exercise should be carried out exactly as custom prescribes may be petty, it may be prompted by a superstitious fear, yet I think that the Paters, Aves, and Credos that rise from the hearts as well as from the lips of those who fidget over the exact spot on which to kneel whilst saying these prayers, are, nevertheless, pleasing to God.

You know, of course, that Saint Patrick himself started the pilgrimage. He went to the island on Lough Derg to pray in solitude, and whilst there he saw a vision of Purgatory so awful that for nine days and nine nights he stayed praying and fasting so as to avert such suffering from himself. Here, too, following their master's example, came his disciples. Thus came Saint Bridget and Saint Brendan, Saint Columba and Saint Malachi, Saint Dabhroc and Saint Catherine. How many others came in those old days of fervent Christianity even tradition does not pretend to relate, but that those I have named to you performed the pilgrimage is testified to by the six crosses that have been put up in their names and walled round with rough stones, and that still mark the "beds" or resting-places of these saints.

For fifteen centuries thousands and thousands of pilgrims have, bareheaded and barefooted, followed St Patrick's example. In the last fifty

years a careful record proves that from one to three thousand people have visited the island annually. There is Papal authority as well as this undoubted precedent for undertaking the pilgrimage, and if some amongst the thousands who do it are superstitious, I think it may be forgiven them in consideration of the real prayers and real penances that they perform. For ten weeks every summer the two churches —poor little damp-stained buildings—and the equally bare and almost equally damp hospice, large enough to hold over a hundred people, are open to the public. No one may stay on the island unless he is willing to carry out the regulations of the pilgrimage, but to suit the rapidity—and perhaps the constitutions—of to-day, the time of penance has been lessened to three days and two nights only.

The routine of these days varies but little. There is Mass at five in the morning and a sermon. Imagine eighty or ninety people, all

barefooted, and with a larger percentage of men than of women, in a small, low, cruciform chapel, where there are benches for about twenty, the others kneeling upon the mud floor with faces upturned to the altar, no one appearing at his or her best in the chill grey of sunbreak, and some who have spent the whole night in the chapel, looking quite the reverse of attractive. But no one cares. The world, for most of the pilgrims during those three days, is just that island, their own soul, and God. And those who feel differently are ashamed.

After the second Mass, said in the other chapel, which later in the day is given up to hearing confessions, the "rounds" begin. These consist of a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, a renewal of baptismal promises, and a number of Paters, Aves, Glorias, and Credos, some of which are recited whilst walking round the church and round the six crosses that dot the island, others whilst kneeling or standing in prescribed places.

All this, you remember, is done barefooted, and the island is neither smooth nor grassy. Consequently one "round" takes an hour and a half to perform, and nine rounds constitute that part of the pilgrimage. At mid-day public prayers are said and there is another sermon, or rather instruction. At six Benediction is given, and at nine every one makes the stations of the cross, and says night prayers in the chapel.

The penances are, first and easiest, dispensing with any kind of footgear or headgear for three days. Second, eating only once a day, at about one o'clock, as much oatcake washed down by lake water or black tea, as possible. Thirdly, spending one of the two nights in the chapel, praying if you can, and if not, doing your best to keep awake, and follow the prayers that your more pious companions say unceasingly, and mostly aloud, from ten in the evening until five in the morning.

On the third day you go home, footsore, very hungry, but quite uninjured by three days of such fasting as elsewhere would be utterly impossible.

And you never speak again of the superstition of Saint Patrick's Purgatory.

Driving from Pettigo to Lough Derg we shared our car with a fellow pilgrim, a cattle-dealer, who immediately took us under his protection, and in the boat, after securing the best seats for us, began to tell us various things about the pilgrimage. As we knew most of them before, our attention strayed away to an old woman, who, seated in the bows, was sobbing quietly under her shawl.

"You're looking at that one," our protector observed. "She's in trouble, the creature, but it's to the right place she's goin' to get shut of it. Is it what's on her you're askin'? God Almighty knows. Sure, haven't we all our troubles? Amn't I after losing a fine cow meself, ere yesterday (the day before yesterday)?"

In duty bound we enquired the deceased animal's complaint.

"Not a sickness was there on her," was the reply. "I couldn't say what took her, was it solid contrariness or the will o' God."

Another boat was overtaking us, and, catching sight of one of its occupants, our companion passed to a different subject.

"There's Dan Casey!" he ejaculated, "and the young wife of him, no less. Well, now, be this and be that, it's himself has horrid taste."

Mrs Casey, evidently a newly-made bride, might have been somewhat hurt at such outspoken criticism had she not known that the adjective "horrid" is the English rendering of a Gaelic word meaning superlatively fine or wonderful. If you ever go out night-fishing with Andy Rooney, when the stars are bright, ask him his opinion of the sky, and, if I mistake not, he will bare his head and say, "Praises

be! and isn't it the works of God that's horrid?"

But if Mr Casey's taste had been horrid in its Gaelic meaning, it struck us that the word might have been applied in its English sense to the taste of his bride. He was a big man, red-headed, with scant red beard, and a prominent nose that once had been scarlet, but that had now faded to the hue of a dying cabbage rose.

"D'you see Dan Casey, there?" our talkative friend went on. "Before ever he began coming to the Purgatory there wasn't a better-looking blackguard from Enniskillen to the town of Clones than himself." (Anglice: No one in that country looked to be a better, or rather greater blackguard than he.) "You may have heard of the row in ——" he mentioned a case that had excited some newspaper comment a few years ago. "Well, Casey was in it, hand and neck, an' when he got out, off he comes to the island, and on his two knees before the prior, he takes

the pledge for life, and many another promise. And he kept them too, God help him, and he got the business together again. Then last month he fetched home that lassie, out of Tintona, and I'm proud to see the two of them in the holy place, where God Almighty gave him strength to break with the drink."

We asked how often the speaker himself had made the Purgatory.

"Seven-and-twenty years, I'm coming," he said simply, "and me father before me, and the lads at home, please God, they'll be coming when I get back."

In the grey light of early morning we saw all our fellow pilgrims gathered together. There were about fifty men, none looking very poor, some quite well-to-do. The women were more mixed, a few young ones who might have been school teachers, or shop assistants; some real "voteens" of a type well known to all Irish churchgoers; some prosperous middle-

aged matrons, as well as a few poor old women, to whom bare feet were no novelty, and a meal of oatcake no unwonted hardship. But to all, these three days' prayer, in spite of the penances, come as a yearly rest, and I think it gives them strength to struggle on through the hardships of their lives for another twelve months.

The men looked much more peculiar than the women, with their tidy clothes and bare feet, and though the faces of several proclaimed that, like Mr Casey, they came to the island to ask God's help to take or keep the pledge, there were many others whose motives for coming were not to be guessed so easily.

Our friend of the boat, in an interval between two stations, presented one young man to us as "coming as far as you ladies do yourselves, all the way from Dublin." He was quite young, and might have been a shop-keeper or a Christian brother in secular clothes. We spoke to him in the low tone in which all conversation on the

island is carried on for fear of disturbing those who were praying, and very simply he told us his story.

As a boy he had wished to be a priest, a friar, but whilst he was still at a Seraphic school, his father died, leaving a number of children. They would have kept him at the Friary, and people proposed to send some of the younger ones to an orphanage, but his uncle offered him work in his public-house with a salary that would allow his mother to keep his family undivided.

"It was then I came here first," he said, "to find out God's will, and though it nearly broke my heart to give up the schooling, I felt it was to my uncle that I must go. I come back every summer, and I thank God for the work He sends me to do for Him. There's plenty to be done for Him in a public-house as well as in a church, and maybe I serve Him better behind a spirit bar than ever I would have served Him in a pulpit."

Two of the women also spoke to us. One was she who had been weeping in the boat.

"May you never know sorrow, acushla," she said as I helped her from her knees on the lake shore; and then, being questioned, she told us the reason of her tears. For seventeen years she and her "man" had made the pilgrimage to the island together, but in the winter she had buried him, away over the hills, and for the first time now she came alone to the island. I muttered something about being lonely, but she, misunderstanding, turned almost angrily upon me. "Lonely is it? Why would he be lonely?" she cried. "Isn't it to the poor man's Best Friend he's gone?"

The other old woman also had her trouble, and her story was pathetic. She came from the coast where there are periodic epidemics of fever. One day the child of a neighbour, "a widow woman like meself," died, and there was no one to dig the grave. "Not one at all, till my Mickeen went to do it, and the mother was that distracted that it was my boy's two hands that laid little Katie in the coffin that he'd made for

her. Then he came home to me, and death was written between his two eyes.

"'Granny,' says he, 'I've loved you better nor me own head and I've got to go from you.' And he cried—God bless him for the best boy in Ireland—he cried because he was leaving his old granny, and he not four-and-twenty years of age. 'Twas a week and no more, the day for the day, that he buried little Katie, when they carried him out himself, on the sticks. You can fancy the fine boy he was, daughter, when 'twas seven feet planks they had to put to his coffin."

There was no repining. It was God's will that in her old age Mickeen's grandmother should be "thrown on the rates." If Saint Patrick's Purgatory is superstitution, then this is either apathy or philosophy; but if one is faith, so I think is the other, or rather is it the resignation that comes from faith.

After leaving the island we made a tour through the highlands of Donegal. If the reforms suggested

by the authoress of the American letters to hotel-keepers and others were carried out, that tour would certainly have been more comfortable. Still it did console us a little to remember that if the domestic economy of other nations is more perfect than our own, we, and no others, have the faith that keeps alive the pilgrimage of Saint Patrick's Purgatory.

What do you think?

Your loving

PATRICIA.

XI

My dear Joan, — I quite agree with you that it is disgraceful for a strong, able-bodied woman like Maria Hegarty to beg. And she is an inveterate, hopeless beggar, as her mother, and probably her grandmother, were before her. She is altogether unattractive too, and yet she is not wholely bad. Once, years ago, when Maria was only a girl, she agreed to try and work, and so we sent her to the Sisters of Charity's Laundry, but, as you may imagine, her sojourn there was of short duration. I must tell you the story of her last day in the convent, as the Sisters told it to us, for it upholds my theory that she is not altogether bad.

Sister Mary, tall and stately in her grey

gown and white cornette, stood at the table in the packing-room of the laundry, holding an empty picture frame in her hand.

"Where is the picture belonging to this frame?" she asked in a clear, cold voice.

Her audience was not one that heeded. No reply came from the group of wild-looking young women, who paused in their occupation of sorting the clothes to listen to her question.

"Girls, I am speaking to you all, and I expect an answer. I ask again where is the picture?"

A voice, half muffled yet with a defiant ring in it, came from amongst the workers:

"In the fire."

There was no surprise apparent in the Sister of Charity's even tones.

"Who threw it there?"

Again the same voice came in reply:

"I did."

Sister Mary let her glance wander slowly

from face to face before she looked directly at the culprit. Strangely enough, there was more shame to be seen on the other countenances than on that.

"Maria Hegarty, you can wait for me at the passage door after time-bell this evening."

No more was said, and in silence work was resumed.

The mistress had shown no curiosity, no astonishment nor even anger, when speaking to the girls, but in her heart she was greatly puzzled over the occurrence.

The girls, though their faults were legion, had never shown any disrespect to the statues or pictures that were to be found in each room, and this outbreak was apparently quite unaccountable. Maria Hegarty had only been a few weeks at the convent, and, so far, she had seemed to be fairly contented. The nuns, however, felt that they were making little or no impression upon her, and evidently her wild, wilful temperament

was already chafing under the unaccustomed discipline.

When the time-bell rang the other girls filed out, but Maria, in obedience to the Sister's injunction, waited under the big clock in the passage to explain her conduct.

"Well, Maria," said the nun seriously and gently, "I want you to tell me why you threw the holy picture in the fire."

Shamefaced now, the girl stood silent with drooping head.

"We asked no questions when you came to us, Maria, but I can guess that in your life there has been some one you loved dearly, your mother, perhaps, or your father, or a little brother or sister, or some one who was kind to you when you were a child yourself. I think by your face it was your mother whom you loved the best. Well, what would you say if a person came and threw your mother's picture with words perhaps of contempt into the fire, or tore it to bits and

scattered it through the mud of the streets? That is what you have done to my mother, and she is your mother too, my poor child, although you know her and her Divine Son so little. Now, Maria, what am I to say to you? Will you tell me what made you do it? You see I know something about it already."

"They've split on me, then," said Maria sullenly, "and more'n likely they've lied to you, too. I'm bad, real bad, but not so bad as them, for they go shamming an' I don't. I'd beat the lot o' them at language out on the roads, but what they say when you're gone's not fit for her"—nodding towards another picture of Our Lady that hung upon the wall of the corridor—"and her Little One to hear. They're better in the fire than listening to such things, and when the others wouldn't quit their talk, I took an' chucked her in. You can keep the coppers you owe me to buy a new one. I'm off." And before the nun had recovered from her surprise there was

a whisk in the passage, a slam of the work door, and Sister Mary had seen the last of Maria Hegarty.

She made her way home after that. We heard of her return, although it was a long time before we saw her again. Her mother used to come and beg as regularly as before, but Maria avoided explanations by a continued absence. We saw her when her mother came to die. She had sent for us, poor old soul, and we went to see her in the wretched cabin she called home. Four bare mud walls, a tumbling roof, puddles in the mud floor where the rain came through the thatch, and no furniture but a few old wooden boxes. Two bacon cases nailed together and half filled with rags did duty for a bed, the other boxes represented table and chairs. The old woman was blind, or nearly so, and death was very near, but when she heard our voices she called to Maria to dust one of the boxes and to spread on it the clean white cloth that had lain under her hands when, that

morning, the priest had brought her the last Sacraments. It was the only clean thing in the house, and we must sit upon it.

Then she asked us to be kind to Maria, to continue to her the weekly dole that the old woman looked upon as her right. We urged that, late as it was, the time was not yet passed when Maria might earn an honest livelihood for herself instead of remaining a beggar for ever.

"She couldn't do it, the creature! She couldn't live now without the free air of the roads about her," at last the old woman confessed to the attraction of a wandering life. "But don't be too hard on her, asthore, for didn't I breed and rear her to it, God forgive me."

Less urgently, we asked if she did not fear the dangers to Maria soul if left alone to lead a beggar's life.

"Is it with me feet already before the Gates of Heaven you'd ask me to disbelieve His mercy?" she cried, almost scandalised at such a suggestion.

"Don't I know that God Almighty won't leave go what His Son bought for Him so dear."

And so Maria succeeded to her mother's "beat," and became a recognised institution, who claimed her share of our mid-day meal with unfailing regularity once a week.

She is now what the people call a "charity woman," asking and receiving in God's name.

Of a different type is Mrs Lee, who came, I remember, one day when Maria was having her dinner on the doorstep. Mrs Lee belongs to the common tramp tribe—in local parlance, she is a tinker. Being a tinker in our part of the world does not necessarily imply any connection with the tinsmith's profession. It simply means a member of a family who travel the roads in a donkey cart, camping on the roadsides, asking alms as a right, and oftener than not appropriating what is refused them. Sometimes the tinkers do sell, make, and mend pots and pans, and so forth. Occasionally they parade a knife-grinding machine

or a few broken umbrellas. Often they "job in asses," coming up from further west with half a dozen miserable donkeys, which they sell or exchange, making a little on each deal. And not infrequently an animal grazing on the roads is hustled along with the Westerners and sold to some one miles away, before its legal owner is even aware of his loss. Tinkers, therefore, are not popular people, and I told Mrs Lee coldly that there was nothing for her unless she cared for a piece of bread — an offer which I knew, in summer at least, was sure to be refused. But to-day she did not heed my words, and as I spoke I saw that her eyes—such beautiful, black-fringed eyes of grey—were red and swollen from weeping.

Last time she came she had told us proudly that she always took the children into the Union at Christmas, so that they should get the treat we intended for the children resident there; to-day her news referred to one of these children,

whose only chance of a Christmas treat was in the workhouse.

One of her little girls was dead. I no longer had a single friend in all the tinker tribe, for little Lizzie Lee was dead. Her mother had neglected her. To our way of thinking, she had often and often been cruel to her, yet in her own rough way she had loved the child.

Coming out of the country jail after one of her frequent visits there, she had found Lizzie dying—yes, and glad to die—in the workhouse infirmary.

Morally and physically there was nothing of the "tinker" in the child. It was from her mother that she got the delicately-cut features—blurred now in the elder woman—and the strangely pathetic eyes that singled her out from amongst her more coarsely made brothers and sisters. But whence came the moral delicacy that made her shrink with loathing from her wretched drunken surroundings no one could imagine.

Fortunately for her, her people were so often in the lock-up, that much of her life had been spent under the care of the nuns in the workhouse school. It was here that we first made friends, Lizzie and I, and when December came round we sent her a doll—only a rag-filled nigger, dressed in gaudy cretonne—the one single gift that Christmas had ever brought her.

Soon after we went to see her, but her place was empty in the schoolroom, and, crossing the damp, grey yard, we entered one of the infirmary wards. There, on one pillow we saw two heads. One face was white, and now so wee and wan that at first we hardly recognised our little friend; the other was black, inanimate, hideous, yet worn with kisses, the face of the nigger doll.

Sister had given Lizzie her present on Christmas morning, and at dinner-time she had found the child lying with her "baby" in her arms, and her meal—a degree less unappetising than usual workhouse fare—untasted before her.

"Put away that doll, Lizzie, and eat your dinner, like a good child," she was admonished.

But the doll was only clasped the closer.

"I don't want me dinner, Sister, I don't want no dinner, not any more," the child said.

"No dinner, but you'll die if you eat no dinner," said the nun.

Lizzie looked up at her with wide innocent, eyes.

"I want to die," she said.

And further questionings brought her reasons to light. Her sister, who had come in presumably for the Christmas treat, had been up to see her, and had told her as a cheering piece of news that "our folk's time would soon be up in jail," and that they would come before long and take them all out to the old life of want, cold, hunger, and beatings, and yet of freedom, and therefore loved.

"I couldn't go travelling again, Sister," Lizzie explained; "you know what they're like, them folk"—that is her grandfather, father, and mother

—"and I couldn't take the child out to them," hugging the nigger closer still. "But you told me that Jesus is kind to little children, so I'll die an' go to Heaven, and I'll bring the child along with me, and Jesus will be good to us."

That was some months ago, and now she had had her wish. She has never gone out on the tramp again. Jesus, who is kind to little children had taken her to Himself, and from the wretched mother's lips we learnt that the child's last desire was for the doll to be buried with her. The Sisters told us afterwards that they had done as Lizzie asked. The black doll was laid beside her, and has crumbled to dust in a little pauper grave. —Good-bye, dear Joan,

PATRICIA.

XII

My dear Joan,—I have again looked through your *vade-mecum*, the American letters, and at every fresh truth that I find in its pages my hopes of rousing your toleration grow weaker. There is not a fault of commission or omission described by the authoress that might not have been drawn from life, from one, two, half a dozen of my acquaintances. But to me the dual nature of the Celt is such easy reading that I still repeat

> "—A piteous land,
> Yet ever beckoning with enchanted wand."

Piteous! at times almost hopeless—yet more than beckoning, drawing forcibly as a magnet, with her enchanted wand.

I understand that you cannot feel this curious

fascination. It is as subtle as the distinction between our virtues and our failings. It is one of the invisible things that are stronger than steel, yet being unseen are inexplicable. At times we ourselves lose sight of it, but such little things, that by many pass unnoticed, serve to bring it back. Do you remember the day, soon after you went to live at Ballynaraggit that we took shelter from a storm at Martin Concannon's? He bade the farm girl fetch chairs for us from the inner room, bade her dust and set them near the fire, and, speaking first to me, he gave me greeting.

"Your honor is heartily welcome," he said.

It was your turn next.

"Ma'am, your husband's wife is welcome."

But to the stranger who was with us:

"Miss, take a seat."

Perhaps you did not notice; it was all so courteously done, but to me those delicate grades of welcome brought the glamour before my eyes that made me lenient to the muddy ducks

waddling across the kitchen floor, to the heap of turnips that ought to have been cleaned and chopped outside, even to the all pervading smell of cabbage rising insistently from the great black pot upon the fire.

I understand that besides disliking your surroundings for what they are, you dislike them still more because of what they are not. The greyness, the dampness, the rank growth in summer all revolt your orderly soul, you yearn for the warm red soil, the picturesque villages, for the very things that overcome me when I am in England, and make me long for a glimpse of human nature as seen round Ballynaraggit. I understand how you miss the beautiful little Gothic church, so spotlessly kept, with vestments, services and all so correctly carried out. In it one feels, when the vibrations of the organ send the incense down in clouds from amongst the carvings of the roof and a hush of reverence—is it mingled with respectability?—hangs over the

congregation, that one really is in church. I do not think you will ever feel at home in the bare barn-like chapel at Ballynaraggit, where the floor bears traces of Sunday's mud from Monday until Friday, where the sunlight straggles in through coloured glass that sets one's teeth on edge to look at, where the smell of damp turf smoke pervades the air; and the want of a High Mass, the ill-sung Benediction, is not made up to you by the real eloquence of the sermons. Yet do you never feel when your own efforts at praying are very feeble—if ever they are!—that there is comfort in the heartfelt devotion that some of the congregation round you feel, and do not keep to themselves? Does Mary "the monk" still crouch in her old place beside the confessional and pour forth in a mixture of Gaelic and English her litanies of praise and prayer?

I have knelt and listened to her, marvelling at the fervent flow, but best of all I like the prayer, extempore yet stereotyped from weekly repetition,

with which, Sunday after Sunday, she concludes her devotions.

"Oh Sacred Heart of me Jesus, hear me,

"Oh Sacred Heart of me Jesus, help me,

"Oh Sacred Heart of me Jesus, smite me, strike me, heal me,

"Oh Sacred Heart of me Jesus, grant me never to pass out of the world without th' assistance of me holy clergy."

Do you know, Joan, that the more I think of you the more I pity you. Fate has obliged you to make your home in Ireland, and you would like to be in sympathy with your surroundings, but that seems to be impossible. Faults and failings are apparent everywhere around you. As French people say, "Elles vous sautent aux yeux," and where are the virtues, the attractions that might counterbalance some of them? I do not wonder that in Eastern Ireland, at least, they are invisible to so many. That they do exist I maintain, in spite of all, but a cloak of the

commonest English gentility, made doubly offensive by the ignorance it seeks to hide, or the more aggressive mantle of American independence, often covers them effectually from the casual observer's eye, and it needs some special occasion to bring them to light, even to those who know of their existence.

In the west — in Donegal, Connemara, and Kerry—thank God, they are less far to seek, but even there you find them hard to recognise unless they are pointed out to you.

I do not blame you in the least. If fate had treated me as it has treated you, if I had been obliged to make my home in a country not my own, I too should have looked upon it as a misfortune, although, had I been exiled to England, I should at least have been able to enjoy, in an intensified form, in a more personal way than I now do, the proud feeling of belonging to the greatest country in the world.

But you! You have lost this, and have gained

nothing in return. "Ireland a nation" is to you a rebellious cry, given voice to only by the vulgar and unruly. I own that in a Dublin drawing-room, or in a pasture field of Meath, the Ireland of the poet is an imaginary thing; but can you never feel, putting the people quite aside, that in our stony Connemara wilds, "the little black rose," "the dark rosaleen" is a real, living motherland?

As to the people, I hope what I have told you of them may help to make you a little more lenient; and before I end I want to tell you one thing more. Do you remember the Murphy family, who were, and are, the despair of priest, and nuns, and landlord at ——? They are the only Irish family in the whole of that picturesque Gloucestershire village, and goodness knows how they got there. He is hopelessly idle, frequently unsober. The children—there must be a dozen of them, I think—are the quickest in the class-room, the most unruly and untidy out of it. They

come to Mass regularly, wholly unabashed in their rags; and on Sunday afternoons their mother, with a perennial baby in her arms and two or three infants clinging to her skirts, may be seen paying a visit to the otherwise empty chapel—that lovely little Gothic chapel that you love. The father refuses to work regularly, to pay his rent at all. Mrs Murphy declines to keep her house in order or her children clean, and yet the clergyman's wife—an honest woman, although no lover either of the Irish or of Catholicity—says openly that, with all her faults, Mrs Murphy is the only spiritual-minded woman in the whole district.

So it is that in unexpected places appears the leaven.

If it were not there at all, less would be expected of us. If our standard were lower we should fail less in this world, but should we rise as high—I speak as a nation, as a whole—in the next.

I wonder if you know the context of the

lines I am so fond of quoting. They were written after reading a history of Ireland, and although they apply more to Ireland political than to Ireland domestic, and the seventh line is true from a materialistic point only, they have the feeling in them that I have been trying to show to you, and therefore, though perhaps I am presumptuous in so doing, I add them here as an *envoi* to my letters.

"Shut up the book. A piteous land,
Yet ever beckoning with enchanted wand,
Whether by fault or fate
Where all things come too soon or are too late,
Of fitful love and inextinguishable hate.

"Unhappy, though beloved beyond the sea,
Thy children prosper furthest from thy knee.
Vainly at home they spend, and oh! that it should be,
In barren battle and debate
The wit, the humour and the oratory,
Genius enough to make us great,
And more than blood enough to make us free."

PATRICIA.

THE END

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