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A TALE OF THE ATLANTIC COAST.

BY GEORGE F. BAGLES.

We are sitting to-night by the fire, My Mary and me, all alone. A watchin' the blaze on it, flickers In its play on the old hearstone.

As the light of the burnin' driftwood Flares out on the hob, across the wall, It shines on a sailor's son's wester, Hangin' just where the gray shadows fall.

These thoughts make my bosom feel heavy, They've silv'ered an' whiten'd my hair, And, thus, as I sit in my corner, An' a watchin' the blaze on it, flickers In its play on the old hearstone.

There are times, when, sleepin' or wak'in', My face beamin' joyous an' gay, Steals upon me from out the corners An' nooks where he's nestled in play;

Yes, now, when it's late for repentance, I know I was wastin' my time, I might as well have been a sailor, An' a watchin' the blaze on it, flickers In its play on the old hearstone.

"What is your name, dear?" she asked, kindly. "Norah," she answered, given in a low voice, and with a look of wonder at the questioner.

"Norah!" echoed the lady, turning pale. "Norah what?" "Norah Brady, ma'am."

"Oh!" and an expression, partly of relief, partly of disappointment, swept over the listener's face. Then she slipped some money into the child's hand, and whispered: "Spend it as you please, dear. It is a New Year's gift."

"I can't take it, ma'am," she answered in a low, wailing tone. "She was angry if I did!" "Angry that you accept a gift? Why so?"

"Because we're poor, and when people give us things, he says it's out of charity."

"But it is that any reason for refusing them?" "Yes, for papa and I are independent, and had rather earn our own money."

"The little figure straightened itself with an air of dignity almost womanly."

"You are a strange child," was the reply, and the lady looked interested and amused at the way in which she spoke.

"The street and number were named, and then Norah raised her honest blue eyes, and said softly: "Please don't think me ungrateful, ma'am. You are very kind indeed. Only that papa has seen better days, and it hurts him now to see me so poor, and he says, 'Keep it. And she handed back the money with a wistful little glance that spoke volumes."

"Have you a mother, dear?" questioned the other. "No, ma'am," she answered, in a quivering voice. "Mamma died three years ago."

"Why was it a throbbing pain still, red the listener's heart at that word? What was Norah's mother to her? She felt drawn toward the child, she hardly knew why; drawn, too, toward the dead mother, and the strange, proud father."

"Norah's eyes, Norah's name, were like those of a little sister she had lost by a separation almost worse than death. She had never forgotten it, and to-night the memory of that olden time softened her heart, and made her pitiful toward the griefs of others. But all this while her carriage stood waiting, with a white-haired old gentleman inside, and the coachman impatiently staring at her feet."

"I must leave you," she whispered to Norah at last, longing to clasp the little figure to her breast. "I shall come and see you soon, may I not?" Then, seeing the child hesitated to reply, she added: "Are you afraid papa will object? Tell him I'm a charity case, and he'll let it be for my own sake, and because you remind me of some one I loved years ago, that I wish to come."

Norah was a hospitable little soul, and the beautiful lady had completely won her heart. "Papa will be glad to see you," she said, simply, "and I go."

"Thank you, dear," then moved by a sudden impulse, the lady stooped down and kissed her. The coachman, looking on, rubbed his eyes, and thought that perhaps Norah was some little princess in disguise. And so she was, and by a right more royal than that of blood or money."

"What child was that?" questioned the white-haired old gentleman, as the lady took her seat in the carriage and bade the coachman drive on. "Some beggar with a tale of distress that touched your sympathy?" He looked at her fondly, and in a manner that showed she was the "one woman of the world" to him.

"Not a beggar," and the lady smiled and told how Norah had refused the money. "But the child interested me strangely. She has eyes like those of the little Norah I left in Ireland, and for a minute I had a faint hope that my search was at last ended. But her father's name is Brady."

"And yours was O'Connell," said the gentleman. "And it was not here, but to France, that he migrated."

"I know," and a touch of impatience came into her voice. "It was but for a minute, as I said. Afterward I understood how impossible it was."

"She sighed bitterly, and went on: 'I wonder if this is to be the punishment for my sin and folly—that I am never to know the fate of those I deserted.'"

"That girlish sin and folly, as you call it, dear wife, has been expiated long since," was the answer. "Let the past bury its dead. Do not make yourself miserable by ruminating up its ashes."

"I am not unhappy," she said, softly. "Why should I be? Every wish is gratified save one—that of reconciliation with my parents, and perhaps it is right this should be denied me."

"Has it ever occurred to you that they may be dead?" asked the gentleman, looking at her compassionately. "Many times," she answered. "But I cannot make myself believe it. Something seems to tell me they are living and in want."

itself in her eyes, but was quickly followed by an expression of gravity and sorrow, touching in one so young. Finally she turned away with a sigh, and at that instant the confectioner's door opened, and a lady, richly dressed, came out. Something in the child's face or looks attracted her attention. She stopped, drew the shivering little figure toward the light, and scanned it curiously.

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"Oh, that is because the agent we sent over to Ireland told us your father had lost his property," she would naturally think of him as poor after that.

"Yes, and when pride is joined to poverty, the struggle is the harder. Father was a strange man; stern, and haughty and obstinate, but under the harsh exterior hid one of the warmest hearts that ever beat. I can understand why he left Ireland so suddenly, and covered up all traces of his flight, lest those who had known him in prosperity should witness his humiliation. He could not have borne that; it would have been the added drop of bitterness that would have choked him. But mother was different; so meek and gentle, and she was the only living person who would have managed him. Every one else was sure to see the worst side of his nature."

"Ah, yes! you have told me of her before. But I cannot understand, Kate, why she never answered your letters. You were but seventeen when you eloped with that villain—a mere child—and surely she might have given you your heart's wish and comfort when your heart was almost broken by his baseness. True, he was your wedded husband, and held you by a bond stronger than that of parents; but their silence was cruel and I cannot forgive them for it."

"You do not know how I have tried their love. My father warned me against the man, my mother told me of his faithless and treacherous ways, and he betrayed them both. Oh, I was guilty of such base subterfuge, it seemed as if a demon had entered into me, and I was no longer my real self. Whatever they said only increased my obstinacy and made me more infatuated with the object of my childish passion, you must remember, my father had seemed to think I robbed him the night of my departure, though the theft was committed without my knowledge, and by the wretch into whose hands I had trusted my honor and happiness. That I should have been so hindered to his real character seems impossible now, for he had a winning, plausible manner, and I was vain and foolish, fond of flattery and admiration."

"You fled to America at once, did you not, and wrote home to her?" "Yes, my husband's villainy was first revealed to me on board of the ship that took us over. I accidentally came across the money he had stolen from my father, and recognized the purse that held it as one I had knitted myself. I asked for an explanation, and he gave it boldly, gloating over the idea of what he called a just and righteous vengeance, instead of the hateful crime it seemed to me. It was there I found out there had been a feud of long standing between him and my father, and that it was for this he had married me, and thus struck his enemy to the heart."

"Though the villain is dead, it makes my blood boil to think now of him. Kate, but did you not mention all this in your letters—the vile plot, the stolen money?" "Yes, and more too. I told of my desolate condition in New York, alone and friendless, for as soon as we landed I fled from the wretch whom the law had made my husband. He followed me, persecuted me, prevented my obtaining any respectable employment; and oh! the terrible life that I led those two years that he lived. It is dreadful to say it, but his death was actually a relief."

"And they never answered your letters?" said her husband indignantly. "I cannot understand such vindictiveness."

"The first one was returned unopened," she answered; "of the others I never had any tidings. But I am sure they would have forgiven me had they known it all. It may be the letters were intercepted. The suspicion has occurred to me lately that they fell into my husband's hands, and that he re-mailed and stamped that first one to deceive me and prevent my writing others."

"Don't call that man your husband, Kate. It makes me shiver. I have no doubt your suspicion is correct. But surely you wrote after his death?" "I did not," she replied. "I was so utterly heart-broken, by all that had occurred, as to believe myself an outcast from love and kindness forever more. You know what I suffered, and how I went from place to place, vainly seeking employment. The stage was the only means of livelihood that offered itself. Ah! can I ever forget from what a life you rescued me, the humble ballet-girl?"

"But remember you said it was from love, not gratitude, that you became my wife. For I am old enough to be your father, Kate, and had you refused me what I craved, would have adopted you as my daughter?"

"Old in years but young in heart," she answered. "If my first marriage was a wretched mistake, my second is indeed blessed, and I never hoped to enjoy."

The carriage had reached the suburbs of the city by this time, and now stopped before a large house with an old-fashioned, hospitable aspect very inviting.

"Home at last!" said the gentleman, jumping out as nimbly as if he had been younger. "Come, Kate."

She followed, and leaning on his arm went up the steps and into the house. No further allusion was made by either to the subject of their conversation during the drive. But the thoughts of one kept continually recurring to the child she had seen in front of the confectioner's; and when Kate Hillard closed her eyes in sleep that night, it was with the firm resolve to see Norah's father early the next day, and find out who he was and whence he came, for Norah's words, Norah's looks, seemed like an echo from the past, and had in them something of the spirit she remembered.

Norah's thoughts were as full of her as hers of Norah. "Such a lovely lady!" mused the child, as she hurried home. "I don't think papa would have minded my taking the money, if he could have heard all she said, and seen exactly how she looked. It is New Year's Eve, and what if she were not a real lady, but just some fairy going about doing good? I saw a nice old gentleman inside her carriage, though, and a live coachman on top. I guess she's rich and blood like the rest, only kinder and more thoughtful."

It was toward a wretched quarter of the city that Norah bent her steps, and the tenement where she stopped was old and dilapidated and crowded with human beings. She ascended the stairs and found her way to a room dimly lighted by a tallow candle. The door stood open, and she entered softly. Then shading her eyes with her hand, she looked around. There was a bed in one corner, and upon that lay a man asleep. "Poor papa," she thought, "he is tired. The doctor says he ought not to work, but he will, and I can't help it. I almost wish I had taken the money. It would have bought a chicken and I could have made him some broth to-morrow. But he wouldn't have eaten it if he knew how I got it. Oh, dear! it is so hard to be poor and have a sick father."

She bustled about a little, setting the room to rights, and tried to look cheerful, though she was down-hearted. But the tears came in spite of her when she went to the cupboard and looked in to see what there was for breakfast. Only a few dry crusts and a small piece of butter, old and rancid, New Year's Eve, and their poverty would not have seemed so bitter. She had gone hungry before and never complained, but now, looking at her pale, worn father, and remembering the sad Christmas they had spent, she started, and she almost doubted the goodness of God, who let poor people suffer thus. Then her mother's sweet face rose up before her as if in reproach, and she folded her hands together and breathed a prayer for help and comfort. Poor Norah! a child in years, but weighed down with a woman's cares, old in trouble, New Year's Eve, and their poverty would not have seemed so bitter. 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