OUR·LITTLE·IRISH·COUSIN

MARY·HAZELTON·WADE

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Our Little Irish Cousin

THE Little Cousin Series

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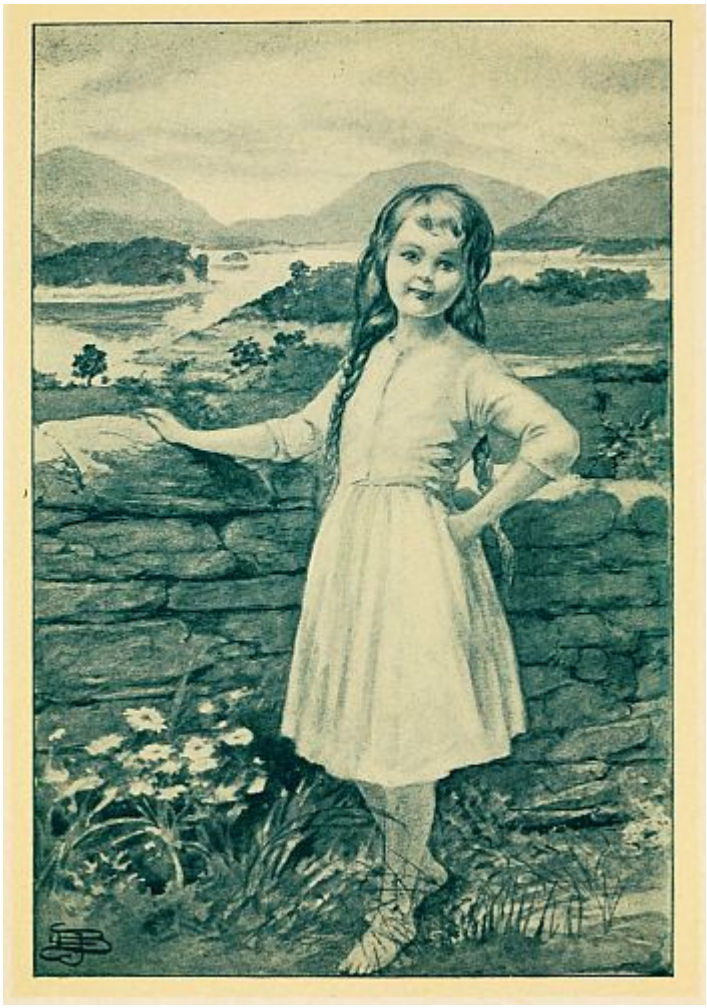

NORAH.

Our Little Irish Cousin

By
Mary Hazelton Wade

Illustrated by
L. J. Bridgman

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INTRODUCTION

WITH the home of our Irish cousins we are not very familiar, but with our Irish cousins themselves we have a better acquaintance, for many of them have come over to settle in America, and they were among the bravest of the American troops in the World War. Of the part in the war taken by their people in Ireland we do not know so intimately, but we do know that they sent many men to France to help England defeat the Germans. They took our boys to their homes, and fed and clothed them; they nursed them back to health and strength, and by so doing the people of Ireland won their way into the hearts of the people of America.

Since the end of the war the bond between the two countries has grown even closer, for, under the leadership of America, the nations of Europe began to listen to Ireland's plea for home rule. This plea was backed up by active Revolution, as was our own struggle for independence. Finally the Imperial British Government, with the interests of the Irish people at heart, granted them Home Rule, to control their own destinies within the British Empire. Unfortunately, however, even this did not prove a complete solution of Ireland's difficulties, for some of the Irish people wished to remain attached to England, and enjoy the advantages of her wise and just rule. These were the people of Northern Ireland, called Ulster. So it has been agreed that they shall remain under English rule, leaving Home Rule for Southern Ireland.

Preface

You have often heard people speak of the Emerald Isle. When you have asked where it is and why it is so called, you have been told it is only another name for that small island to the northwest of the continent of Europe called Ireland.

The rains there fall so often, and the sun shines so warmly afterward, that Mother Nature is able to dress herself in the brightest and loveliest of colours. The people there are cheerful and good-natured. They are always ready to smile through their tears and see the funny side of every hardship.

And, alas! many things have happened to cause their tears to flow. They have suffered from poverty and hunger. Thousands of them have been forced to leave parents and friends, and seek a living within the kindly shores of America.

America is great, America is kind, they may think, but oh! for one look at the beautiful lakes of Killarney; oh! for a walk over the green fields and hills of the Emerald Isle. And oh! for the chance to gather a cluster of shamrock, the emblem of dear old Erin.

The little Irish cousin, who has never left her native land, may be poor, and sometimes ragged, but her heart is warm and tender, and she loves her country and her people with a love that will never change, no matter where she may travel or what fortune may befall her.

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Our Little Irish Cousin

CHAPTER I.

NORAH

"Londonderry, Cork, and Kerry,
Spell *that* to me without a K."

"CAN you do it now?" said Norah, laughing.

"Can I do it? Yes, easy enough, for I've heard the riddle before. T-h-a-t. There, Norah, you didn't catch me this time."

Molly laughed, too, as she spoke, and the little girls went on dressing their rag dolls.

They were great friends, these two children of Ireland, and, although they were ragged and dirty most of the time, and neither of them owned hats or shoes, they were happy as the day is long. And, when I say this, I mean one of the longest days of Ireland, which are very long indeed.

Norah had beautiful blue eyes and dark auburn hair. Her teeth were like pearls and her cheeks were rosy as the brightest sunset.

"She is a true daughter of Erin," thought her mother, as she looked at the child. "May God will that she grow up to be as good as she is beautiful," she said to herself, making the sign of the cross on her breast.

As for Molly, Norah's little playmate, her hair was black as night. Many other lads and lasses of Ireland have hair like that. It is because, long years ago, before even the Christ-child dwelt among men, Spaniards came to the west coast of Ireland and settled among the people there.

They gave their black hair and dark eyes to the people already in the country, most of whom were fair in face, hair, and eyes. So it happens that sometimes they now have dark hair and blue eyes, and sometimes light hair and dark eyes.

"Norah! Norah, darlint! Come and feed the pigs," called her mother. "They are that hungry they would eat the thatch off the house if they could reach it."

Norah jumped up, and running home as fast as her young feet could carry her, took the dish of mush from her mother's hands. She was instantly surrounded by a thin old mother pig and her ten little ones.

They were cunning little things when they were born, and Norah loved to hold them in her arms and pet them. But they were big enough now to root about in the mud, and the little girl held them no longer.

"Oof! oof!" grunted the mother pig. "Good! good!" was what she meant, of course, as she swallowed her supper as quickly as possible, and the ten babies followed her example.

Then Norah had to feed the ducks and chickens, and her precious goat.

"I love it. Oh, I love it, next to father and mother and the children," thought the little girl.

"How much it knows, and how gentle it is! And what should we do without the sweet, rich milk it gives us!" she said, turning to Molly, who was helping her in her work.

"It is a dear little creature" (Molly pronounced it craythe r), "but I love our pet cow better. I suppose the reason is because it is ours. But, good night till ye, Norah. I must be after getting home."

Molly went running down the lane, while Norah entered the house.

House! It would hardly be fair to give it such a grand name. It was a small stone hut, not much taller than Norah's father, with a roof covered with mud and straw mixed together. Such a roof is said to be thatched.

There was only one window in the hut, and that was a small one. The door was divided across the middle, and the upper part of it stood wide open. Yet, as Norah stepped inside, the air was thick and heavy with smoke.

Over in one corner was a fireplace, and in it cakes of dried peat were slowly burning. It was the only kind of fuel Norah's mother had to burn, so it was no wonder the air of the room was smoky.

Do you know what peat is? In Norah's country there are many square miles of marshy land covered with moss and grasses. If it could speak to us, this land would tell a wonderful story.

"Ages and ages ago," it would say, "great forests of oak stood here. The trees grew large and strong. But the rain fell often and the air was very damp. This is the reason mosses and other plants gathered on the trunks and branches of the trees. They sent their roots into the moist bark and fed on the sap that should have nourished the trees.

"The great trees became weaker and weaker as the years passed away, until at last they sickened and died, and fell to the ground.

"Fir-trees began to grow in the places of the oaks. But they were treated in the same manner. Their life-giving sap was taken by a new growth of mosses. The fir-trees died, and added to the great masses of decaying wood which now covered the damp ground.

"Then plants grew up. But they met with the same fate as the trees.

"Thousands and thousands of years passed by. The beautiful forests that once covered the land were slowly changed into peat."

The peat-bogs are now so thick and heavy that the poor of Ireland can dig twenty-five feet into them and cut out squares of the solid peat.

After drying them in the air and sunshine, the people burn them in place of coal. This queer fuel does not make as bright and clear a fire as coal, but it is cheap, and keeps the poor from suffering.

"Be patient and wait only a few more thousands of years," the bogs would say to us if they could, "and you may have coal instead of peat. Father Time will make the change without any work on your part."

But the people of Ireland cannot wait. Most of them are very, very poor. They live from day to day, glad if they have a roof to cover their heads and food enough to keep them from starving.

Norah's father hires the land for his little farm from a rich lord who lives most of the year in England. The Irishman built the little hut on this land for himself and wife, and his family of growing children.

"What use would it be to spend much time on it?" he would say. "The better I make the place, the more rent I shall have to pay."

Every year he planted his patch of potatoes and cabbages for himself, besides oats and turnips and other things for his fowls and pigs and goat. He mended the thatched roof when it leaked too badly for comfort, and they all tried to be happy. They succeeded pretty well.

When each new year came around, the home looked about as usual. It was no better, and no worse, unless, perhaps, it was a wee bit more shabby.

But the children grew fast. They were merry and rosy, and thought very little about the shabby stone hut they called "home."

"Sivin of us there are," Norah would tell you, "and baby Pat is the dearest and best of us all."

As she came in to supper that night, her mother lifted the kettle that hung by a hook over the smoky fire and made a pot of tea. Then she placed a dish of steaming potatoes and a plate of dark, heavy bread on the table.

"A good supper, indade," thought the hungry children, and in a few minutes not a sign of anything to eat could be seen.

"Here chick! chick!" called Norah, dropping crumbs to her pet chicken. It had kept close beside her during the meal, and once had grown so impatient that it flew up into the little girl's lap.

An old hen had already gone to roost on the rung of a stool in a dark corner of the room, while the much-loved goat stood munching grass at Norah's elbow.

The child's mother did not seem troubled in the least by these things. She was busy as busy could be, giving hot potatoes and slices of bread to Mike and Joe, Norah and Katie, while she trotted baby Patsy on her knee.

But when the whole flock of geese came running and flying into the hut for their share of the family supper, it was a little too much.

"Away with you, noisy creatures!" cried the busy mother. "Away with you! Mike, take the broom and drive them out. Joe, lend a hand and help your brother."

When the room had been cleared of the greedy geese, every one went on eating, until not even a crumb was left on the table.

The girls cleared away the dishes; the boys brought a load of peat into the house, and placed it before the fire to dry for burning; the mother rocked Patsy to Dreamland, and the father smoked his pipe.

Then, when the work was all done, he told the children there was good news.

"What is it, what is it?" they all cried together.

"A letter from our own Maggie, in Ameriky. Sure, what else could the good news be?" said their father. "Listen, and you shall hear it.

> "'DEAR FATHER AND MY OWN SWEET MOTHER:
> —First of all, how are yoursilves and the pigs and all the children? I have a good place, and my mistress is very kind to me. My work is not hard, and I am fast learning the ways of this great country. My wages is now two dollars and a half the week. In the money of good ould Ireland, that is just ten shillin's. By bein' careful since I last wrote ye, I have saved enough to send you two pounds. My master got the money changed for me, he was that kind. What will the money buy yez now? Mother darlint must have two pounds of the best tay, and a new red woollen petticoat. You, father, will have some grand leather boots, and aich of the children must buy something for the remimbrance of the sister Maggie far across the great say.
>
> "'Good-bye, and may the blissings of Hiven fall upon ye.
>
> "'MAGGIE O'NEIL.'"

As he came to the end of the letter, every one was silent for a moment. The mother wiped away some tears which had fallen upon her cheek, and her husband cleared his throat.

Two pounds! It seemed like a fortune to the little family. It was nearly enough to pay the year's rent.

"But the pigs are doing well, and, if they keep on, there will be no trouble when rent time comes," said the father, as they sat talking the matter over. "The price of the pigs will be enough for the rint, I'm thinkin'. It shall be as Maggie said. Let the childer go to bed and dream of the fine things they will see in the town when they go shopping."

Somehow or other the children were all stowed away for the night in the small room next the kitchen, and Norah was soon sound asleep, and dreaming a most wonderful dream.

It seemed in her dream that the goat was harnessed to the jaunting-car belonging to the father of her friend Molly. He was a very, very big goat in the dream, and he looked really handsome, as he capered down the lane, carrying the whole family to market.

Norah's pet chicken was going to see the sights, for he was perched on the goat's head. The old mother pig ran by his side, and the baby pigs, with their curly tails high up in the air, were trying their best to keep up. Everybody was laughing and singing to the tune of an Irish jig that Norah's father was playing on the bagpipes.

CHAPTER II.

THE THUNDER-STORM

"WHISHT, now! The fairy folk are passing along. We must get out of their way, and greet them politely," said Norah to her little sister Kate, as she made a bow, and whispered, "God speed ye."

The children were out berrying, and were quite a distance from home. They had wandered down the lane running through their little village, and were now on the road to Killarney.

"Why, Norah?"

"When you see a cloud of dust sweeping along, you may know the fairies are travelling. It might bring something bad to us if we stood in their way. We want them to be our friends, of course."

"Oh, yes, yes, Norah. I'll be careful next time. But I'm tired. Tell me a story about the fairies."

"I'm tired, too, Katie darlint. But I'll tell ye this much. There once was a man who did not care for the fairies as he should. Perhaps he did not believe they used arrows and shot them at the cattle of those people with whom they were angry. Oh, Katie, it is the living truth that the fairies can bewitch any one whom they please.

"Well, the man of whom I was tellin' ye bought a farm. It was close to a beautiful valley where the fairies had their home. He built himself a house; he ploughed the land; and then he made a lime-kiln on the very borders of the fairies' home.

"They were so angry that they punished him in many ways. But not all at once, Katie darlint. First, they killed his horse; next, three of his cows; and, as though that wasn't enough, nine of his pigs died.

"THE DRIVER STOPPED HIS CAR AND ASKED NORAH HOW FAR IT WAS TO THE LAKES OF KILLARNEY."

"The farmer knew well enough what was the matter. He took down his lime-kiln, and was careful after that to keep clear of the borders of fairy-land."

"Look, look, Norah! I hear a carriage. It may be people travelling through the country. Put on your sweetest smile and maybe they will give us a penny."

The two children stood still on one side of the road. As the carriage passed them, little Kate held out her chubby hands, saying, "A penny, kind lady, if ye plaze."

She was quick to notice that, besides the driver, three gentlemen and a lady filled the seats of the jaunting-car.

"Take this, little one, for your rosy cheeks and smiling face."

The lady threw out a three-penny piece, as the driver stopped his car and asked Norah how far it was to the lakes of Killarney.

"Four miles, sir, if ye keep straight on this road," was the answer.

"Do you mean four Irish miles?" asked one of the gentlemen. "For, if you do, we have an hour's good drive before us."

"Sure, and I always supposed a mile is a mile," answered Norah, with a perplexed look in her eyes.

The gentleman laughed, and said, "If you go to America when you grow up, you will find that two of our miles will almost make one of yours."

The car passed on, and the children stood watching the travellers out of sight.

"Isn't it grand to be travelling like that, Katie?" said her sister. "A jaunting-car is one of the finest things in the world."

But the people who were in the carriage did not agree with her.

"Dear me!" said the lady, "I'm afraid of falling out whenever the horse goes fast. And as for this beautiful country, I can only see what is on one side of the road at a time."

"I quite agree with you," said her husband. "I have always wanted to ride in a jaunting-car, but it is more fun to talk about it than to really do it."

"But what is a jaunting-car?" perhaps you are wondering.

It is a carriage in which the seats are placed back to back, facing sideways. It has no top, but has big wheels and big springs underneath.

A small jaunting-car, like the one which had passed the children, has two wheels, and seats long enough to hold four people, two on each side. The driver's place is built out in front, reaching over the horse's back. Such a car is very light, and one horse can carry it easily.

But what the lady said was true. There was no way for the passengers to hold on firmly. Besides this, they could see the view on only one side at a time.

A story has been told of a man who was travelling in Ireland and wished to see the country. He rode in a jaunting-car from Queenstown to Cork. He sat on the side of the car toward the hill and did not get a single view of the river. When he went back again he changed his seat to the opposite side of the car. And still he saw nothing but the hill. It is no wonder that, when people spoke to him about the river between Cork and Queenstown, he said, "There is no river. There is nothing to be seen except a hill."

Do you see the joke? And do you understand the reason why he saw only one side of the country, though he travelled twice over the same road?

Norah and her little sister had just turned to go home, when they noticed the sky had grown black with heavy clouds.

"It is going to rain, Katie. We must hurry, for I fear it will thunder and lighten," said Norah.

The children began to run. Although they did not mind the rain, they were both afraid of thunder-storms.

"There! hear that, and that!" sobbed Katie, beginning to cry. A streak of lightning had darted across the sky, followed almost instantly by a loud peal of thunder.

Down came the rain in torrents, just as the children turned from the road and entered the lane leading to their own little village. As they did so, the sound of wheels could be heard behind them.

They were in too great a hurry and too much frightened to turn around. But as they reached their own door, the very jaunting-car they had met on the road to Killarney drove up.

The children's mother had been watching from the doorway.

"Come in, children, as fast as you can. I was near beside mesilf, I was that worried about ye."

Then the good woman, turning with a welcome smile to the people in the carriage, asked them to shelter themselves from the storm in her poor little cot.

The two drenched children rushed to the fireplace and stood there with the water dripping from their skirts and making little puddles on the floor of the cabin.

In the meantime, their mother was making her visitors as comfortable as she could. Two of the gentlemen took seats on the edge of a big feather bed, for there were not chairs enough to go around. The lady was given the best chair, after Norah's mother had dusted it with her apron, and placed it near the fire.

The flock of geese had somehow managed to follow the visitors into the house, and the big apron was next used to drive the poor wet creatures out into the storm. It was plain to see they did not enjoy it any more than the people themselves.

"You must excuse us for taking you by surprise in this way," said the lady, as soon as it was quiet enough for the kind Irishwoman to hear her, "but we saw the storm suddenly coming up, and we knew we were too far from Killarney to get there before it should break upon us." She smiled as she went on, "Indeed, it overtook us before we could even reach your village."

As she finished speaking, there was a blinding flash of lightning. It was almost instantly followed by a peal of thunder which shook the little cabin again and again.

Norah's mother made the sign of the cross upon her breast, and her lips moved in prayer. Every one was silent as flash after flash of bright light came through the window, and one peal of thunder followed close upon another.

It was a good half-hour before the storm began to die away.

"Yes, the rain comes often in these parts, and thunder-storms are a common matter in the summer time," said Mrs. O'Neil, when they fell to talking again.

"That is one of the reasons why I don't like jaunting-cars," said her lady visitor. "They have no covering, and in a sudden rain there is no way of keeping dry."

"Wheniver the lightning comes as it did a few minutes ago," said Mrs. O'Neil, "it makes me think of a story told by me father, God rest his sowl.

"There was once a man working in his garden. It began to thunder, and the man was scared. He put his head through a hole in the wall. 'God save whativer is out of me.' That is what he prayed.

"He had no sooner said those words than the wall fell and his head was taken off entirely.

"You see, he didn't pray for the *whole* of him.

"Now, my good father said that was just right. The man was selfish to think only of himsilf. He should have prayed large, for all the folk around him, and not small, just for himsilf. It was the judgment of Hiven upon him.

"But, dear me! I must tend to my baking. I had clean forgot it in the storm."

Mrs. O'Neil turned to the fireplace and lifted a round, low pot out of the ashes. When she had set it on the table, she took off the cover. Then, turning the pot upside down, a dark, heavy loaf of bread fell out upon the table.

The visitors rose to go, thanking the good woman for her kindness in giving them shelter during the storm.

But Mrs. O'Neil would not hear of their leaving so near supper-time, with Killarney a good hour's drive away.

She told them she had a nice pat of butter in the cupboard. The wild berries picked by the children had been covered over, so they were not softened by the rain while on the way home. With a pot of good tea and the newly-baked bread, she proudly thought her visitors might satisfy their hunger.

After looking at her husband and the other gentlemen, the lady sat down again, saying:

"You are very kind and generous, Mrs. O'Neil, like the rest of your people. Wherever I have travelled in Ireland I have met just such kindness. I shall never forget my visit here.

"And what a beautiful country it is! I never saw such green grass anywhere else in the world. No wonder it is called 'The Emerald Isle.'"

Mrs. O'Neil smiled her happiest smile. She loved to hear her country praised.

"Ah! Ireland was a great place once," she cried. "But times have changed, and many of the days have been sad ones since the rule of our own kings. Did ye ever hear tell of the famine?" she asked.

"Yes, indeed," said one of the gentlemen, as Mrs. O'Neil bustled about the table. "I shall never forget a story I read at the time. I was a little boy in school. It was about a family who were suffering terribly from the famine. Their supply of potatoes had come to an end and the new crop was killed by the blight. There was no money to pay the rent, and the poor little children with their parents were turned out of their home by the hard-hearted landlord.

"But at this dreadful moment, help came from a kind friend in America, and they were saved from further suffering."

When he had finished speaking, Mrs. O'Neil told of the suffering people who became homeless and starving, and who died before help reached them.

Norah crept close to her mother's side as she listened to the story. Her big blue eyes were full of tears.

This dreadful famine happened before Mrs. O'Neil was born, for Norah's grandmother was herself a child at the time.

The potato crop had been poor for several years, and many were the families who were obliged to beg from those who were a little better off than themselves. But at last there came a season when all the crops failed. It was the dreadful year of 1847, when the blight fell upon every part of Ireland.

Stop for a minute and think of the thousands of little children who lived almost entirely on potatoes up to this time. Some of them, it is true, had bread every day, and meat once or twice a week.

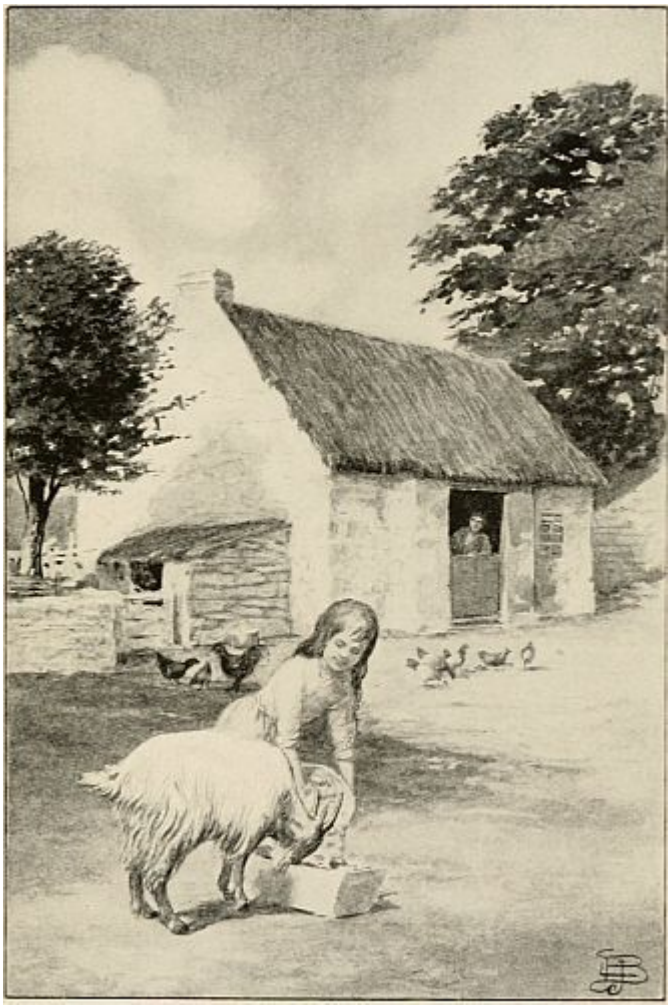
But there were many many homes where the only food of the family was potatoes. Then you can picture what happened when there were no more potatoes.

The smiles soon gave place to tears. The roses faded away from the cheeks. The bright eyes grew dull and heavy.

Poor little children of Ireland! Think what became of them when the last piece of furniture had been sold to buy bread!

Alas! many of them were soon without even shelter. For they were driven with their parents out of their small homes, because there was no possible way of paying the rent.

Then what? Fever and sickness travelled from place to place. Death followed in their pathway. There were many days of cruel suffering before the rest of the world waked up and sent help to the sick and the starving in Ireland.



NORAH'S HOME.

America showed herself a kind friend in that sad time. It was some of the very food she sent to Ireland that saved the life of Norah's grandmother. She and her brothers were nearly starving when the help came. They lived on the seashore and had been trying to keep themselves alive by eating seaweed and moss. Those were dreadful times, indeed.

Mrs. O'Neil stopped to pat Norah's head, which was in her apron. The child was crying softly.

"There, there, those hard days are over now, my child," said her mother, tenderly. "The sky is brighter for Ireland than it has been these many years. You must not let this fine lady see you cry.

Enough water has fallen outside to-day without our adding to the shower."

Norah began to laugh, while she wiped away the tears with her mother's apron.

The visitors once more rose to go. At the same time one of the gentlemen stepped to Mrs. O'Neil's side and said in a low tone, "We would not think of offering pay for your kindness to us this afternoon, but it will give me a great deal of pleasure if you will take this and buy a little kid with it for Norah."

He pressed some money into the good woman's hands.

"But we have one goat now, as you must have seen," she said.

"Two goats will give the children twice as much milk as one," he answered, with a laugh. "And, besides, I want Norah to have the new goat for her very own."

Mrs. O'Neil could not refuse such a kind offer. "Thank ye entirely, and may Hiven send its blessing on ye all."

By this time the driver had brought the horse and the jaunting-car from the little shed, and the party drove off in the direction of Killarney.

CHAPTER III.

ST. PATRICK

"SURE and it's Father Tom himself," said Norah's mother. She was in the midst of the family washing. Katie was rocking baby Patsy, and Norah was brushing up the rough mud floor. Every one stopped work at once and ran out of the cabin, the mother wiping her hands on her apron, and Norah lifting Patsy and carrying him along in her strong young arms.

The whole village had by this time turned out into the lane and gathered around the kind fat priest, who had a smile for each and all.

There were old people hobbling along with the help of sticks, men who had stopped work for the sake of a blessing from the priest, mothers with babies in their arms, and children big and little.

It was a glad day when Father Tom came to the village to see how all were getting along. There were so few people that the village had no church of its own. They went four miles every Sunday to the nearest service. Almost every one had to walk, for there were only two or three donkeys and one or two rough carts in the whole place. A visit from the priest was a great honour, a very great honour. The children knelt in his pathway that he might lay his hands on them and bless them. The men took off their hats and bowed their heads low as he passed by. The old women made as good curtsys as their stiff backs would let them.

Norah put little Patsy down on the ground, whispering, "Patsy, dear, touch the good man's robe with your little hands. It will make ye a better boy."

Father Tom must have heard the whisper. He turned around and placed his hands on the baby's curly head. Then he made a short prayer and blessed him.

"I will take a sup of tea with you, Mrs. O'Neil," he said to Norah's mother. "I am quite tired, for I have walked all the way from my home this morning."

Mrs. O'Neil was much pleased. She hurried home, while the priest and children followed her more slowly.

As she hung the kettle over the fire and set the table for the priest's lunch, he gathered the children around him and told them stories of St. Patrick, the dearest of all saints to the Irish people.

It was a long, long time ago that the King of Ireland was holding a festival in the Hall of Tara.

"Put out all the fires," he had commanded his people. "Let no light be seen till a blaze bursts forth from the hill of Tara."

Not one of his subjects would have dared to disobey the king's command.

You may judge, therefore, how surprised he was when he looked out into the darkness and saw a light. It grew stronger and stronger every moment. A great fire was blazing near by on the top of a hill!

Who could have dared to disobey the king? What was the meaning of the fire? The Druid priest for whom the king sent in haste said:

"O king, if that fire is not put out to-night, it will never die in this country."

Now it happened that the festival which the king and his people were celebrating was held on the night before Easter Sunday. Few people of Erin had at that time heard of Easter Sunday. They knew nothing of the life of the Christ Child. They were Druids, and had a strange belief of their own.

Their chief priests dwelt in the dark forests of oak-trees, and taught their followers to worship fire as the symbol of the sun.

But a new teacher had come into their country. He had a message to the people. He wished to tell them of the Christian religion and of Jesus, who had lived and suffered and died to help all mankind.

The name of the new teacher was Patrick, and Scotland was his early home. When he was sixteen years old, he was surprised by a band of robbers. They made him their prisoner and took him with them to Ireland.

After he had been with them six months, he managed to get free and went back to Scotland.

But he was carried off a second time, and again he escaped. After he reached his own home once more, he said to himself, "I should like to help the people of Ireland. I should like to tell them of Jesus and his religion."

He began to study and prepare himself for teaching. At last he was made a bishop.

After many years, he was able to go back to Ireland. It was what he had long wished to do.

It was the eve of Easter Sunday when he lighted that great fire on the hilltop and surprised the king by his daring.

"I will send for the man who kindled that fire. Let him come before me at once," commanded the king.

Patrick was brought in haste, but he was not frightened in the least.

When the king and the princes, the nobles and the Druid priests were gathered together, he told them he had come to Erin to put out the fires of the Druids. He wished to stop the making of the pagan sacrifices in which the people then believed. He had brought something better in their place. It was the Christian religion.

What do you suppose the king replied?

He was very angry, of course. But still he asked Patrick to meet the wise men of the country the next day and talk the matter over. Then he could explain his belief to them.

On the next day he did meet them. He talked so well and so wisely that many of the listeners thought he knew a great deal more than they did. They became Christians then and there.

The king then gave Patrick the right to preach all over Ireland. As he went from place to place, he spoke so well that all those who listened to him felt his great power.

In a short time the whole of the people became Christians, and the strange worship of the Druids came to an end.

Father Tom told Norah and her sister many wonderful stories of the life of St. Patrick. He told of a spring of water he had visited. This spring worked miracles.

It happened that St. Patrick and St. Bridget were one day taking a walk. She said she was thirsty. St. Patrick struck the ground with his staff. Water instantly began to bubble up through the earth, and a spring has been there ever since.

Father Tom went on to tell of strange wriggling things called snakes. He had seen them in other countries. They were something like big worms, and were of different colours. The bite of some of them was poisonous.

"But we have none of them in our own beautiful Ireland," he said. "You may thank the blessed St. Patrick for sending them out of this country."

Norah and Katie both shivered when they thought of the snakes. How good St. Patrick was to drive the horrid creatures out of Ireland!

"There is a grand church in the city of Dublin called St. Patrick's Cathedral. When you grow up, Norah, you must surely visit it," said the kind priest, as he finished his story-telling. "It stands on the very spot where St. Patrick himself once built a church. It is a fine building, and its spire reaches higher up toward heaven than anything you have ever seen made by men.

"But, my dear little children, your mother has prepared me a nice luncheon. I must eat it, and then visit poor Widow McGee, who is very ill."

A half-hour afterward, Father Tom had left the little home, and Mrs. O'Neil was once more hard at work over her wash-tub. Norah was out in the yard amusing baby Patsy.

"Mother, mother," she called, "Mrs. Maloney is on her way here. She has just stopped at Mrs. Flynn's."

"Come in and get some petaties ready for her, Norah. I don't want to stop again in my work." (Mrs. O'Neil pronounced it "wurruk.")

Mrs. Maloney lived in a lonely cabin about two miles away. You would hardly believe it, but Norah's home was almost a palace beside Mrs. Maloney's.

There was one little window, as she would have called it. It was really only a hole in the wall. When heavy rains fell, the old woman stuffed it with marsh-grass. The thatched roof had fallen in at one end of the cabin. The furniture was a chair and a rough bedstead.

Poor old Mrs. Maloney! Once she had a strong husband and eight happy children, but, one by one, they had died, and now she was old and feeble, and had no one in the world to look after her.

Is it any wonder that the generous people whom she visited always had something to give and a kind word to speak to her?

Every few days, she went from house to house, holding out her apron as she stood in the doorway. She did not need to say a word. One kind woman would give her a bit of tea, another a loaf of bread, a third a cabbage, and a fourth a little butter.

In this way she was kept from starving, or from going to the workhouse, which she dreaded nearly as much.

As Norah dropped the potatoes into her apron, the old woman blessed her heartily. As she turned to leave, Mrs. O'Neil called after her to ask how she got along in yesterday's bad storm.

"Sure and I was that feared I dared not stay in the cabin. It was so bad I thought it would fall down on me shoulders. So I wint out and sat on the turf behind it. I was wet indade when the storm was over."

"Too bad, too bad," said Mrs. O'Neil, in a voice of pity. "We must see what can be done for you."

She did not forget. That very night she asked her husband if he could not find time to mend the old woman's hut and make it safe to live in. He promised her that as soon as the potatoes were hoed he would get his friend Mickey Flynn to help him and they would fix it all right.

"Ah! Tim, Tim," said his wife, with her eyes full of tears, "of all the eight children Mrs. Maloney has lost, there is none she grieves over like her boy John, that went to Ameriky and was never heard of again.

"Maybe he lost his life on the way there. Maybe he died all alone in that far-away land, with no kind friends near him. No one but God knows."

Mrs. O'Neil crossed herself as she went on, "Think of our own dear girl in Ameriky, and what might happen to her!"

CHAPTER IV.

DANIEL O'CONNELL

"O Paddy, dear, and did you hear
The news that's going round?
The shamrock is forbid by law
To grow on Irish ground."

NORAH was sitting by her father's side as the family were gathered around the fireplace one chilly evening. She was singing that song they loved so well, "The Wearing of the Green."

"I picked some shamrock leaves this morning, and I put them in the big book to press. Can they go in the next letter to Maggie, mother?" asked the little girl, as she finished singing.

She jumped down from her seat and went to a shelf, from which she took the treasure of the family. It was the only book they owned besides their prayer-books.

It told the story of a man loved by every child of Erin,—the story of Daniel O'Connell.

Opening the leaves carefully, Norah took out a spray of tiny leaves. They looked very much like the white clover which is so common in the fields of America. It was a cluster of shamrock leaves, the emblem of Ireland.

"Yes, it shall go to Maggie without fail," said Norah's mother. "It will make her heart glad to see it. The fields behind our cabin will come to her mind, and the goat she loved so well, feeding there. Oh, but she has niver seen Patsy yet!"

"Father, please tell us the story of that great man," said Norah. "I am never tired of hearing it."

Norah pointed to the big book as she spoke. The first money Maggie had sent from America had bought it, so it was doubly precious to every one in the little home.

Daniel O'Connell! What a friend he had been to Ireland! The face of Norah's father grew brighter as he began to tell the story of the brave man who had worked so hard to help his people. But the story-teller first went back in the history of Ireland to a time long before the birth of O'Connell.

The Irish had at last been conquered by England. They had fought against her for four hundred years. It was hard now to have English rulers in the country and to have English lords take their lands away from them.

It was harder still to have these rulers say, "You must worship as we worship. If you remain Catholics, we will punish you."

The hard-hearted Cromwell came to Ireland, bringing a large supply of Bibles, scythes, and firearms. The Bibles were for those who were willing to become Protestants. The firearms were used for killing those who would not give up their religion. The scythes cut down the crops of those who did not happen to get killed and yet held to their faith.

"They shall be starved into obeying my orders," said the stern Cromwell.

As though this were not enough, forty thousand of the Irish people were driven to the seacoast. They were put on board ships and sent to Spain. Never more should they see the Emerald Isle they loved so well.

Weeping and moaning could be heard all through Ireland. But a still more pitiful sight followed. It was a procession of children who had been taken from their homes. They, too, were driven on board ships which were waiting for them. These poor helpless boys and

girls were to become slaves on the tobacco plantations of the West Indies.

How their mothers' hearts must have ached! What sobs and groans must have filled many a lonely cottage of Ireland!

One hundred and fifty years passed by. They were hard years, and full of trouble.

Then the people began to whisper to each other, "A real helper has come at last."

It was the young Irishman, Daniel O'Connell, who lived the life of a country boy in a quiet place in Kerry. It was scarcely twenty-five miles from Norah's home.

An old schoolmaster taught Daniel his letters in a little village school. No one noticed the brightness of the boy's mind until long afterward, when he was sent to a college in France. After he had been there a year, the principal began to see he was not like most boys.

"He will be a great man, unless I am much mistaken," he thought. He was not disappointed.

Daniel studied hard and became a lawyer. His chief thought was always, "Ireland! Poor Ireland! How can I help my country?"

He worked early and late. He studied far into the night. He would have little chance as a lawyer unless he became very wise, and was keen and quick in his wits.

For he was a Catholic. That was much against him. The judges in the courts were Protestants and were ready to favour Protestant lawyers.

But O'Connell's heart was full of courage. He did not lose hope for a single moment.

When he began to practise law, he showed every one what a bright mind he had. He was quick to see little mistakes and point

them out.

He stayed in the court-room during the whole of a trial. He would not leave it for a minute, even if he had been there many hours. He had lunch brought in to him. He was afraid if he left the court that something might be said he ought to hear.

"He is very bright." "He sees every blunder." "He is a sharp-witted fellow." People began to say things like these. Or, perhaps, some bold Irishman would tell his friend, "England can't have it all her own way much longer. Dan O'Connell will see to that."

Now, while this clever young lawyer was busy in the courts in the daytime, he was doing just as important work in the night.

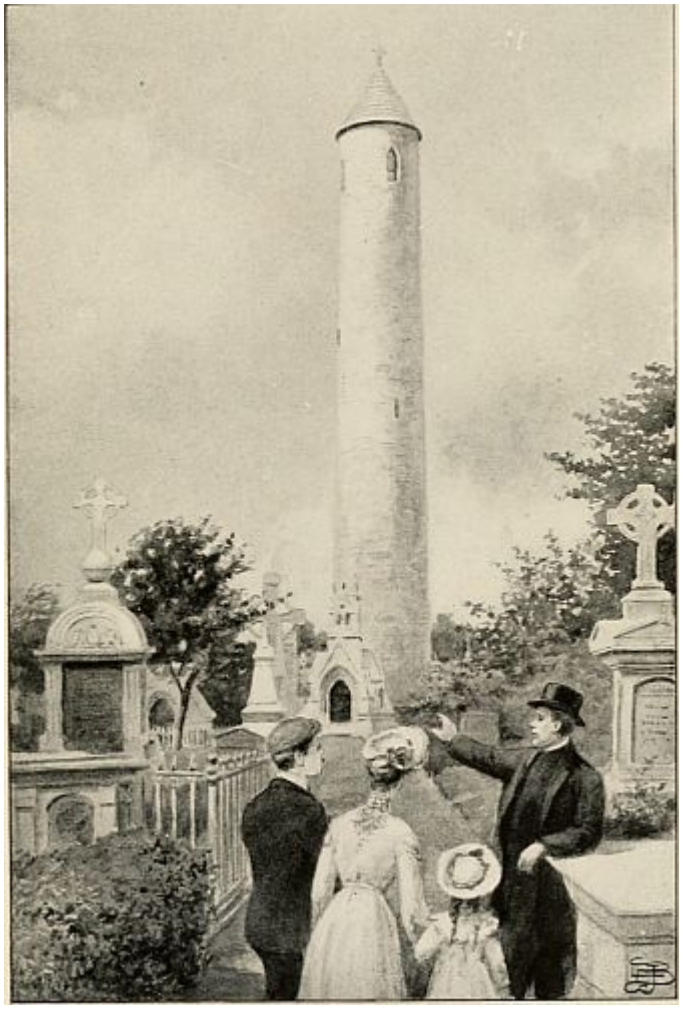
Evening after evening he met with the friends of Ireland. He talked with them of the best way to help their country.

"But no blood must be shed," he would say again and again. "No blood must be shed. That would be too high a price to pay. Besides, it has been fully tried for hundreds of years, and nothing but bitterness and misery has come of it. And yet the Catholics must have equal rights with the Protestants."

He saw only one way of bringing this about. It was by getting all the people to vote alike. Then the English rulers would see how strong and how much in earnest the Irish people were.

There were years of hard work before Daniel O'Connell was able to bring about any change. At last, however, the government of England was obliged to pass a law giving Catholics the right to vote and hold office the same as Protestants.

It is said that when the king signed the law he was so angry he broke the pen with which it was done, and stamped upon it. But he knew he had to do it, and there was no way out of it.



THE MONUMENT TO DANIEL O'CONNELL.

Daniel O'Connell had won. He was the great Liberator of his religion in Great Britain.

He now tried to gain a separate government for Ireland. But he did not live to finish his work. He was seized with illness. This very time was the beginning of the dreadful famine.

O'Connell could not keep his mind from thinking of the sufferings of his people, and so, of course, he gained no strength. His doctors gave up hope.

The great lawyer and Liberator had but one wish now. He would like to die in Rome under the blessing of the Pope. He did not live

long enough to reach the religious capital of the Catholic world, but his heart was preserved and sent there, by his own wish.

His body was sent to Ireland, where there was a grand funeral.

A great monument stands to-day in the city of Dublin. It was built in honour of Ireland's brave helper and true lover, Daniel O'Connell.

It is shaped like the round towers still standing here and there throughout Ireland. They are so old that no one knows when or why they were built. They stand tall and straight and strong and silent. But it seems as though they would say, "Look at us and think of the grand old days of Erin!"

Some people think they were watch-towers from which the enemy could be discovered far away.

When the people wished to build a monument to Daniel O'Connell, they thought nothing would be more proper than a copy of the old watch-towers still standing in the country and reminding every one of the old glories of Ireland.

As Norah's father finished the story, the little girl got up softly and went to a drawer, from which she drew a picture. It was that of a white hound, the dog Daniel O'Connell loved so much.

"Father," she said, putting her arms around his neck, "if you ever see a white hound at the fair in Killarney, please buy it for your little Norah. I will love it tenderly for the sake of that great man."

CHAPTER V.

KILLARNEY

"MOTHER, mother! Mollie says can I go with her for a day at Killarney?" cried Norah, rushing into the house quite out of breath.

And, indeed, it was no wonder. She had run every step from her friend Mollie's, which was a good half-mile away.

Mollie's father seemed quite rich in Norah's eyes. He had a farm, where he kept three cows and twenty sheep. Yes, and a horse besides. Not a donkey, mind you. Two of Norah's neighbours owned donkeys, but Mollie's father was so well off that he had a real live horse, and a jaunting-car of his very own.

When the work was not heavy, the farmer sometimes took his family for a day's pleasure.

"If it is fine weather to-morrow," he promised Mollie, "you shall ask Norah to go with us. It will be a rale treat for her."

How Norah's eyes sparkled as she told her mother of the invitation! Her cheeks were more rosy than ever, and as she laughed over the good news, her teeth looked for all the world like the loveliest of pearls.

The next morning she was out-of-doors at sunrise, to see what signs there were of good weather. Dame Nature was very kind to the little girl, and made the sun spread his loveliest colours over the eastern sky.

There was a great scrubbing and cleaning before Norah was ready to start. Her mother combed and brushed her thick, long hair, and made it into two glossy braids. What did it matter if there was no

hat to wear! She was so pretty, she did not need straw or ribbon to make people stop to look at the bright, happy face, with eyes ever ready to laugh or cry.

When she was dressed in her pink cotton gown (it was the only one she had, and her mother had washed and ironed and mended it the night before, after Norah had gone to bed), she ate her breakfast, and slipped over the fields to Mollie's, as happy as a lark.

The horse and car already stood waiting at the door. Mollie and Norah, and Mollie's sister Bridget, sat together on one side of the car, while the jolly farmer, with his wife and baby, filled the other seat. Mollie's big brother Tim was the driver.

As they jogged along through the beautiful country, the party sang "Killarney" and other favourite songs. After awhile, Mollie's mother started "The harp that once thro' Tara's halls," and every one joined in with a will.

When the song came to an end, the farmer told the children about an old harper who used to go wandering through the country. He stopped at every place to play the tunes the people loved so well.

But that was before Mollie and Norah were born. Yes, before even the farmer himself was born. He had heard his mother tell about the old man, and how bright his eyes grew as his fingers drew out the tunes from the harp.

Once upon a time there were many such harpers in the country. Those were the days of the Irish kings and lords. There were feasts and dancing and music in many a stone castle in those times.

But now, alas, most of the castles are only ruins, where the kindly ivy covers the piles of stones, and the wind howls through the empty door and window places.

One castle was the grandest of all. It was called the Hall of Tara, and was built on the top of a high hill. Mollie and Norah had often heard of the doings in that grand building.

It was the place where the Irish princes met together to choose their king. It was there that he was crowned, upon an upright stone that actually roared during the ceremony. At least, so the story runs.

The laws of the country were made in the Hall of Tara, and a great feast was served there before commencing business each day. Three loud blasts were sounded by the trumpeter to call the people together in the great dining-room.

Not only princes and nobles met in Tara's Hall. There were also poets and wise men. For those were the days when Ireland had places of learning where many scholars gathered, to study history and poetry, the movements of the sun and stars, and many other things. Those were great days for Old Ireland.

"Oh, see! See!" cried Norah.

Mollie's brother stopped the horse to let every one see the beautiful sight before them. The lovely lakes, shut in by high mountains, were ahead of them.

"They are the jewels of Erin," cried Mollie's mother. "They are diamonds sparkling on the breast of our country."

It was no wonder she spoke as she did. It would be hard to find any spot in the world more beautiful than the Lakes of Killarney.

As the horse started up once more, they passed high stone walls covered with moss and ferns and ivy. The branches of tall trees met together over their heads, with vines wound lovingly about their trunks. The whole view was so beautiful that even the children became quiet. No one felt like talking.

"We will not spend any time in Killarney town," said Mollie's father. "This is going to be a day outdoors, childer. We'll have a rale picnic."

Mollie and Norah clapped their hands.

"We must go to Ross Castle, that's sure. And of course you want to visit Muckross Abbey and hear the echo below the Eagle's Nest," the farmer went on.

"Castle Lough and Glenna bay,
Mountains Tore and Eagle's Nest;
Still at Muckross you must pray,
Though the monks are now at rest."

So sang the girls in answer.

You must know that Killarney is the most beautiful part of the beautiful country of Ireland. One day is not enough to see all that is worth seeing.

No one could blame the children for not wanting to spend any of their time in the little dirty town at the end of the lakes.

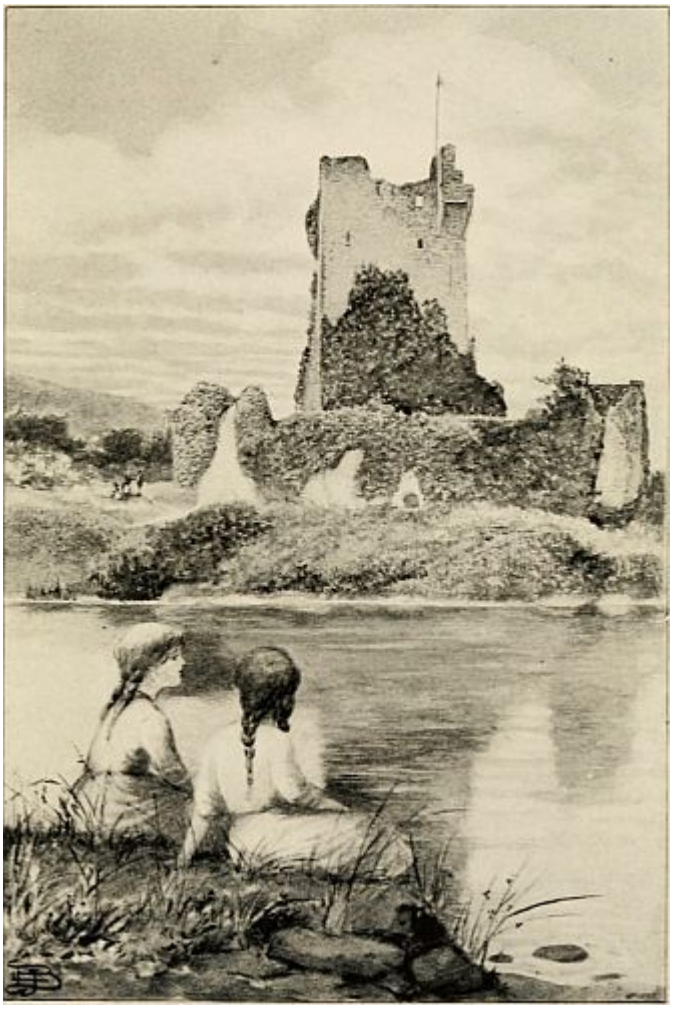
The horse was driven close to the shore of Lough Lean, or the Lake of Learning. This is the name given it by the people of the country because two universities once stood near its shores.

The party got out of the jaunting-car and sat down at the water's edge to eat their lunch. There were no cakes or pies, but nothing could have tasted better to the hungry children than the thick slices of bread and butter, the home-made cheese, and the rich goat's milk.

And then, every time they lifted their eyes they could see the green meadows on one side, and on the other the mountains covered with purple heather and thick forests.

Out on the clear waters of Lough Lean were many little islands, looking like so many emeralds set in the silvery bosom of the lake.

"What lovely homes they would make for the fairies," whispered Norah to Mollie. She always spoke of the fairies in a whisper. Perhaps she felt they might be provoked if she mentioned them in her usual voice.



NORAH AND MOLLIE AT LOUGH LEAN.

"I believe they choose just such places to live in," answered Mollie. "I think there must be hawthorn-trees growing there."

Both Norah and Mollie believed in fairies. They had as much faith in them as many little boys and girls in America have in Santa Claus. They thought hawthorn-trees the favourite places for the midnight parties of the fairies. It was in the shade of the hawthorn-trees that these beautiful sprites feasted on dew, and danced to the music of fairy harps.

As the children sat whispering together, Molly's father began to tell the story of Lough Lean. The little girls were only too glad to listen.

He told the old legend of the time when there was no lake at all. A fine city stood here in its place, and in the city there lived a brave warrior, whose name was O'Donaghue.

Everything one could wish for was in the city except plenty of water. There was one small spring, to be sure. A great magician had given it to the people. But he had made one condition, which was this: whoever drew water from the spring must cover it with a certain silver vessel.

It happened one day that the brave O'Donaghue drank more wine than he should. It made him very bold. He ordered his servants to go to the spring and bring him the silver bowl that covered it.

"It will make a good bathtub for me," he said, and he laughed merrily.

"Pray don't make us do this," cried his frightened servants.

He laughed all the louder, and answered: "Don't be afraid. The water will be all the better for the fresh night air."

The silver bowl was brought to the daring warrior. But as the servants entered the house, they imagined they heard terrible sounds about them.

They shook with fear as they thought, "We are going to be punished for breaking the magician's command."

One of the servants was so frightened that he left the city and fled to the mountains. It was well for him that he did so, for when the morning came, he looked down into the valley and saw no city at all.

Not a sign of a house or living being was in sight. A sheet of water was stretched out before his astonished eyes. It was the beautiful Lough Lean.

As Mollie's father repeated the legend, the children bent over the lake. Perhaps they could see the roofs of palaces, or the tops of towers, still standing on the bottom of the water. They had heard of

people who said they had seen them. But the children were disappointed.

Perhaps when they went rowing in the afternoon, they might yet catch a glimpse of the hidden city. Who could tell?

Mollie's father had more to tell of another man, whose name was also O'Donaghue. He pointed to a little island not far from the shore. It was Ross Island, and an old, old castle, called Ross Castle, was still standing there.

The stone walls were now in ruins. They were overgrown with moss and ivy. But hundreds and hundreds of years ago it was a great stronghold of Ireland's bravest warriors.

The chief of them all was the daring O'Donaghue. Even now he cannot rest easy in his grave. Every seven years he rises up, and, mounting a white horse, rides around Ross Castle. And as he rides every stone goes back into its old place, and the castle is once more as strong and grand as in its best days.

But this is only for the one night. When the sun shines the next morning, a heap of ruins is standing there, where the owls and bats may keep house in comfort.

"How I should like to see the knight on his white horse!" said Norah.

"Yes, but I should be afraid, I'm sure," said Mollie. "After all, the day is the best time to be outdoors, and my bed at home is the safest place after dark."

When the lunch was eaten, the whole party crossed a bridge that spanned the water to Ross Island. The children played games over the smooth lawns, picked flowers, and told fairy stories.

Then Mollie's brother rowed the girls out on the lake. Many a time he rested on his oars while the children called out and then listened for the echo to answer them.

"There it is, hark!" said Tim.

A party of travellers came rowing toward them. They had hired an Irish piper to go with them. As he played a slow tune, the answer came back.

Tim whistled, and the echo repeated it. Then Norah sang the first line of "Come Back to Erin," and the echo sang it back again.

But the afternoon was going fast, and the children could now hear Mollie's father calling to them from the shore. They must get back to land as soon as possible.

When they reached the car, they jumped in, and all started at once for Muckross Abbey, at the other end of the lake.

It had once been a great place of learning, but it was now in ruins. Ah! but such beautiful ruins, covered with mosses and creeping vines. How the ivy seemed to love the old stone walls!

Some of Ireland's greatest men were buried here. Poets and soldiers and wise men lie in their tombs. Norah and Mollie stepped softly and spoke in low tones as they walked among them, half-buried in moss and ivy.

But they did not linger long. They loved the sunshine and the brightness outside, and were glad to get back to them.

They took their places in the jaunting-car once more, and started on their homeward way.

As they drove along, they passed the grand home of a rich Englishman. A long and fine driveway led up to it from the road. It was almost hidden in a lovely grove.

Just as they drew near, a party of horsemen passed them and turned into the driveway, blowing their horns. They had been out hunting and were now returning.

"Arrah! they have a jolly life," said Mollie's mother. "Hunting and fishing and feasting. That is the way they pass their days. But, glory be to God, I have my husband and childer and our little farm, and I am content."

She might have said, also:

"I live in the most beautiful part of beautiful Ireland. I can look to my heart's content at the lovely hills and lakes, the fields filled with flowers, and the cascades rippling down the mountainsides."

Yes, let glory be to God that the poor can enjoy these blessings, and it costs them nothing.

CHAPTER VI.

HALLOWE'EN

"Iт's jumping wid joy I am," said Norah.

It was the eve of the first day of November, and the little girl was putting on a new dress. Her father had been to the pig fair at Killarney. He had sold his pigs for a good price, and had brought home enough blue cloth to make gowns for both Norah and Katie.

But what is a pig fair? perhaps you are wondering. It is like any other fair in the old countries, except that little else is sold besides pigs.

Pigs! pigs! pigs! Big pigs and little pigs. Pigs rolling in fat and weighing a good three hundred pounds. Little baby pigs, pink and white, and too young to leave their mothers.

Streets full of men and pigs. Everybody talking, and many of them laughing and telling each other funny stories.

And all along the sides of the roads were horses and donkeys fastened to queer-looking wagons, in which the pigs had been brought to market.

Oh, a pig fair is a jolly sight, as Norah's brother would tell you.

The two blue dresses were made in a hurry by the mother, and now the whole family were going to a party at Mollie's house. It was to celebrate Hallowe'en. Patsy had to go, too, for there was no one to leave him with at home.

There was no baby-carriage for him. But that did not matter. He could go on his mother's broad back, after she had wrapped a big

shawl over her shoulders.

The father led the procession. He felt very grand in a coat with long tails and a tall hat.

Of course, Norah and Katie felt fine in their new gowns. They walked behind their mother, looking from time to time at her new red petticoat, and then at their own dresses.

It seemed a longer walk than usual, because they were so anxious to get there and join in the sport.

"Hear the piper, hear the piper!" shouted Katie, as they at last drew near the farmhouse. And her little bare feet began to dance along the path.

A minute more, and the house door opened wide, and the visitors were made welcome.

The kitchen was not large, and it was already well filled. The big bed had been moved over into a corner to make room for dancing. The older people, who did not dance, sat on the edge of the bed, while the children nestled together on the floor against the wall.

The turf fire was glowing in the big fireplace, and giving a pleasant welcome to all. On the rafters overhead, some hens were fast asleep, not seeming to mind the music and laughter in the least.

The piper was playing his jolliest tunes, and two young people were dancing a jig when Norah arrived.

"Good! good!" cried the rest of the company, as the young girl went around and around the young man, her partner, never once losing the step. Her heavy shoes made a great clatter as they came down on the paved floor.

Her face grew redder and redder. Her breath came harder and harder, but she would not give up dancing till the piper himself left off playing.

"Let us bob for apples now," said the host. "We will give these young folks a chance to get their breath."

A big tub of water was brought in, and some apples were set floating in it. Who would duck for the apples? Every one who had a chance. It did not matter how old or how young they might be.

It was such fun! One head after another went down into the water to see who could seize an apple between his teeth without using his hands to help him.

When the company grew tired of this sport, there were other games and more lively dances.

Then there were refreshments. There was plenty of tea for the big folks, and bread and cheese and potato cakes for all.

As they sat eating, the piper began to play a soft, sad tune.

"They do say he learned it of the fairies," whispered Mollie to Norah.

Just then, the children's school-teacher came and sat down beside them. He heard the word "Fairies."

"Do you believe in fairies?" he asked Norah.

She lifted her blue eyes in surprise.

"Sure, sir. They live in the hills and caves. And there be some, I have heard, who have their homes under the waves of the sea. This night they are more lively than at most times.

"Mother was careful this morning not to drain the milk-pail. She wanted to leave a drop in case the fairy folk should come along and wish for a sup. And sure, sir, father never puts the fire out at night. He says maybe the fairies might like to rest a bit on our hearth before the morning."

The schoolmaster smiled, but did not contradict the little girl. He thought it would only trouble the child.

Norah's father had once said, "The teacher is a man of great larnin'. And, strange to say, I have heard that people of larnin' have little belief in fairy folk."

"Would you like me to tell you a story?" asked the teacher, after a moment or two.

"Oh, plaze do, indade!" said Norah and Mollie together. They loved their teacher dearly.

Their school was kept in a plain, bare little room with rough benches and desks. There was nothing bright or pretty about it. But their teacher was kind, and tried to help them learn. They were always glad to be with him and hear him talk.

"You have never been to the north of Ireland, have you?" he asked.

"Oh, no, sir. We've never been farther from home than the Lakes of Killarney," answered Mollie.

"But you know, of course, that this is an island, and if you travel to the northeastern shore of Ireland you must cross the sea if you want to go to Scotland."

"Yes, indeed, you showed that to us on the map at school."

"I will tell you of a giant named Finn McCool, who is said to have lived on that rocky shore. Do you know what a giant is?"

"Oh, yes. He's like any other man, only he's ever and ever so much bigger," answered Norah.

"Very well, then. This particular giant wished to fight another giant who lived in Scotland. He invited him to come across the sea to Ireland. But the Scotch giant was not able to swim. So he answered:

"'I would gladly come if I could, but I cannot get across.'

"'It's an aisy matter to make a road for you,' said Finn. 'It is hardly worth speaking about.'

"He set to work at once and built a road, or causeway, made of stone pillars. They were placed close together, and reached upward from the bed of the sea. Of course, the Scotch giant could not refuse to come now."

"Could we see it if we went there?" Mollie eagerly asked.

"You could see a part of it. But, according to the legend, it was broken in two by the sea. Even now, you could walk out upon it for quite a distance. But the causeway slopes downward into the water, and then seems to stop. Some people, however, believe it extends under the sea clear to Scotland.

"It is certainly a wonderful thing, and many people from other countries go to see it.

"Do you suppose it was really the work of giants, children?"

"Indade, whatever else could it be, sir? No common man could do it."

"No one knows; no one knows," said the schoolmaster, thoughtfully. "But come, let us join in the songs. We know more about them."

How sweet and clear the voices sounded, as the favourite tunes of Ireland rang through the farmhouse.

Then came fairy stories and jokes, and the party broke up just as the little wooden clock on the mantel struck the hour of midnight.

CHAPTER VII.

FAIRIES

"WAKE up, me darlint. You have been dozing by the fire long enough," said Norah's father.

It was a cold evening in winter. Patsy was sound asleep in his bed. The good mother sat knitting socks for her husband; Mike was whittling a hockey stick to play with the next day. Little Katie was singing her rag doll to sleep, while Norah lay on the floor by the fireplace with eyes shut tight and breathing softly.

When her father touched her cheek and spoke to her, she sprang up with a sudden start.

"I've been dreaming. Oh, it was such a beautiful dream!" she exclaimed. "I was with the fairies in a big cave. They were having a party, and they looked just lovely. Indade, it was the sweetest dream I ever had."

"Do tell us about it," cried Katie. "Oh, do, Norah. And don't forget a single thing."

Norah's cheeks were rosy red, and her blue eyes sparkled as she painted the dream picture to the listening family.

She had been in the grand hall of a cave. It was like no other hall she had ever seen. The walls were shining with precious stones. Shining pendants hung from the ceiling and glistened in the light given by hundreds of fairy torches.

But the fairies themselves were the loveliest sight of all. Oh, they were such tiny creatures! The young lady fairies were all in white, and their soft, fair hair hung far down over their shoulders.

The young gentlemen fairies wore green jackets and white breeches.

The fairy queen had a golden crown on her head, and when she waved her golden wand, every one hastened to do her bidding.

They all had sweet, kind faces, and looked lovingly at Norah as they danced around her to the fairy music.

When Norah had got this far in her story, she turned to her father, and said:

"Then you called me, and the fairies all looked sad, and then—then—that's all I can remember."

"The fairies are wonderful people, and we must keep them for our friends, but I don't want them to call my Norah away from me. You must never turn your ears to the fairy music, my child."

Norah's father looked serious as he said these words. He had heard of a young girl who had listened to fairy music. It made her lose all love for her dearest friends. She forgot everything that had happened in her life. After that, she could only think of the fairies, and long to be with them. She died a short time afterward.

But, of course, Norah had only been *dreaming* of the fairies. That was quite different.

"Tell us some fairy stories, father dear. It is just the night for them," begged Katie.

Her father liked nothing better. He began at once to tell of a battle between two bands of fairies. It was in the night-time, and not far from the very place where they were living.

Norah's father had seen with his own eyes the man who told the story of the strange battle.

The fairies were no more than nine inches tall, but there were millions of them. They marched along in rows just like any other soldiers. The men of one army were in green coats, and the men of the other in red ones.

When they had drawn up and faced each other, the signal was given to begin the battle.

What a fight it was! The man who saw it became so excited he began to shout. Then, lo and behold! every fairy vanished from sight, and he found himself lying all alone on the roadside.

Had he been asleep? was it all a dream, like that of Norah's? He declared that was impossible.

The mother and children listened eagerly to the story. They believed every word of it.

The father did not stop here. He told now of a grand ball given by the fairies. A woman in Sligo saw it her very own self.

It was out in a big field, and the moon was shining on the beautiful scene. Hundreds of fireflies flew about the fairies, who were dancing like angels.

But the music! There was never anything like it in the world. A big frog played the big fiddle, and two kittens performed on the little ones. Then there were two big drums beaten by cats, while fat little pigs blew the trumpets. It must have been a wonderful sight.

"The fairies are very fond of childer," said Mrs. O'Neil. "They are that fond of them, they sometimes carry away a sleeping baby to their own home and leave a fairy child in its place. And that's the very truth. But come, husband, tell one more story before we go to bed."

"Oh, do, do, father!" cried Mike, and Norah and Katie repeated, "Do, do," after their brother.

How could any father refuse when children begged like that?

Norah took possession of one of his knees, Katie of the other, while Mike stretched himself out on the floor at his father's feet. As soon as all was quiet, they listened to the story of "Ethna, the Bride."

Once upon a time there was a great lord, who had a beautiful young wife. Her name was Ethna. Her husband was so proud of her, he held feasts every day. All the noblest people in the land came to his castle and danced and sang and took part in these feasts.

It happened one evening that, in the very midst of a dance, as the fair Ethna was whirling about through the hall in her rich garments of gauze, studded with sparkling jewels, she sank lifeless to the floor.

"She has fainted, she has fainted," cried the company.

She was carried to a couch, where she lay for hours without knowing anything happening about her.

But as the morning light began to creep in through the window, she awoke and told her husband she had been in the palace of the fairies. It was very, very beautiful. She longed to go back now and listen to the fairy music. It filled her with such joy as she had never felt before.

All that day her friends watched her closely, so she might not leave them again. It was of no use. As soon as the twilight settled down over the castle, there was the sound of soft music outside the walls. Instantly the beautiful Ethna closed her eyes and sank to sleep.

Every means was tried to wake her, but in vain. Her nurse was set to watch her, but for some reason she could not keep awake, and before the night was over, she, too, fell asleep.

When she awoke, she discovered that her charge was missing. Ah! where had she gone?

Every place about the castle was searched, but it was of no use. People were sent now in one direction, now in another, but every one brought back the same word,—there was no sign nor trace of the fair bride. Then the young lord said:

"I know where she must be. She has gone to the fairies. I will go to their king, Finvarra. He has always been a good friend to me. He will help me to get her back."

Little did he dream that the king of the fairies, even Finvarra himself, had fallen in love with Ethna, and had spirited her away from her home.

The young lord mounted his horse, and away he rode at full speed till he came to the hill of the fairies. There he stopped.

All at once he heard voices. This is what he heard:

"Finvarra is happy now. He has won the fair young Ethna. She will never leave his palace again."

"Ah!" was the reply, "it may happen yet. For if her husband digs down through this hill, he can win Ethna again."

"We shall see! We shall see!" exclaimed the lord when he heard these words.

He sent off at once for workmen to come to the fairy hill. They were to bring pickaxes and spades.

"Dig without stopping," was his command. "Dig till you come to the fairy palace."

A great company of men was soon at work. The air rang with the noise of their spades striking against the rocks and earth.

When night came they had made a tunnel into the very heart of the hill. They went home to rest, and with the first light of morning they came back to go on with their work.

But, behold! The hill looked as though no man had touched it. The dirt had all been replaced at the order of the powerful fairy king, Finvarra.

The young lord did not give up hope, however. The men were set to work again, and again the same thing happened as before. The work of the day was undone the next night. A third time the lord tried, and a third time he failed.

He was overcome by sorrow and disappointment, when he heard a soft voice speaking somewhere near him. It said:

"If you sprinkle salt over the earth the men dig up, Finvarra will have no power over it."

Once more the young lord was filled with hope. He sent out into the land in every direction to get quantities of salt from the people. And when the workmen stopped digging at nightfall, the salt was plentifully sprinkled over the earth.

How anxious the young lord was now! Had he really found a way of defeating the fairies? The next morning he eagerly hurried to the hill to see.

What the voice said was really true. The tunnel was just as it had been left the night before. Another day's work was enough to see it dug clear to the middle of the hill, and far down into the earth.

And then the men, putting their ears to the ground, could hear fairy music. Voices, too, could be heard around them. This is what they heard:

"Finvarra is sad at heart. It is no wonder. His palace will crumble to dust, if one of these mortals touches it with his spade."

"Why does he not save us then, and give up the young bride?" said another voice.

Then King Finvarra himself spoke, in a true kingly way. He commanded the workmen to stop digging, promising that at sunset he would give Ethna up to her husband.

The young lord was glad of heart, and told the men to lay down their spades. He could hardly wait for evening to come. But it did come at last, and found the impatient husband sitting on his handsome horse and waiting by the hillside for his bride.

As the sun lighted the western sky with his most glorious colours, Ethna, dressed in her silver robe, appeared in the pathway before her husband.

He swept her from the ground in his strong arms, and away they galloped back to the castle.

But it was not the same Ethna as before the fairy spell had been cast upon her. Oh, no! She seemed like one half-asleep. Day after

day she lay on her bed with her eyes closed. She did not move or speak.

"She has eaten of the fairy food," said the people. "It will be impossible to break the spell that has been cast upon her." And every one was filled with grief.

Three months passed by with no change in Ethna. One night, as the young lord was riding through the country, he heard a voice speaking near him. It said:

"The young husband won back his beautiful bride. But what good has it done him? Her spirit is still with the fairies, and, as far as he is concerned, she is like one dead."

As soon as this voice became silent, another could be heard, saying:

"There is one way to break the fairy spell. Her husband must take off her girdle and burn it. Then he must scatter the ashes before the door. He must not forget to take the enchanted pin by which the girdle is now fastened and bury it in a deep hole in the earth. This is the only way of regaining the spirit of his wife."

At these words the young lord was filled with new hope.

He hurried home as fast as his swiftest horse could carry him, and went at once to the room of his sleeping wife.

He hastened to her side, and began to do exactly as the voice had directed.

He drew out the enchanted pin. He removed the girdle. He burned it in the fire. Then, carefully gathering the ashes, he scattered them before the door. The enchanted pin was buried in a deep hole.

He went anxiously back to Ethna's room.

She was already coming back to life. As her husband stood at her side, she began to smile at him in her old, sweet way.

And now she moved and spoke, and took up her life as in the days before the fairy spell was cast upon her.

Her husband and all others in the castle were filled with happiness. There was great rejoicing. The beautiful Ethna was safe, and King Finvarra never again tried to win her to the fairy realm.

Is it a true story? some one asks. If you do not believe it, you need only go to the hill through which the tunnel was dug. It can be seen, even now. And people still call it the Fairies' Glen.

When Norah's father finished the story, the children begged him to tell "just one more, plaze." But he pointed to the clock.

"Late, late it is for you childer to be up," he said. "It is to bed ye must go this very minute."

A quarter of an hour afterward, every one in the little cabin was settled for the night.

CHAPTER VIII.

BLARNEY CASTLE

NORAH'S friend, Mollie, had just got home from a long journey. At least it seemed a long one to Norah, who had never been farther away from home than the Lakes of Killarney.

Mollie had been all the way to Cork and Queenstown with her father and mother. They went to see Mollie's uncle start for America on a big steamer.

Queenstown is at the mouth of the River Lee. It used to be called the Cove of Cork, but the name was changed to Queenstown in honour of Queen Victoria.

It seemed a very big place to Mollie. As she described the queer cars running through the city, and the great steamers at the docks, it was a wonderful picture that little Norah saw in her mind.

Mollie had gone there in a railway train. When the guard shut her and her parents inside the car and locked the door, she was a little frightened at first. Then the engine gave a fearful shriek, and the train moved.

There were many other people in the car, or rather "compartment of the railway carriage," as they call it in the British Isles. Their cars are divided into three or four parts, with doors opening on the sides. Each part is called a compartment.

It was quite a jolly crowd. Every one seemed in good humour, and strangers were soon talking together as if they had always known each other. They told funny stories, they joked and laughed, and Mollie soon forgot her fear of the fast moving train. "It was just like a party," she told Norah.

At every station, the guard unlocked the door and let out those who were going no farther. Others then got in, so the company was changing all the time.

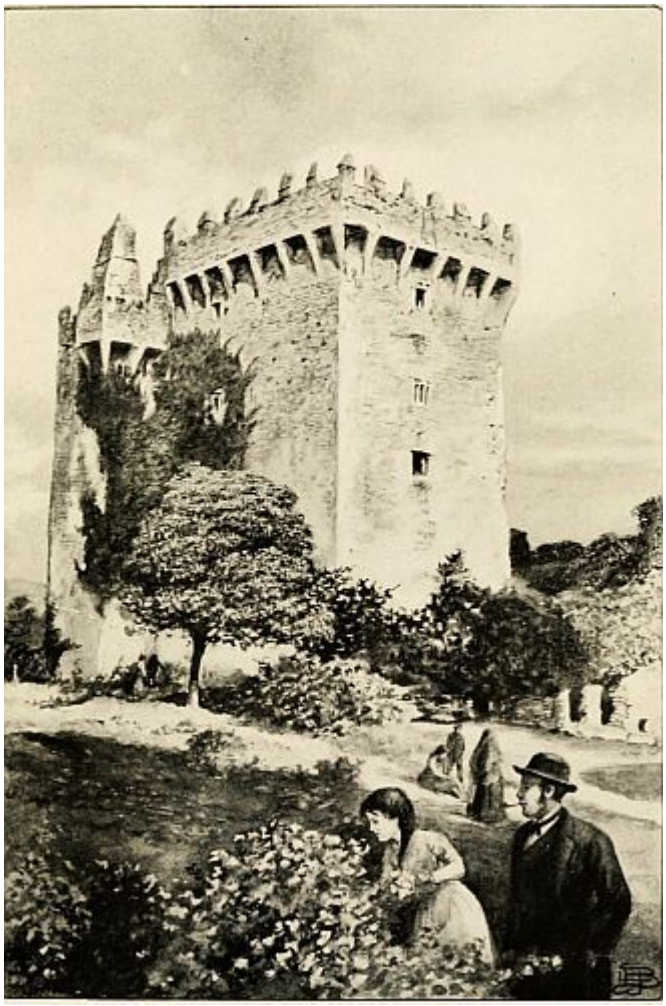
The compartment in which Mollie rode was a third-class one, and the floor and seats were quite bare. But these things did not trouble the little girl. Her parents could not afford to buy tickets to go first or second-class. They were glad enough to be able to go at all.

Cork was reached at last, and Mollie could hardly sleep nights after going about the city in the daytime and seeing the strange sights.

When her uncle had gone away on the big steamer, she went with her father and mother into some of the mills and factories. She saw glass spun into beautiful shapes, woollen cloths woven by huge machines, and many other things made as if by magic.

"Sure, it seems as if these big wheels must be turned by the fairies," she said to Norah, as she told her little friend of what she had seen.

It was all very interesting, but Norah liked best of all to hear of Mollie's visit to Blarney Castle. She asked her to repeat it over and over again.



MOLLIE AND HER FATHER VISIT BLARNEY CASTLE.

Not far away from Cork is the busy little town of Blarney. And a little way out from Blarney is an old, old castle which is visited by people from all over the world.

Did you ever hear of the Blarney Stone? Or did you ever hear one person say to another, who has made a very polite or flattering speech, "Well, well, I think you must have kissed the Blarney Stone?"

Perhaps you did not understand the reason for such a remark. Now you shall hear it.

If you ever climb to the top of the walls of Blarney Castle and look down over the walls on the outside, you will see a certain stone.

It is a magic stone, you may be told. It has a great charm, for, if you kiss it, you will be blessed ever after with the power of eloquent speech. Your words to charm and wheedle will never fail you. You will always be able to say the right thing in the right place at the right time. You will say it so well you will make yourself very pleasing to your listeners.

But how is anybody able to kiss the Blarney Stone? It is too far down to be reached from the top, and too far up to be reached from the bottom. There is only one way. You must have a rope tied to your waist, and trust some one to let you down over the wall till you reach it.

There are some people foolish enough to do this very thing.

As Mollie stood looking and wishing she dared try it, she heard some one telling a story. It was about a young man who got his friends to lower him out over the wall.

But, just as his lips touched the stone, a shower of coins fell to the ground below. The young man had forgotten to take the money out of his pockets.

Every one laughed at the story, and Mollie wished she could have been there to see the funny sight.

"I didn't kiss the real Blarney Stone," she told Norah. "But there was one inside the walls. It was a sort of make-believe Blarney Stone, and we all kissed that instead."

"Daniel O'Connell must have been to Blarney Castle and kissed the stone," said Norah, quite seriously. "How else could he have had the power to move every one by his words? He was a great man. When I grow up, I'll be after going to the great city of Dublin to see his monimint. You see if I don't, Mollie darlint."

"Maybe we'll be going together, Norah," was the answer.

And the two little girls skipped arm in arm across the fields of the beautiful Emerald Isle.

THE END.

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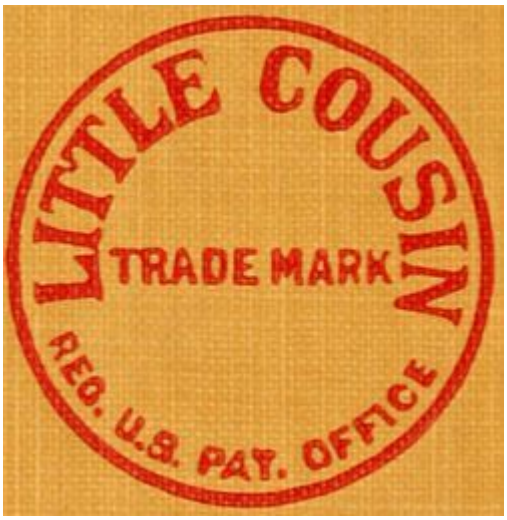

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