

Literature, &c.

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THE SCHOOLMASTER'S DREAM.
AN IRISH TALE, BY MRS. S. C. HALL.

JAMES O'LEARY was a school master of great learning, and still greater repute; his school was the most crowded of any school within fifty miles of Killgubbin—yet he modestly designated it his 'Small College,' and his pupils 'his thrille of boys.' O'Leary never considered the 'vulgarians'—as he termed those who only learn English, writing, and arithmetic—worth counting. No boy, in his estimation, merited naming or notice until he entered Virgil; he began his school catalogue with 'the Virgils,' but was so decidedly proud of his 'Homorians,' that he often regretted that he had no opportunity of 'taking the shine out of them ignorant chaps up at Dublin college' by a display of his 'Gracians'—five or six clearheaded intelligent boys whose brogues were on their tongue; whose clothes hung upon them by a mystery, and yet poor fellows! were as proud of their Greek and as fond of capping Latin verses, as their master himself.

James O'Leary deserved his reputation to a certain extent, as all do who achieve one. In his boyhood he had been himself a poor scholar and travelled the country for his learning; he had graduated at the best hedge school in the kingdom of Kerry, and at one time had an idea of entering Maynooth; but fortunately, or unfortunately, as it might be, he lost his vocation by falling in love and marrying Mary Byrne, to whom, despite, a certain quantity of hardness and pedantry, he always made a kind husband, although Mary, docile and intelligent in every other respect, never could achieve her A, B, C, this he was fond of instancing as a proof of the inferiority of the fair sex. James looked with the greatest contempt at the system adopted by the National schools, declaring that Latin was the foundation upon which all intellectual education should be raised. And that the man who had no Latin was not worthy of being considered a man at all.

Donnybeg the parish in which he resided, was a very remote silent district—an isolated place, belonging chiefly to an apologetic old gentleman, whose father having granted long leases on remunerating terms, left him a certain income, sufficient for himself, and not distressing to others. The simple farmers had so long considered Master O'Leary a miracle, and he confirmed them in this opinion so frequently, by saying in various languages which they had not understood if spoken in vernacular, that when a national school was proposed in the parish by some officious person, they offered to send up their schoolmaster attended by his Latin and Greek scholars—tail fashion—to 'bother the board.' This threw James into a state of such excitement, that he could hardly restrain himself, and indeed his wife does not hesitate to say, that he has never been right since.

The old Landlord was as decided an enemy to the National school system as the master himself, and the matter dropped without O'Leary having an opportunity of 'flooring the board,' which he bitterly regrets. James for many years after his establishment at Donnybeg, was exceedingly kind to the itinerant class of scholars, of whose merits he was so bright an example. For a long time his college was the refuge of every poor scholar, who received gratuitous instructions from the 'Master,' and the attention and tenderness of a mother from the 'Mistress.' This generosity on the part of James O'Leary increased his reputation, and won him a great many blessings from the poor, while pupils thronged to him from distant parts of the kingdom—not only the itinerant scholar, but the sons of snug farmers who boarded in his neighbourhood, and paid largely for the classics and all accomplishments. This James found very profitable: in due time he slated his house, placing a round stone as a pinnacle on either gable, representing, the one the terrestrial and the other the celestial globe; he paved the little courtyard with the multiplication table in black and white stones; and constructed a summer-house, to use his own phrase, on 'Geometrical principles,' whose interior was decorated with maps and triangles, and every species of information. If pupils came before, they 'rained on him,' after his 'Tusculum' was finished; and he had its name painted on a Gothic arch above the gate, which, such was the inveteracy of old habits, always stood open for want of a latch. But somehow, though James's fortunes improved, there was something about his heart that was not right; he began to consider learning only valuable as a means of wealth; he became civil to rich dunces, and continually snubbed a first rate 'Gracian,' who was, it is true, only a poor scholar. This feeling like all others, at first merely tolerated, gained ground by degrees, until Master O'Leary put the question frequently to himself—'Why he should do good and bother himself about those who did no good to him?' He had never ventured to say this out aloud to any one, but he had at last whispered it so often to himself, that one evening seeing Mary busily occupied turning round some preparation in a little iron pot, reserved for delicate stir-about, gruel, or a 'cup of broth'—which he knew on that particular occasion was intended for the 'Gracian' who had been unwell for some days—after knocking the ashes

out of his pipe, and closing and clasping his thumbed Homer, he said, 'Mary cant ye sit still at the wheel, now that the day's almost gone, and nature becomes soporific?—what signifies an inclination to repose?'

'In a minute dear, it's for poor Aby—he's sick entirely, and has no one to look to him. The place where he lodges has no convenience for a drop of whey—and if it had the whey nothing to turn it with, and nothing to make it of—so I'll sit down at once.'

'Then why don't you sit down at once? why do you sit wasting your time—to say nothing of the sweet milk—and the, he was going to say 'the sour,' but was ashamed, and so added 'other things—for one who does no good for us?'

'No good for us,' repeated Mary as she poured off the whey, keeping the curd carefully back with a horn spoon. 'No good to us dear? why it's for Aby—the what as you call him—Aby Gradus? No Aby the Gracian—your top boy—as he used to be—he that his old grandmother—(God help us!—he had no other kith or kin)—walked ten miles just to see him stand at the head of his class, that she might die with an easy heart—It's for him it is—'

'Well,' replied the master, 'I know that; I know it's for him—and I'll tell you what, Mary, we are growing—not to say ould—but advancing to the region of middle life—past its meridian, indeed—and we can't afford to be throwing away our substance on the like of Aby—'

'James!' exclaimed Mary.

'Ay, indeed, Mary; we must come to a period—a full stop, I mean—and—he drew a deep breath, then added—'and take no more poor scholars!'

'Oh, James, don't say the likes o' that,' said the gentle hearted woman; 'don't—a poor scholar never came into the house that I didn't feel as if he brought fresh air from heaven with him—I never miss the bit I gave them—my heart warms to the soft homely sound of their bare feet on the floor, and the door a'most opens of itself to let them in.'

'Still, we must take care of ourselves, woman dear,' replied James with a dogged look. 'Why the look should be called "dogged," I do not know, for dogs are anything but obstinate, or given to it; but he put on the sort of look so called; and Mary, not moved from her purpose, covered the mouth of the jug with a large red apple-potato, and beckoning a neighbour's child, who was napping over the multiplication table in the little courtyard, desired her to run for her life, with the jug, while it was hot, to the house where Aby stopped that week, and be sure to tell him he was to take it after he had said his prayers, and while it was screeching hot. She then drew her wheel opposite her husband, and began spinning.

'I thought, James,' she said, 'that Abel was a strong pet of yours, though you've cooled to him of late; I am sure he got you a deal of credit.'

'All I'll ever get by him.'

'Oh, don't say that!—sure the blessing is a fine thing; and all the learning you give out, James, honey, doesn't lighten what you have in your head, which is a grate wonder. If I only take the meal out of the losset, handful by handful, it wastes away; but your brains hold out better than the meal, take ever so much away, and there's the same still.'

'Mary, you're a fool, agair!' answered her husband; but he smiled. The schoolmaster was a man, and all men like flattery even from their wives.

'And that's one reason, dear, why you can't be a loser by giving your learning to them that wants it,' she continued; 'it does them good, and does you no harm.'

The schoolmaster made no answer, and Mary continued. She was a true woman, getting her husband into good humour before she intimated her object.

'I've always thought a red head lucky, dear.'

'The ancients valued the colour highly,' he answered.

'Think of that now! And a boy I saw to-day had just such another lucky mole as yourself under his left eye.'

'What boy?' inquired the master.

'A poor fatherless and motherless craythur, with his Vosters and little books slung in the strap at his back, and a purty tidy second suit of clothes under his arm for Sunday. It put me in mind of the way you told me you set off poor scholarly yerself, darlin'!—all as one as that poor little boy, barrin the second suit of clothes.'

'What did he want?' inquired O'Leary, resuming his bad temper; for Mary made a mistake in her second hit. She judged of his character by her own. Prosperity had rendered her more thoughtful and anxious to dispense the blessings she enjoyed, but it had hardened her husband.

'Just six months of your teaching to make a man of him, that's all.'

'Has he money to pay for it?'

'I'm sure I never asked him. The trifle collected for a poor scholar is little enough to give him a bit to eat, without paying anything to a strong man like yourself, James O'Leary; only just the ase and contentment it brings to one's sleep by night, and one's work by day, to be after doing a kind turn to a fellow-Christian.'

'Mary,' replied the schoolmaster, in a slow and decided tone; 'that's all botheration.'

Mary gave a start; she could hardly believe she heard correctly; but there sat James O'Leary, looking as hard as if he had been turned from a man of flesh into a man of stone.

'Father of mercy!' she exclaimed, 'spake

again, man alive! and tell us is it yerself that's in it?'

James laughed—not joyously or humorously, but a little dry half-starved laugh, lean and hungry—a niggardly laugh; but before he had time to reply, the door opened slowly and timidly, and a shock of rusty red hair, surmounting a pale acute face, entered, considerably in advance of the body to which it belonged.

'That's the boy I told you of,' said Mary. Come in *mabouchal*; the master himself's in now, and will talk to you.'

The boy advanced his slight delicate form bowed both by study and privation; and his keen penetrating eyes looking out from beneath the projecting brows which overshadowed them.

Mary told him to sit down; but he continued standing, his fingers twitching convulsively amid the leaves of a Latin book, in which he hoped to be examined.

'What's your name?—and stand up!' said the master gruffly.

The boy told him his name was Edward Moore, and asked 'if he would give him the run of the school, an odd lesson now and again and let him pick up as much as he could?'

'And what,' inquired O'Leary, 'will you give me in return?'

'I have but little sir,' replied the boy, 'for my mother had six of us, paying to one, whose face we never see, a heavy rent for the shed we starve under. My father's in heaven—my eldest sister a cripple—and but for the kindness of the neighbours, and the goodness of one or two families at Christmas and Whitsuntide, and above all, the blessing of God, which never leaves us, we might turn out upon the road—and beg.'

'But all this is nothing to me,' said O'Leary coldly.

'I know that sir,' answered the boy, yet he looked as if he did not know it, 'though your name's up in the country for kindness as well as learning. But I was coming to it—I have a trifle of about eighteen shillings, besides which the priest warned me to keep, when I went for his blessing, as he said I might want it in case of sickness, and I was thinking if yer honor would take the ten out of the eighteen, for a quarter; or so, I know I can't pay yer honor as I ought, only just for the love of God, and if ye'd please to examine me in the Latin, his reverence said I'd be no disgrace to you.'

'Just let me see what you've got,' said the schoolmaster. The boy drew forth from inside his waistcoat the remnant of a cotton nightcap, and held it towards the schoolmaster's extended hand; but Mary stood between her husband and his temptation.

'Put it up child,' she said, 'the master don't want it; he had only amind to see if it was sale.' Then aside to her husband, 'let fall your hand James, it's the devil that's under your elbow keeping it out, nibbling as the fishes do at the hook! is it the thin shillings of a widow's son ye'd be after taking? It's not yourself that's in it at all.' Then to the boy, 'Put it up dear and come in the morning.'

But the silver had shone in the master's eye through the worn out knitting—the thin shillings' as Mary called them—and their chink aroused his avarice the more. So, standing up, he put aside his wife, as men often do good council, with a strong arm, and declared that he would have all or none; and that with out pay he would receive no pupil. The boy thirsting for learning, almost without hesitation agreed to give him all he possessed, only saying that 'the lord above would raise us up some friend who would give him a bit, a sup, and a lock of straw, and a lock of straw to sleep on.' Thus the bargain was struck, the penniless child turned from the door, knowing that at least for that night, he would receive shelter from some kind hearted cotter, and perhaps give in exchange tuition to those who could not afford to go to the 'great master,' while the dispenser of knowledge, chinking the 'thin shillings,' strode towards a well heaped hoard to add thereto the mite of a fatherless boy. Mary crouched over the cheerful fire, rocking herself backwards and forwards in real sorrow, and determined to consult the priest on the change that had come over her husband, turning him out of his self into 'something not right.'

This was O'Leary's first public attempt to work out his determination, and he was thoroughly ashamed of himself, he did not care to encounter Mary's reproachful looks, so he brought over his blotted desk, and sat with his back to her, apparently intent on his books; but despite all he could do, his mind went wandering back to the time he was a poor scholar himself; and no matter whether he looked over problems, or turned leaves of Homer, there was the pale gentle face of the poor scholar, whom he had 'fleece' to the uttermost.

'Mary,' he said, anxious to be reconciled to himself, 'there was never one of them poor scholars that had not twice as much as they pertended.'

'Was that the way with yerself, avick?' she answered. James pushed back the desk, flung the ruler at the cat, bounced the door after him, and went to bed. He did not fall very soon asleep—nor when he did, he did not sleep very soundly—but tossed and tumbled about in a most undignified manner; so much so, that his poor wife left off rocking, and taking out her beads, began praying as fast and hard as she could, and she believed her prayers took effect, for he soon became tranquil and slept soundly. But Mary went on praying. She was accounted and was called the steadiest hand at prayers in the coun-

try; but on this particular night she prayed on without stopping, until the gray cock, who always crowed at four, told her 'what the time was, and she thought she might as well sleep for a couple of hours; for Mary could not only pray when she liked, but sleep when she pleased, which is frequently the case with the innocent hearted. As soon however, as she hung the beads on the same nail that supported the holy water, cross, and cup, James gave a groan and a start, and called her. 'Give me your hand,' he said 'that I may know that it's you that's in it.' Mary did so, and affectionately bid God bless him.

'Mary my own auld darling,' he whispered 'I'm a grate sinner, and all my learning isn't—'isn't worth a brass farthing.' Mary was really astonished to hear him say this. 'I's quite in earnest I am dear; and here's the key of my little box, and go and bring out that poor scholars nightcap, and take care of his money, and as soon as day breaks entirely, go find out where he's stopping, and tell him that I'll never touch cross nor coin belonging to him, nor one of his class, and give him back his coins of silver and his coins of brass and, Mary agair, if you've the power turn every boy in the parish into a poor scholar, that I may have the satisfaction of teaching them, for I have had a dream, Mary, and I'll tell it to you, who knows better than myself how to be grateful for such a warning. There prais the holy saints! is a streak of daylight; now listen Mary, and don't interrupt me:—'

I suppose its dead I was first; but anyhow, I thought I was floating about in a dark space and every minute I wanted to fly up but something kept me down. I could not rise—and as I grew used to the darkness, you see, I saw a great many things floating about like myself—mighty curious shapes. One of them, with wings like a bat, came close to me; and after all what was it but a Homer; and I thought maybe it would help me up, but when I made a grab at it turned into smoke. Then came a great white faced owl, with red bothered eyes and out of one of them glared a Voster, and out of another a Gouch; and globes and ink-horns changed, Mary, in the sight of my two looking eye, into vivacious tadpoles, swimming here and there and making game of me as they passed. Oh, I thought the time was a thousand years, and everything about me talking bad Latin and Greek that would bother a saint, and I without power to answer or to get away. I'm thinking it was the schoolmaster's purgatory I was in.'

'Maybe so,' replied Mary, 'particularly as they would let you correct the bad Latin dear.'

'But it changed Mary, and I found myself after a thousand or two years, in the midst of a mist—there was a mistiness all around me—and in my head—but it was clear, soft downy like vapour, and I had my full liberty in it, so I kept on going up—up for ever so many years, and by degrees it cleared away, drawing itself into a *bohreen* at either side, leading towards a great hill of light, and I made straight for the hill; and having got over it, I looked up and of all the brightness I ever saw, was the brightness above me the brightest; and the more I looked at it the brighter it grew; and yet there was no dazzle in my eyes; and something whispered to me that it was heaven, and with that I fell on my knees and asked how I was to get up there; for mind ye Mary there was a gulf between it and the hill; or, to speak more to your under standing, a gap; the hill of light above me was in no ways joined to the hill on which I stood. So I cried how was I to get there. Well before you could say twice ten, there stood before me seven poor scholars, those seven dear, that I taught, that have taken the vestments since. I knew them all, and I knew them well. Many a hard day's work I have gone through with them, just for that holy blessed pay, the love of God—there they stood with and Abel at their head.'

'Oh yah mullah! think of that now my poor Aby; did it I say the pure drop was in him?' interrupted Mary.

'The way for you to get to that happy place master dear,' they said, 'is for you to make a ladder of us.'

'Is it a ladder of the—'

'Whist will ye,' interrupted the master 'we are the stairs,' said they 'that will lead you to the happy mansion. All your learning of which you were so proud—all your examinations—all your disquisitions and knowledge—your algebra and mathematics—your Greek—ay, or even your Hebrew, if you had that same, are not worth a transey. All the mighty fine doings, the greatness of man, or of man's learning, are not the value of a single blessing here; but we, master jewel, we ARE YOUR CHARITIES, seven of us poor boys, through your means learned their duty—seven of us, and upon us you can walk up to the shining light, and be happy for ever.'

I wasn't a bit bothered at the idea of making a *step ladder* the seven holy crathurs, who though they had been poor scholars, was far before myself where we were now; but as they bent, I first stepped on Abel, then on Paddy Blake, then on Billy Murphy; but anyhow, when I got to the end of the seven, I found there was five or six more wanting; I tried to make a spring, and only for Abel I'd have gone—I don't know where; he held me fast. Oh Lord be merciful! is this the way with me after all, I said.—'Boys darlings! can ye get me no more than half way after all?'

'Sure there must be some more of us to help you,' makes answer Paddy Blake. 'Sure ye lived many years in the world after you left ye,' says Abel, 'and unless you harden-