

# The Storyteller.

## THE DEVOTIONS OF DARIUS.

(By R. H. KANE in the *Church Progress*.)

"I DO not believe it is possible for us to be as devout as they were in those olden days, nor to endure the persecutions and tortures that some of them had to suffer," declared Maud, looking up from the book in which she had been so deeply interested.

"Why not?" I asked.

"Why not! Why, Nora! how can you ask such a question? Could you endure such suffering?"

"Perhaps not," I answered. "But because I might not be able to stand the test is that proof that it cannot be done in these modern days? There may have been those in your early days who would be as weak as we, if they had been called upon to suffer."

"But I do not believe there are any who could do as those early Christians did. Just think of their hiding away in the Catacombs of the cities; of hearing Mass in out-of-the-way places, knowing that the dagger or the spear of the soldier, the rack and the wheel, or the stake and faggots, awaited them if detected. Just think of beautiful maidens thrust into the den of gaunt, half-starved lions and never for a moment wavering from the faith. Nora we never could do it," and Maud covered her eyes with her hands to shut out the horrible pictures that her imagination conjured.

I studied her in thoughtful silence for a few moments. "Maud," said I, "I am convinced that there are being performed for the love of Him who gave His life that weak mortals like you and me might enjoy the glories of Heaven, acts just as noble, just as heroic, just as self-sacrificing in these degenerate days of ours as ever the early Christians knew. You must remember those early Christians lived in an age schooled to war, hardships, and cruelty, while in our modern times we are reared too delicately. Persecution finds a much tenderer plant upon which to exercise its power in these days than in the days of the ancients."

"And for the reasons stated by you we cannot produce such heroism," triumphantly declared my sister.

"But, my dear Maud, you have forgotten or you have missed the stories of modern heroism of which these days are filled."

"Have you never read of the heroism of Father Damien, who left all the pleasure of modern civilisation and the many comforts that his ability could secure to him, and went away to spend his life ministering to the outcast lepers of Molokai? he himself, laying down his life a sacrifice to the loathsome disease? Or the noble Sisters who left their homes and friends and all that life held dear to assist him? Or of Brother Joseph, young, talented, wealthy, a convert to our religion, who first took his life in his hands to minister to the wants of yellow fever patients of the South, and who, when his services were no longer needed there, took up that greater sacrifice where the heroic Damien had laid it down? Maud, I fear you do not pay sufficient attention to the 'poor weak mortals' of to-day. You look beyond the centuries for your heroes and heroines. And now, Maud, let me tell you a story of a hero whom I myself have known."

"In the early seventies, as you have learned, shortly after John and I were married, we concluded that we would seek our fortune upon the broad prairies of the West; and, without going into details, I will say that we lost no time in taking up our abode in that fabled land. You may be sure that settlers were at that time few in the region where we settled."

"We were eight miles from town, and that the merest frontier village. You could travel for miles and miles and except along the creeks you would not see a human habitation—all was boundless, billowy prairie. There was no Catholic church in the town, and the priest visited us at irregular periods of about once a month. The half dozen Catholic families met to worship in the living-room of one of the local merchants."

"It was no slight task to keep informed of the coming of the priest, and many a time when we had gone fasting for Communion we were disappointed by his failure to appear. Many times when he had come, I am sorry to say, the cold winter blizzards kept us at home. John did not think it possible for him to brave the storm, and I must confess that I did not urge him very strongly on those occasions."

"Upon our first attendance at Mass we observed a fine looking man of about thirty-five, who took his place as closely as possible to the altar; who always remained kneeling while others sat down, received Communion, and, as soon as Mass was finished, mounted his horse and galloped swiftly over the plains. On every recurring Mass day we saw this handsome man in his accustomed place at the altar, always assuming the same devout positions, always receiving Communion, and always hurrying home immediately after Mass. We wondered very much whom he could be, and, after we became acquainted with our co-religionists, made some inquiries."

"We were told that his name was Darius Martin (which struck me as being somewhat out of the order of Catholic names); that he lived twelve miles away on the Hackberry, and was supposed to be a prosperous bachelor ranchman. We were given the further information that he never missed Mass. Rain or shine, hot or cold, when the hot south winds drove the sand in cutting drifts and withered the grass and parched the corn, or when the blizzard raged and roared, he was to be seen at his accustomed place, always receiving Communion, and hurrying away as we had seen him. Many times, 'twas said, he had been disappointed by the non-arrival of the priest; but it never affected his coming, and on those occasions he paid his contribution, which was always generous. It was rumoured that he had an invalid relative who was a great care to him, but this was scoffed at by others."

"One day in the early springtime, after we had been almost a year on the prairie, John and I concluded we would take a trip in a northwesterly direction, a section of the country we had not visited, and learn what new wonders the country possessed. A low range of hills reared their misty summits in the distance. We might find some curiosities there."

"So we hitched up our spirited ponies and dashed away over the plains. We had no road to guide us or fence to bar our progress. Now and then we would come to a cabin or dugout of a homesteader and his patch of breaking; these of course we would have to pass around, an object of curiosity to the settler's family."

"Fully twenty miles were travelled before we came to the hills. At their base grazed a considerable herd of cattle cared for by one lone herder whose pony pricked up his ears at our approach."

"Whose place is this?" asked John of the cowboy.

"Darius Martin's," was the answer.

"We were surprised at the information, but were pleased to learn that we were so near the home of one of our own communicants. We accordingly asked the way to the house and were directed to a clump of trees that grew in a gulch of the hills. Thither we drove. When we arrived at the grove we saw that it sheltered a low rambling house of apparently much room, while extensive out-buildings and corrals clustered back against the hill."

"A man was engaged in some work beside the house as we approached, and upon looking up we saw our fellow-worshipper. He dropped his tools and came towards us, evidently recognising us, a faint smile upon his handsome face."

"He invited us to alight and put up our team, as dinner was about ready. While feeling somewhat embarrassed at the thought of intruding, we were nevertheless hungry and tired and accepted the invitation."

"Mr. Martin ushered me into a small sitting-room while he and John went to put up the team. I was astonished at the contents of the apartment. An organ stood in one corner, a large and well filled book-case in the other. Numerous articles of furniture of peculiar but artistic design were arranged in the most appropriate positions."

"A neat and substantial carpet covered the floor, while the walls and ceiling were artistically but chastely papered. What surprised me much was an invalid chair standing almost in the middle of the room. I had not yet seen an invalid who could be the owner, and had my doubts that the cook who was preparing the savory meal could be such."

"But the most remarkable of all were the pictures which adorned the walls. They were for the most part representations of episodes in the life of the Saviour. There was one of the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph journeying to Bethlehem. There was another of the finding of Jesus in the temple; one of the Good Samaritan; another of the woman touching the hem of Christ's garment; a beautiful one of Christ in the Garden; also Raising the Young Woman to Life; The Laying of Christ in the Tomb; The Resurrection, and a magnificent Crucifixion. There were others, which I do not now recall, all of which were conducive to a life of piety and self-abnegation."

"By the time I had finished my inventory of the surroundings Mr. Martin and John returned to the house. "I hope you have been able to entertain yourself in our absence," said Mr. Martin in a cheerful tone."

"I have been interested in your pictures," I said.

"Yes?" in an inquiring tone as he gazed meditatively around upon them.

"Just then I heard a faint call from an adjoining room. Our host excused himself and retired to the other apartment. He soon returned and informed us that his mother wished to be brought out."

"Is she sick?" I solicitously inquired

"An invalid," he answered as he proceeded to wheel the chair into the other room. Soon he re-appeared wheeling the chair, which contained a frail, snowy-haired woman, upon whose face the most excruciating pains had left an indelible impress. While there were faint traces of former beauty, her features bore marks of impatience."

"Mr. Martin introduced his mother, and she in turn acknowledged our salute with a faint smile and inclination of the head. She informed us that she had been a helpless paralytic for the past ten years. She had met with an accident—a severe fall—which injured her spine and caused complete paralysis of the lower portions of the body. She had never since been able to help herself, and changed her positions only with the help of her noble son. The physicians in her eastern home had advised them to come to the West, where the clear, light atmosphere, the dry climate and change of scene might in time restore her."

"The change had benefitted her health, she said, but she was satisfied that never again would she be able to walk, or be anything but a burden to those around her."

"Every day I pray that I may die and lay my poor broken body down to rest for all time." And the poor creature broke into sobs. "But," she continued after she had calmed herself, "Darius tells me I should not feel this way; that God will call me in His own good time."

"My son is a Catholic and he believes that we should never grumble but should offer up all our sufferings to God, and our reward will be all the greater. Poor Darius! If God has any special rewards they should be for such as he. Day and night, for the past ten years, he has been a faithful attendant upon his poor cripple of a mother."

"There, there, dear mother, do not speak of it. You know that I am only too happy to know that I am spared to be of service to you. I have been helpless in my time and more of a burden than you have been to me."

"Oh, Darius!" the old lady cried, "I have deprived you of every pleasure in life; of companions, a family, society, travel, everything that is dear to the heart of youth."