

Selected Poetry

The "Trimmin's" of the Rosary

Ah, the memories that find me, now my hair is turning gray,
 Drifting in like painted butterflies from somewhere far away,
 Flitting idly through my fancy, and the pictures fading fast,
 Pass again in rose and purple o'er the broad screen of the past.
 There's the old selection dreaming 'neath the wistful, watchful stars,
 And the breeze is telling stories to the list'ning "coolabaks";
 And the old home, looking welcomes from its big, bright, friendly eyes,
 With the "Sugar-loaf" behind it, blackened in against the skies;
 There's the same dear, happy circle round the box-log's cheery blaze,
 With a little Irish mother telling tales of other days,
 While the fountain keeps a-singing on the hook besooted o'er,
 And the youngsters on their hands and knees play "horses" round the floor.

She had one sweet little custom that I never can forget,
 And a gentle benediction crowns her memory for it yet;
 I can see that little mother still, and hear her as she pleads:
 "Now it's getting on to bedtime; all you children get your heads."

There were no steel-bound conventions in that old selection free;
 Only this—each night she lined us up to say the Rosary;
 E'en the traveller who stayed the night upon his journey knew
 He must join the little circle, aye, and take his decade, too.

And I believe she darkly plotted, when a sinner hove in sight,
 Who was known to say no prayer at all, to make him stay the night.
 Then we'd softly gather round her, and we'd speak in accents low,
 As we prayed as sainted Dominic prayed so many years ago.

And the little Irish mother's face was radiant, for she knew
 That where "two or three are gathered," He is gathered with them too.
 O'er the *Paters* and the *Aves* how her reverend head would bend,
 How she'd kiss the cross devoutly when she'd counted to the end;
 And the visitor would rise at once—and brush his knees, and then—
 He'd look very, very foolish as he took the floor again;
 For she'd other prayers to keep him, they were long, long prayers in truth;
 And we used to call them "trimmin's" in my disrespectful youth.

She would pray for all our little needs, and every cloud of care
 That would darken o'er the "Sugar-loaf" she'd meet with a prayer.
 She would pray for this one's "sore complaint," or that one's "hurt hand,"
 Or that someone else "might make a deal," or "get that bit of land."

Yes, and then again to "make it rain," or else to "make it dry,"
 And a help for Mary Jane McShane, "who's going to wed Matthi";
 And that "dad might sell the cattle well" and seasons good should rule
 So that little John the clever boy, might go away to school.
 There were "trimmin's" too, that came and went, but ne'er she closed without

Adding one for something special, none of you must know about.

Gentle was that little mother, and her wit would sparkle free,

But she'd ruin you if you looked about when at the Rosary.
 If, perchance you couldn't find your beads, disaster waited you,

For the only one she'd pardon was the Dad—because she knew

He was hopeless, and 'twas sinful what excuses he'd invent,
 So she let him use his fingers, and he "cracked" them as he went.

And he wasn't always certain if he counted five or ten,
 So he'd face the crisis bravely, and would start around again,

But she tallied all the decades, and she'd stop him on the spot

With a "Glory! Dadda, Glory!" and he'd "Glory" like a shot.

She would portion out the decades to the company at large;

Ah, but when we reached the "trimmin's," she would put herself in charge.

And it oft was cause for wonder, how she never once forgot,
 But could keep them in their order till she went right through the lot.

For that little Irish mother's prayers embraced the country wide;

If a neighbor met with trouble, or was taken ill or died,
 We could count upon a "trimmin'," till in fact it got that way

That the Rosary was but "trimmin's" to the "Trimmin's," we would say.

Then her spouse would enter protest (in the public good, we thought),

"Sure, you'll have us there till mornin'—yerra, cut them 'trimmin's' short."

But she always could outrange him in a decent argument;
 And he'd sit in silence sulking, like Achilles in his tent;
 Then she'd take him very gently and he'd soften by degrees,

"Well, then, let us get it over; come, now, all hands to their knees."

So the little Irish mother kept her "trimmin's" to the last,
 Ever growing, as the shadows o'er the old selection passed,
 And she lit our drab existence with her simple faith and love,

And I know the angels lingered near, to bear her prayers above;

For her children trod the paths she trod, nor did they later spurn

To impress her wholesome precepts on their children in their turn.

Aye! and every "sore complaint" got right and every "hurt hand,"

And we "made a deal" from time to time, and got that "bit of land."

And we never failed to get the rain, and as the years went by

We could see that Mary Jane McShane was fit for our Matthi;

Yes, and Dad did "sell the cattle well," and little John, her pride—

It was he who said the Mass in black the morning that she died.

And her gentle spirit triumphed, for 'twas this beyond a doubt,

That the "something very special" was, she kept so dark about.

But the years have crowded past us, and the fledglings all have flown,
 And the nest beneath the "Sugar-loaf," no longer is their own;

For a hand has written *finis*, and the book is closed for good,
 There's a stately red-tiled mansion where the old slab dwelling stood;

There the stranger has her "evenings," and the formal supper's spread,

But I wonder has she "trimmin's," now? or is the Rosary said?

Ah, those little Irish mothers, passing from us one by one!

Who will write the noble story of the good that they have done?

All their children may be scattered, and their fortunes windwards hurled,

But the "trimmin's" on the Rosary shall bless them round the world.

—JOHN O'BRIEN.