

MOTHER MACHREE

By James B. Connolly

ILLUSTRATIONS BY D. C. HUTCHISON



WAS when the black smallpox swept over the islands from the mainland he died, and not long after my father was lost in the great gale that destroyed all before it on the west coast that was. In from the western ocean came the wild wind, and my father that was out in his fine, stout yawl ran before it for shelter. But the men that were out in their poor little curraghs, they couldn't run without smothering before it, so he stopped to take them with him.

And, taking the last of them, his yawl was borne by a sea to the sky and a roaring of wind that dashed back the wild gulls themselves before ever their beating wings could take them from out of their nests in the side of the cliff. And my mother and my one brother and myself, we stood together atop of that same cliff and watched the great wave when it rolled in, and when it rolled back I thought my mother would go with it, she with her hands stretched out over the edge of the cliff, looking down while the yawl and all were in it were dashed to pieces on the cruel rocks below.

"Mother, mother," I said, taking hold of her hand, "don't let you be going, too!"

"God in heaven," says my mother, "but 'tis the cruel blow! O my Jimmie, my little Jimmie, 'tis only you is left me now!" 'Twasn't of me she thought at all that day, as why should she?—me with my own husband and my own cabin and my own baby at the time to my breast.

No fine, stout yawl of his father's had Jimmie then, to be making a living for his mother. Hard work it was, but 'twasn't him would let on that 'twasn't a joy to be pulling and hauling through all the day long and sometimes half the night again all by himself in his little boat.

A straight, slim, hardy, grown boy was Jimmie then, the spit of his father. "Jim-

mie, my little lad, have a care o' yourself now," my mother would say, "for let you go and they might as well be laying me down in the grave along with you."

"Mother astore," Jimmie would say, "sure after taking father from you, and him for no fault of his own, 'tisn't God would be taking me, too."

Whistling he would go and whistling he would return. To cheer her up that was, for by nature his ways were his father's ways, and 'twas his father's way to be quiet and thinking-like always, unless 'twould be at a christening or a wedding, when the holy Pope himself would be expected to smile.

And never a time that Jimmie passed out the door but she would be looking after him and his curragh from the little cove till it was gone from sight in the big bay; and if while he was gone the gale would rise, not a moan of it but would stir a moan of her own. "God forgive me for a weak woman," she would say then, "but 'tis like the hand o' death itself is making a harp of my heart-strings!"

And then the black smallpox I was speaking of came, and first one and then another it took, and then by twos and threes they went. And the crown doctor came out in his boat from the mainland and set up a pest-house on the side of a hill. And it was winter-time, with the cold snow to the height of a man's knee.

"'Tis to no pest-house they would take one o' mine," said my mother; and 'twas to no pest-house they carried Jimmie when he was taken down. With the door barred against the doctors, crown or no crown, we nursed him, my mother by night and myself by day, and little Gerald not weaned of my breast at the time.

And 'twas terrible to see my mother then. Down on her two knees she would go in prayer for him then, if it wasn't making the broth or wiping the face of him she was at the moment, and the tears coming

slow and heavy from her eyes she'd say: "O God that loves us all, spare my little lad to me! Or, if you must take him, take me along with him!" And Jimmie would lie there, the poor blackened face of him looking into his mother's, and he'd say: "I'm striving, mother—God knows I'm striving not to be leaving you!"

And I saw how it would be with my mother if Jimmie died. And there was a holy well in the island named after Saint Ann, who was a great saint in those parts, and my own name was Ann. And with never a word to my mother of what I had in mind, I went to where by the highroad was the holy well, with a great cross made of cement and smooth, round little sea stones above it. And beside that cross I knelt to Saint Ann, that my mother had named me for, to ask for courage for what I was about to do. And then I prayed, and the words do whisper in my ears now of how I prayed to our Father in heaven that if it was his will for one of our family to die, that it would be my child he would take, for my husband and myself we were young and other children would not be denied us, but if Jimmie died my mother would have none she could call her own all the long years before her, if so it wouldn't be she would die along with him.

And it was dark, with never a moon or a star in the sky to show me the way home again, but no light did I need, when from the holy well straight across the snowy fields I flew to my little Gerald that I thought I could hear in the dark night calling me: and there he was that never since the hour he was born having an ache or a pain—with eyes weeping up to me when in my arms I had him again, like a child beyond his age, to ask me what strange thing was it was ailing him. And there was Jimmie, that had been rolling in agony, now wide awake in the sweat of health and saying: "Mother, mother, 'tis come like a prayer within me that I'm to be cured at last."

All that night I crooned little Gerald in my bosom, never for a breath leaving him go of my arms, for the truth of what was before me was by then deep in my heart. And the yellow sun rising up over the hills of the mainland shone on Jimmie sitting up and cured of his illness; but that self-same sun falling down that same night be-

low the western ocean left only my dead baby and a great blackness to me.

And I carried him to my own cabin, and the little face and body of him—once so lovely and white, but now all black like—I laid him in among the snow-white sheets of his own cradle; and on the low settle before the fire, keeping my death-watch of him till his father would come in from the sea, my thoughts went back to the hour when I heard his first little cry.

And a woman may bear twenty children again, or she may listen to all the cries of all the little children born into the world for as long as her life shall last, but the first cry of her first-born, she will know that little cry from out of them all. Sixty years and more that was, and 'tis singing again in my ears. And always it will. And from that first cry my mind went on—every hour of his growth to the last day I had nursed him on the cliff in the sun, he looking up from my breast to my face and then wisely out over the sea, as if himself, too, was waiting the sight of the brown yawl of his father sailing in from the west.

And the nights I would sit as I was sitting then before the blue smoke of the fire, planning against the day he would go out in the world and make his gallant way! No dragging and hauling of nets and trawls did I have in mind for him, but a captain to lead great fleets before the kings of the world he was to be. And now all my high hopes of him—gone like a wind in the night they were.

'Twas the long, long wait before I heard his father's step on the lintel and his voice from where by the door he was hanging up his wet sea things. "And where's me little sailorman at all?" he asked when he didn't hear him cooing and toddling from some corner across the floor to him; and when he stepped within—his head lowered and one shoulder before the other the way he was compelled to, he was that tall and broad, to let himself in through the door—and near to me I saw his face that for two days had been hard set again the wind and the spray, but now all soft and bright-like in the way it would be when home he would come from the sea—'twas then for the first time I doubted did I do well.

He bent over the cradle and drew back

the coverlet, after the way of him, to see the face of his boy. And not for a little time did he have a notion of how it was. When he did he took him up to see him better, and then he looked at me, and "Tis so," I said.

"And for what black sin o' mine did you go and leave me—myself and your poor mother, acushla?" he said, and drew him—oh, so close and tender to him.

And he came and sat by me on the settle before the fire and held the little body at arm's length before him; and by and by he spoke.

"Twill be like beating into harbor of a wild night and finding no beacon light before me from now on, Gerald avick. 'Twas when I would be to the tiller of the yawl, miles before ever I would raise the high cliff itself, I could see the little cabin and you, the little lad, rolling fat and laughing on the floor. And the great thoughts I had of you, from the day you were born till the day I'd go to my grave—deep in the sea or high on the land, wherever that grave might be—thoughts of how when for the first time I would take you with me in the yawl and you would look out on the wide ocean, myself standing beside you, to watch the blue eyes of you grow big and dark if 'twas the great roll of that same ocean would be growing in your mind, or deep and slim, with your little eyebrows lowering down when 'twas a far-away ship you would be wishful to make out. And I would curl my hand to the tiller, the way I would be one day curling your little hand within my own to hold it and telling you of the ways of the high sea and the tall ships. 'A great sailor I'll be making of you,' I would say to myself. 'Master of the sea and whatever class of ship it is you'll choose to sail in when 'tis a fine big man you've grown to be.' And now, God help me, 'tisn't the bright sun is shining down on God's blue sea, but the black night that's on me and yourself, acushla, laying dead across my two knees!"

'Twas wrung from me aloud. "O John, John," I said, "to be denying the like of you the living joy of your own child! But it wasn't from want of love of the lad or you that I wished it!" I told him then.

And no word of blame did he have for me.

"Tisn't for you or for me to question the ways o' God, Nanna Wan," he said. "If it wasn't God's will, 'tisn't God would take him."

But he cried as if himself was a little child, and 'tis right and natural that women should cry,—but a strong man to cry—no, no. "God spare me," I said that night, "from ever again to have the hearing of it."

And we carried him high up on the side of the hill where I did be going until I was ten years of age to look for the fairy queen on Christmas eve. I would lie there in the cold twilight behind a flat rock to see her unbeknownst when she would come walking atop of the waves with the golden crown on her golden head and her blue-and-silver robes trailing in the sea behind her. 'Tis the foolish child's mind I had that time, believing everything was told me till long past my child's days. And there we buried him; and to no fishing would John go again until he had carved a little headstone, myself on the settle before the peat fire beside him to tell him the better how to fashion the letters that sometimes he would be doubtful of.

The black plague passed, but a long, hard year it was after the little lad was gone, with not a night that I wasn't weeping myself to sleep for the want of his little hands reaching up to me in the dark. And then came the black famine on the mainland and the failure of fishing in the islands, and it came to me then that the dreams I did have for our children would never come to be anything more than the light talk of young girls on the rocks in the sun, if we lived longer there. And so I spoke to John about going to America.

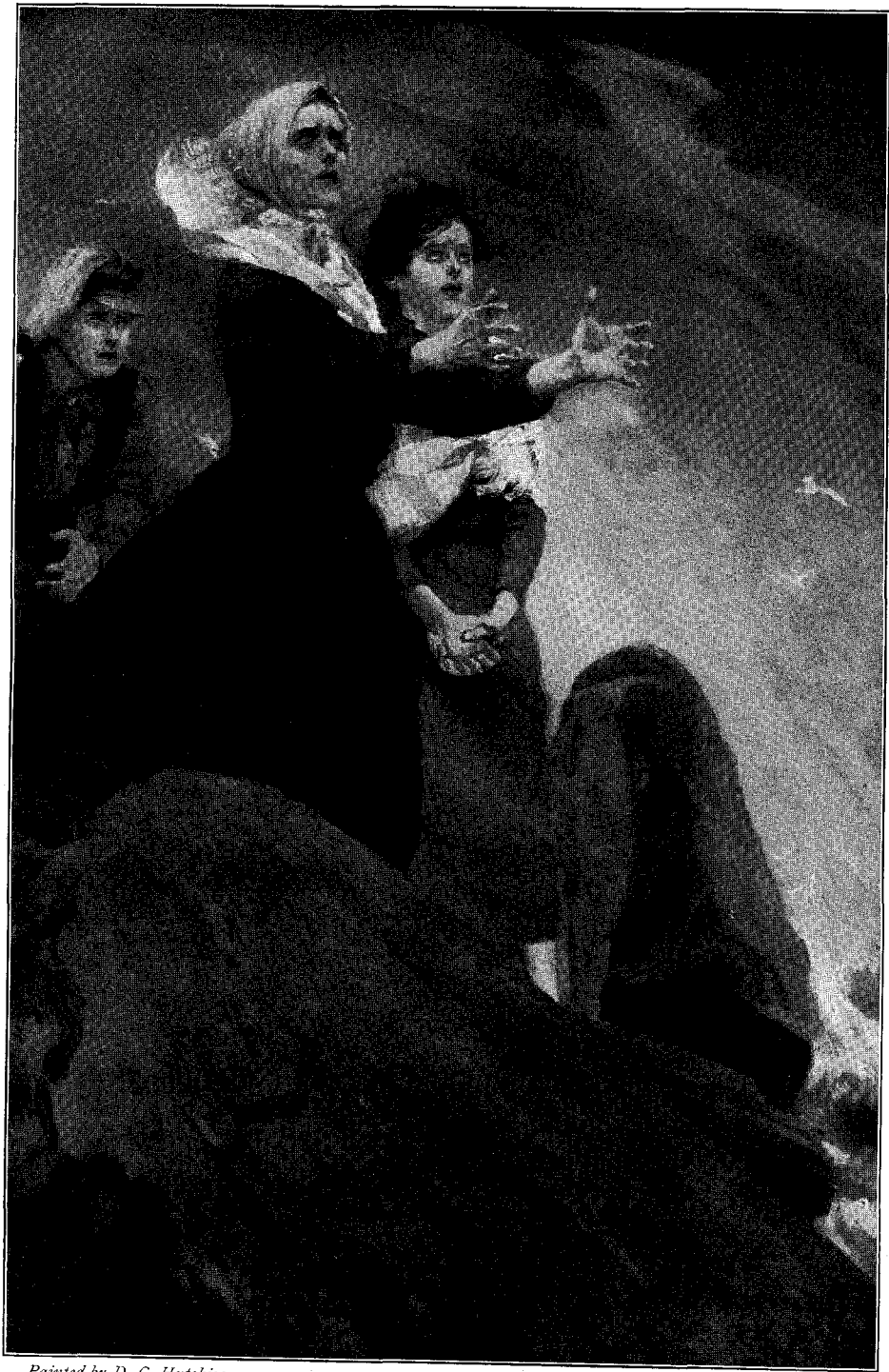
"Is it leave here," he said, "where for all the long years since farther back than the parish records go my fathers and forefathers and your own before them have followed the sea?"

"It is," I said.

"And where our fathers and forefathers, yours and mine, from first to last, except such as are deep in the ocean, do lie buried?"

"It is," I said.

And we sold our little cabin and John gave over his fine, stout yawl to Jimmie, and we said good-by to everybody and sailed on a ship was leaving for America;



Painted by D. C. Hutchison.

My mother and my one brother and myself, we stood together atop of that same cliff and watched the great wave when it rolled in.—Page 164.

and sailing out past the island it was hard enough it was to be looking back on my mother and Jimmie and the little grave where Gerald was. "There 'tis," said John, "high up where no sand from the sea will ever wash up to hide it, and there 'twill be, his little grave, for the light of the sun and the blue heaven to fall upon till the island is sunk in the sea or judgment-day itself will come."

Nine weeks we were out on that ship, a weak-made, leaky ship with sails that were not able to withstand the force of the wind, and after a great storm they put us into boats, John and I in the long-boat with the captain and the second mate. A terrible, huge man the second mate was.

And we rowed and sailed on the wide ocean two days and two nights, until the captain said 'twould be bad weather again. And I asked John and he said yes, 'twould be moderately bad weather again. And the captain had a great fear, and he says to the second mate: "We'll have to begin to lighten this boat or she will founder." Before this there had been a whispering between them and a looking over the passengers in the boat. "To your work!" the captain said now. "You know what to do."

And the huge mate steps over to the nearest man passenger and picks him up in his arms and throws him into the sea. And from one to the other he went. "You next!" and "Your turn now!" he would say, till he had thrown over all the single men in the boat—six in all. Two he dragged shrieking from their seats, and another was good as dead before ever he threw him over, in terror at the thought of the poor mother he was leaving friendless in a strange world behind him.

Still the boat wasn't light enough, and "The married men now!" says the captain, and the big mate turns to a young fellow that reminded me something in his ways of my own brother Jimmie. And his young wife had been listening to some talk between myself and John, so in the terror of her husband being torn from her she leaps up and said: "Captain, there's a man here is wise in the ways of the sea, and he is saying there is a way to save the boat and all is in it."

"He does, does he!" says the captain. "Let him stand up, this wise man, till I

see him!" And the young wife turns to John, and in all innocence he stands up.

And the captain looks him up and looks him down, and he says: "So, 'tis you, you big lummo, who knows more of the sea than the master of the ship, is it?" And he turns to the big mate. "Take him next, instead," he says.

And John says: "But 'tis foolish and cruel to be casting poor, innocent men in fear like this into the sea."

"You next, I said!" calls out the captain, and nods his head to the huge, big mate, who steps over the seats in the boat, crowding men and women to one side to reach John.

I was cold with the fear of it, for I knew John wasn't one to go against the captain's word on a ship at sea, where it was as much law as a judge's itself in a grand court on the mainland back home. And up to that time I hadn't told him that God had listened to my prayers and was to give me a child to take the place of the little lad was dead. And I stood up beside him and said: "And is it you, John Lacy, will let yourself be sacrificed by a fear-stricken man and your unborn baby go fatherless all the days of his life?"

And with that John turns to me with one arm stretched out to hold the mate from him, and "Nanna Wan, Nanna Wan," he says, "do you tell me that?"

And I said, "'Tis true, John," and John says over the mate's shoulder: "Listen to me, will you, captain? 'Tis well I know what a terrible thing it is to go again the master of a ship at sea, but 'tis a foolish, cruel thing you have your mind set on."

"Are you going to attend to that man or not?" says the captain.

And then I stood up, knowing John was no one to speak for himself, and I said: "Captain, if you will give me a moment to tell it—my husband has a wonderful skill in the management of small boats."

And an old fisherman from the Claddagh was there with his old wife stood up then and said: "'Tis true, sir, what this young woman says—all from our place knows it. The fishermen of all Galway Bay speak so of him."

At that the captain drew a pistol with two long barrels from his bosom, and "What did I order you to do?" he roars at the mate.

The mate, without more delay, grappled with John and John grappled with him, and 'twas a terrible time they had of it wrestling among the seats, though small fear I had of the huge mate overcoming John. But the captain, half rising from his seat from time to time, his pistol held before him—that he would come to the help of the mate I did have fear.

"You are not striving as you should, John Lacy," I said.

"'Tis true, I'm not, Nanna Wan, but 'tishn't for me to gainsay a ship's captain."

"When he is a captain," I said. "But 'twas the way of captains in your family and my family, where we've had captains back to the French and Spanish trading days, to be guarding their passengers' lives before their own; and have heed you of the child in my womb and what will become of us when you are cast into the sea."

'Twas then he lifted the mate above his head, meaning no more harm than to throw him into the stern of the boat, but the mate made one clutch of John going, and together they fell sidewise from the boat. The mate did not rise out of the sea again, but John did, and gripped the rail in the stern of the boat doing so, and as he did so the captain with his long pistol shot at him, but, what with John and the boat bouncing up and down on the waves, he did but hardly hit him through his thick pea jacket in the shoulder, and before he could fire the second shot John reached up with his free hand and pulled the captain down into the sea and left him there. After John had climbed safe up into the boat the women among us said a prayer for their souls, but it was a long while before the men had any but black words for them.

By that time the wind was wailing, and the ocean all about us was growing white under our eyes; so without more delay John took two small casks that had been emptied of fresh water, and with them and the mast and the sails and a small anchor that was in the boat he makes a cunning drogue, and all that day and night we lay there with that dragging ahead of one bow, the boat bobbing high up and down with the waves, but no more harm coming to us than to a sea-gull itself.

Next day the sea calmed, but there was

yet some wind. "But no more than will make a good sailing breeze for the boat," said John. "And from the east, too, it is—a fine, fair, fresh wind to hurry us on to America." And himself sitting in the captain's seat in the stern of the boat, he sailed her, with no other help, to land.

When the law-officers came down to the boat and every one pointed out John as their leader, he told them what had happened, and many in the boat was vexed for the simple way he told it.

"Tell them," says they, "the terrible, huge man the mate was."

"'Tis no little dwarf I am myself," was all he said to that.

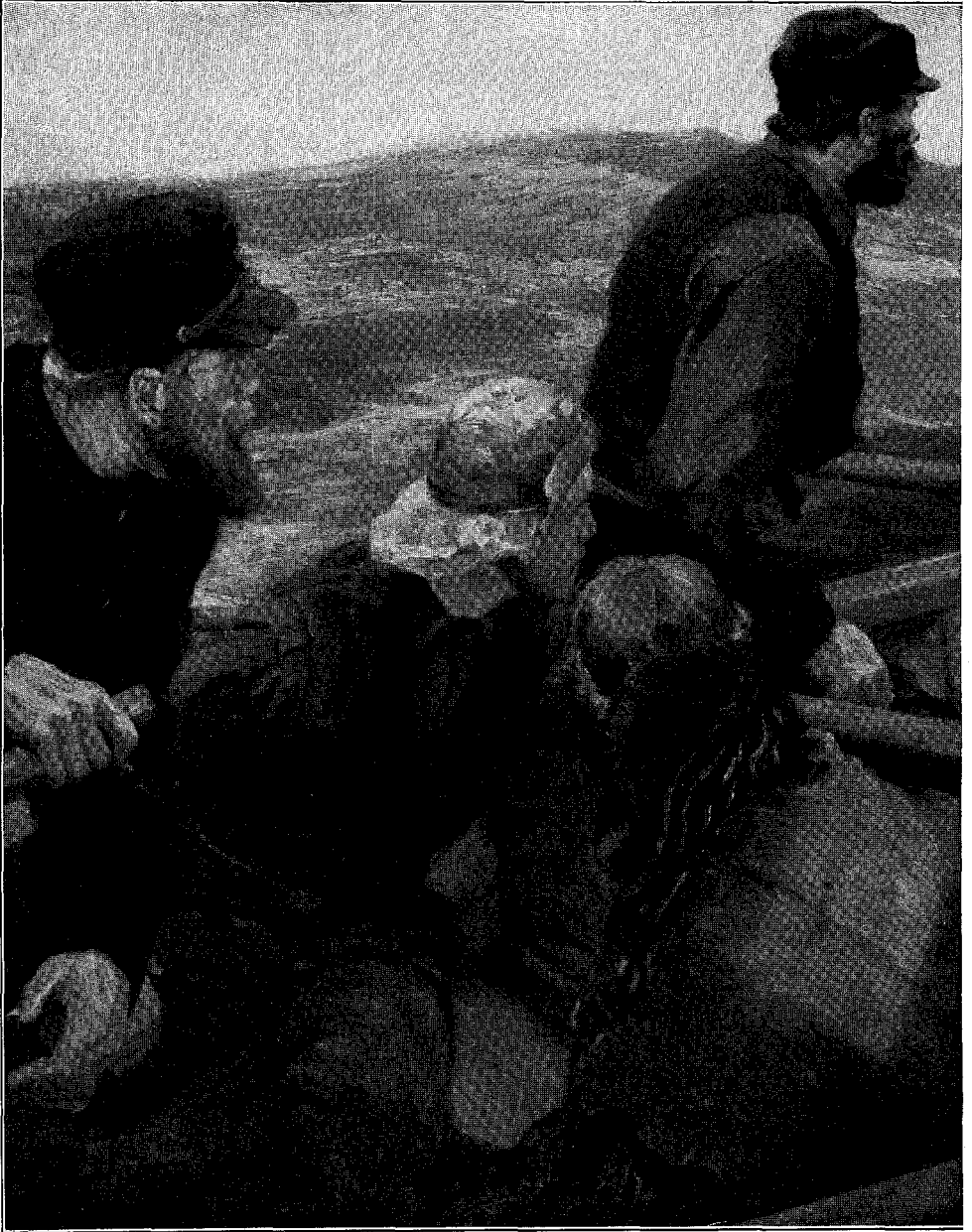
"And the black hate shining out from the face of that black-hearted captain—tell them that," said they.

And John only said to that: "'Tis only natural he would be vexed at one would take his place from him."

They took him to the prison and held him there; and after many months they tried him before a high court. The other people in the boat were by then scattered far and wide. For twenty years of his life they sentenced him, to make an example, they said, of the man who would make way with his lawful commander on the high seas. The law was there, and clear enough.

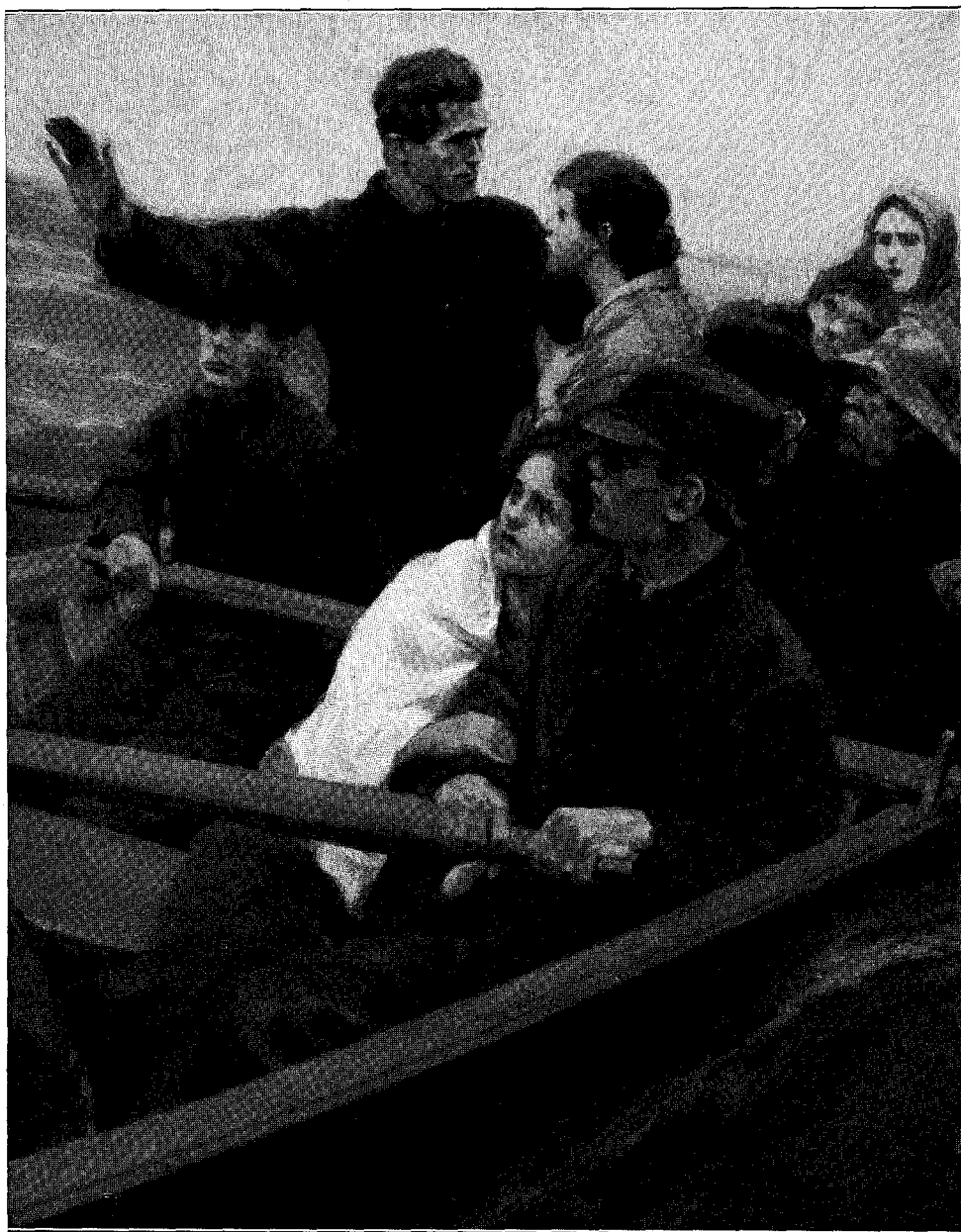
And hatred of such laws—no more to be altered than marble—was in me all the months my child was coming to life. And Jerome I named him when he was born; and when I could no longer deny his father—nor myself—the joy of a sight of his child, I took the few pounds we had landed with and paid my way with it to the far-away prison. And in the prison was an officer that was harsh to John, setting him down as a black murderer; but he saw the little child I was holding so his father could kiss him between the prison bars, and from then on he was milder to John. And that in itself was a great comfort to be thinking of.

'Twas that same prison officer told a great man in the community, a great barrister in that day, of John, and of a winter's night that man came to see me, a thick-set man with a head like a gray rock on his shoulders, in the little attic room where I was meshing nets by the light of the tin lamp for the bit of rent and the



And with that John turns to me with one arm stretched out to hold the mate from

bite was nourishing myself and Jerome that was at that moment asleep in a basket by the little stove with the few little sticks of wood in it that kept us from freezing in the cold night. Mr. Ladfrey was his name, and he questioned me at great length, the while a young fellow was with him set down the answers in a slim black book he had. And going away Mr. Ladfrey said: "Law is law, Mrs. Lacy, and if sometimes one fails of its intent, law was never meant to destroy honest people. A great blunder was made, Mrs. Lacy, in not drawing your full story from



him, and "Nanna Wan, Nanna Wan," he says, "do you tell me that?"—Page 168.

you and your husband on the witness stand. I will see what I can do."

And 'twas he that in good time brought John his freedom, against the wishes of the friends of the captain and of many that knew no more of John than of the moon in the sky, beyond the belief, not to

be shaken out of them, that he was a destroying villain. "And mark him well," I said to Jerome—"the man who came to save the poor stranger in a strange land. 'Tis on the likes o' him the grace o' God should fall. And if ever the day comes you can do him or his a good turn and you

fail in doing it, I'll die of shame of you." A hundred times I said that to him growing up and to whoever else had time to hear me out.

Jerome growing up was like no child ever I had after him. Not a child ever I had but hated what was evil, but in Jerome it was a religion like, and if the evil was protected by laws, then "Do away with such laws!" he would say. For me to chide him for that I could not; for in the months when he was yet unborn, and after, 'twas the same thoughts were in me. What comes with our mother's milk, 'tis never fair gone from us till down in our graves we are laid—that I know.

To be roving strange countries and fighting for people he thought was wronged—that was his wish growing up. And wandering he went when he was old enough. And what with my not knowing where on the face of the world he might be, and too well knowing where his father was—out in the wild sea in his little boat—no night ever did I go to bed without a long prayer it wouldn't be at the bottom of the sea or beside the breen of some black forest the one or the other would find his grave at last.

But God's eye was on him, as it had been on his father when in the navy he went to fight for his new country, when Jerome was yet no more than a child. Safe back his father came then, as always did Jerome now. And to see Jerome, the wild soldier, come home, you would think to be rolling on the kitchen floor with his little nieces or nephews was his most daring wish. Stories he would charm them with, and when they would fall asleep on his breast he would take them up and lay them in their little beds as gentle and soft as their own mothers would.

Innocent and simple he was in many ways, and yet to grown people he would talk of things would make them curl up in their chairs with horror, or of things would send them in gales of laughter or drive strong men to cross the floor with tears in their eyes to shake hands with him and to be saying: "God save you, Jerome, but the heart is like a warm fire within you!" A pure delight and terror he was in the free days of his roving manhood.

And so it was until the day he told me

he would rove no more for a time. "And is it that you've destroyed all the evil in the world, Jerome?" I said to him.

"Mother machree," he said, and looked at me the way he had—his sea-blue eyes and every white tooth in his head smiling at me—"if maybe I fought now and again on a side that had its share of tricksters, bear in mind 'twas the youthful innocence of me that took every man on his own word."

"And are you so much wiser now, Jerome, avick, after all your travels?"

"I'm no wiser than ever I was, mother; although surely a knowledge of evil has been driven into me, and in high places no less than low. And there is the pain of too much knowledge when 'tis of evil, mother—when a shining robe is, by accident it might be, blown away, to learn what a corruption of a carcass is too often lying beneath it. There's a man in this city—" He named him then and questioned me did I know him.

"Who does not?" I said. "A man of high station, no less, and great things to be read in the papers about him."

"And yet greater things you would read of him, mother, if he could find a yet cleverer man to write them."

"'Tis a common human vanity, Jerome," I said to that, "and in itself no great villainy, to be wanting to shine great in the eyes of the world."

"But to be shining great that their own pleasures may be greater—'tis no simple vanity is there. No, no, mother. Many queer corners of this world I've travelled and many kinds of villains I've known at close grips—thieves, cutthroats, robbers, murderers, and so on—and no wonderful harm in many of them beyond the evil of their calling. Some, indeed, there were of likable ways—some such I have been beholden to, now and again, for a kindness. But"—and I grew cold with the chill was in his voice and his eyes—"there are creatures of a sort of villainy that these I've spoken of are white-robed saints beside."

"Jerome, Jerome," I said, "you talk strangely!"

"Let it rest there, then—at strange talk—for 'tisn't me, mother, would wish the innocence of you to understand, beyond knowing from me that the grandson of

that great and good man who saved father from prison is in the way of being drawn to his ruination. And with no full notion of it himself."

I knew 'twas not in Jerome to lie.

ten to no words," said Jerome. "But I will prove to him before his own sight with what manner of villainy he is faced."

And as all men know now, Jerome killed the man he had in mind, meaning not to.



"I'm no wiser than ever I was, mother; although surely a knowledge of evil has been driven into me, and in high places no less than low."—Page 172.

"What a terrible thing," I said, "that a man may strive to be all that is good himself and still no telling will the people after him be good, too!"

"Like many another heir to a fair name, 'tis enmeshed in flattery he is and will lis-

ten to no words," said Jerome. "But I will prove to him before his own sight with what manner of villainy he is faced." And as all men know now, Jerome killed the man he had in mind, meaning not to.

say a word at all I will say too much," he said. "After all, the manner of a man's death, so he should have death, is a small matter."

Years ago that was; and Jerome still in prison for it when his father lay on his dying bed, and he was saying: "Nanna Wan, 'tis come to me that my time is short and there is three, or maybe four, things I would like to have hope of before I go."

"And what are they, Shaun?" I asked.

"To be seeing first of all that will be there the face of little Gerald that we buried long ago in Aran, when my time in purgatory I've served for my sins and into the next world I have passed."

"That will be as God wills, John," I said; "but surely he won't deny you that after your more than eighty years of hard life. But would you know him, John," I said, "after sixty-two years?" saying that to save myself saying something sadder.

"Know him?" he said, "know him?"—vexed like with me. "My own first-born that I held dead across my two knees through all the black night he died?"

"Don't I know you would know him, John! And what else?"

"I was thinking of my days in the navy in the war, and how when the war was over the captain said to me: 'John Lacy, you should stay in the navy and have a fine pension against your old age.'"

"But what of my young age, sir?" I said—"and my family, it might be, on the one side of the world and myself in China or elsewhere on the other? What comfort would I have of them or they of me?" And others on the ship were of my mind. And I was thinking the while I was lying here, Nanna Wan, of what few shipmates is left living of my old ship in the war—and how it would be a grand sight to be having them at my grave and folding the flag about my coffin."

"They will, Shaun," I says. "They have spoke of it, two or three, to me before this."

"And that my own son, Father Tom, will say the dead mass for me from the high altar, Nanna Wan?"

"Though his heart will be breaking, 'tis promised already to me, Shaun—to say the mass over his father."

"I see," he says, with the sly little smile would come to him sometimes, "I

see that my death will be taking no one unbeknownst, Nanna Wan?"

"'Tis no secret, John, that only the strength of the granite rock itself is in you 'tis dead and buried weeks ago you would be."

"'Tis maybe"—with a little roll of pride in the bed he said it—"a moderately strong man I was in my day, though, as to that, never half the equal, I've often thought, of my own father, God rest his soul, or his father before him. There was a huge, strong man came from the mainland to the outer isle, and myself a little boy at the time—" and he went on to tell of a great trial of strength this huge man and his grandfather had, and by that I knew he was near to his end, for 'twas often he'd said that a man's strength was something given him of God, and why should a man be vain of it any more than if it was a red or a black beard, or no beard at all, he had?

"What else have you in mind, John?" I said, when he had done telling how his grandfather had conquered the man from the mainland.

"Whisper, Nanna Wan," and I saw 'twasn't of pride in his past great strength he had now in mind. "Whisper, Nanna Wan, but 'twould be a great comfort to me"—and he wistful as a little child saying it—"to have the hope of seeing Jerome saying a prayer beside the coffin of me before 'tis laid in my grave I am."

"'Tis only the governor of the State can pass on that, John," I said.

"I know, but will you go to him, Nanna Wan—you that did always do the talking for the two of us—and say the poor boy's father on his dying bed did ask it. He will listen to you."

"I will go to him," I said, which pleased him.

And within the hour, with the grace of God in his heart and the praise of God on his lips, I was helping him to fold his hands across his breast the while the bells from his own church were calling the parish to Sunday vespers. He knew then for what they were. "The holy bells!" he whispered when I bent down to him, and smiled like and died.

And I called on the governor next morning in his grand office. "Mrs. Lacy?" he said, by way of asking who I could be.

"The mother of Brian Lacy," I said,

knowing how every one knew of him—"and of Maurice and Michael Lacy."

"Oh-h!" he said, and I sat in the chair he placed for me, and told the story, every word as I've told it here, from the beginning of the plague in the islands to John's dying words. And all kindness and gentleness he was, pacing to the wide window that looked over the fresh, green lawn and back again the while he was wiping his glasses and myself telling my long story.

"I remember the case, Mrs. Lacy," he said. "The man had powerful friends. They had to stand by him—to save themselves, some of them. I'll see that your son Jerome is given liberty to attend the funeral."

He asked after Brian then, and I told him how never did Brian find himself near the city but he would come to see us, and how his father would, the first thing, fill an old black pipe for him and another for himself, and how he would sit and chat, and how 'twas my delight to watch the pair of them blowing great gobs of smoke to the ceiling and gossiping like two chums across the kitchen table, and how the last time he was in the city he said he would paint a picture of me some day. "Some day?" I said. "And haven't you seen the face of me often enough yet to make a picture of me?"

"Ah, but mother," he says, "it is more than your face I want to put into it."

"I saw a painting of your son's the other day," said the governor then—"of a great wave rolling down, and before I knew it I found myself turning my ear to hear the rush of it. You've given gifted sons to the world, Mrs. Lacy. You should be a proud woman."

"Gifted, sir?" I says. "If one of mine has a greater gift than another, 'tis a matter less of pride to me or to them it should be than of debt to some great nature gone before us. When I was a growing girl and would sit with my father, God rest his soul, before the fire of a winter's night, or on the rocks outside of a summer's evening, he would talk to me of many things, and when he would speak of the sea 'twould be like the voice of the sea itself was speaking. Great gentlemen would come from far places to see him on their holidays, and some of the things he would

say they would write down. And one of them said to him one time: 'You could bring great fame to yourself in the great world, Mr. Lacy.'

"And a great desolation, doubtless, to my family!" said my father to that.

"A great gift will die with you," said the gentleman.

"It may be," said my father, "but come here, Anneen," he says to me. "Fine sons and daughters of your own you'll be having some day, Anneen acushla, and who knows that of them will not be one or two to tell the great world of the things your people before you have been feeling within them for ages past. And if it ever comes to pass to a child of yours, Anneen, then do you tell him that if he will some day come out of his way and look out from the top of the cliff here and say: 'If I know more than another of any one thing on this earth, 'tis you and yours and the grace o' God that I have to thank for it.' If he will but say that, then I for one, if 'tis in the sea I'm resting, will promise now that what the crawling crabs have left of me will roll over in the tide on the kelp o' the ocean's bed and say: 'God speed you, boy, but it's you that's welcome!'" He laughed at his great visitor and then down on me when he said that, but 'twasn't always a joke with him when he laughed."

"And did any of your sons ever go back there, Mrs. Lacy?" the governor said to me then.

"The day came, sir," I said, "when the three sons you've named stood on that cliff and cast the wild flowers that they had gathered from between the rocks down on the sea at the foot of the cliff where their grandfather was lost. And one after the other they went to lay a blue flower, or a red one it might be, on the grave of their brother Gerald; and they would have taken up the grave and all was in it and brought it to be laid in a grave here, but I said no. 'Let the lovely body of him fall to dry dust,' I said, 'beside the sea where his father's father gave up his life for others. 'Tis there he was born and 'tis there he should lie,' I told them, 'in the place where people believe in the power of holy wells, and where children up to ten years of age do walk to the high hill to see the fairy queen on Christmas eve.'

"No, sir," I said to the governor, "seven sons and four daughters do call me mother, and no day but their children, one or more of them, do come in loving-kindness to my knee. Not all of my eleven living children may have a great gift, but as my father, God love his memory, would say: 'You can spend your gift and never any one have it again, or you can cherish it to pass it on, in greater strength it may be, to some one to come after you.' And who knows, sir," I said, "that many another the world will never hear of may not be passing the gift along to some one that will make fuller use of it? No, no, sir, seven good sons and four good daughters I have living, and not one would I place before the other. Still less would I put any one of them all before the poor lad that's now within the prison walls."

It was two mornings ago when I saw the governor, and this morning before the coffin left the house for the church Jerome came to me from the prison.

"Jerome avick, let me see you in the free light of the sun, for free you are to be all the days of your life, the governor said." And he stood before me; and his hair, that used to be black as a shining black rock under a running tide, it was white as the same tide running white before the gale; and his face, that was one time brown as the brown sail of his father's yawl, 'twas gray as a gray rock now, and thin like the two sides of a fish dried in the sun—oh, old and worn he was beyond his years—never again would he be the roving soldier, but it wasn't for his mother to tell him that.

"Jerome," I said, "they will soon be taking the body of your father to where the solemn mass will be said for him by a holy priest o' God, his own son. And his voice rolling out the terrible lamentations from the high altar will fill the minds and hearts of all there with the wonder of death and judgment, and they will be giving him great praise for it, when 'tish't him they should be praising, priest o' God though he is—'tis never his own voice it will be, but the voice of his people dead and gone before him chanting up through him from the depths of the deep, black sea, in sorrow from a grave that heard never a mass or a prayer when in it they were laid.

"And then down from the high altar he

will come, Jerome," I said, "and say the blessed prayer for the dead above his coffin, and 'twill be full of the pain of death, but never a quiver of fear for it he will be feeling the while he is saying them, for 'tis in his blood to feel death but never to fear it. And after it will come the holy sprinkling water.

"And away from the altar-rail the black undertaker will roll the bier and the coffin on it, and then 'twill be you, Jerome, and myself beside you, will follow after."

"And 'tis then, mother," says Jerome, "that they will whisper all over the church: 'Is it the black murderer she is choosing to walk behind her dead husband?'"

"No, Jerome," I said, "but 'tis then that they will whisper all through the church: 'Tis the eldest son she has chosen to be with her, and herself as proud of him as a woman may be that walks behind her husband's coffin.'"

And so it was—six tall sons and four good daughters—and their grown children after them—to follow his bier out the middle aisle, but before them all was Jerome; and 'twas Jerome was by my side when down into the black earth the coffin was lowered. And 'twas then, when the first sod was thrown on his body, I needed him. 'Twas like something striking me a blow inside, the sound of that first sod on the coffin.

"Mother machree," he said, "'tis worn and torn your heart is for love of us all."

"Jerome avick," I said to that, "'tis worn and torn the hearts of mothers were before me and will be again—God help their children if they're not. I go to no more funerals, Jerome, till I go to my own—stay by me you till then."

"'Tis myself, mother," he says, "will lay you down in the earth with my own hands."

And so he will, though his heart will burst apart the while he will be doing it. And seven sons and four daughters I have, and not one would I set before the other in the eyes of the world, but in Jerome is the gift I chose, the best gift of all for him before ever he was born.

"Father in heaven," I prayed before he came to me, "make him one will feel for others' pain the longest day he lives!" And that He did; so prison or no prison it's my own boy he is.

PERDITA

[IN THE WINTER'S TALE]

By Marguerite Merington

WHEN you pass I'd have you rather
Violet or primrose fair,
Marybud that I might gather,
Ever on my heart to wear.

When you speak I'd have you stay so
Speaking, till I hear you sing;
Then I'd have you buy so, pray so,
So give alms and ordering.

When you move, a spirit, dancing,
Sets its footstep on the sea:
Wind and wave, and sunbeam glancing
Always I would have you be.

When you flout me, high above me
I would set you, like a star:
When you love me . . . since you love me
I will keep you as you are!

LETITIA

By Gordon Arthur Smith

ILLUSTRATIONS BY CHARLES E. CHAMBERS

I



WHEN Samuel Dent, wealthy malefactor, had, at the age of fifty-five, ground a fortune out of high-grade soap and the sweat of the poor laboring man, he sat back, rested on his laurels, and had a slight paralytic stroke. Although his doctor, a famous New York specialist called Haven, assured him that there was no immediate danger, Samuel Dent, greatly frightened, was convinced that he was about to die. With this conviction came fear; and with fear came remorse; and with remorse came a frantic clutching for spiritual salvation. He "got religion"—and in a very malignant, Presbyterian form.

Just as he had called in the best physician to heal his body, so did he now summon the best clergyman to ease his soul. The Reverend Mr. Thane had the reputation and the manner of being very influential in high circles. But the task that Samuel Dent's conscience set him to do involved not only repentance, confession, and reformation, but also material restitution; so, with this last in mind, he was forced to add his attorney, Rutherford Wilkins, to the staff of advisers.

Equipped, then, with a physician, a clergyman, and a lawyer, he seemed to be in a fair way to triumph over his offenses against nature and God and man.

The four men met in solemn conclave in Samuel Dent's high-ceilinged library on a late February afternoon. Dent himself, cadaverous and brooding, sat in a great leather armchair by the open fire. The others ranged themselves opposite him: Haven, stately, uninterested, and fingering his watch; Thane, eager, acquiescent, yet trying hard to be a man among men; Wilkins, dry, restless, disconcertingly plain-spoken.

"Gentlemen," began Samuel Dent, "thank you for coming to-day."

They made some unanimous deprecatory noise at the end of which Thane's voice could be heard trailing off into: "Not at all, my dear sir, not at all."

"You, Mr. Thane"—Dent turned to the clergyman—"you know that I am a very wretched man. I am an old man and a sick man—and I am a sinful man. The health of God is not in me. But now, before it is too late, before I die, I want to lay hold of life so that when the awful day arrives I'll be able to face the Almighty Judge and say: 'Lo, I have strayed from the fold, but have mercy, for I have returned repentant!'"