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IRISH NED

## IRISH NED

THE WINNIPEG NEWSY

By

**THE REV. SAMUEL FEA, M.A., Ph.D.**  
**Rector of St. Peter's, Winnipeg**



TORONTO  
WILLIAM BRIGGS  
1910

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TO  
**My Mother**  
TO WHOSE  
LOVE I OWE SO  
MUCH

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**IRISH NED**  
**THE WINNIPEG NEWSY.**

## CHAPTER I.

"Free Press! T'bune! Telegram! Papers, sir? Three for a nickel! Press, T'bune and Telegr-r-r-ra-m-m-m-m!"

It was a hot afternoon in August, at the corner of Portage Avenue and Main Street, the busiest thoroughfare in the busy city of Winnipeg, now at its busiest and noisiest; but above the noise and din of traffic rose shrill and clear the persistent cry of "Press, T'bune and Telegram!"

The speaker, or rather the shrieker, was a boy not more than nine years old, and was at the first glance just an ordinary boy, except that he was small for his apparent age. His clothes were patched in places, and his boots were worn considerably, and the uppers were just beginning to gape at the crack across the top; but the clothes were neat and clean, and his boots were brushed. His hair was of the straw-coloured variety, with a tendency to red, but it was not tousled or unkempt, but neatly combed; while his little cap was not on straight but pushed back carelessly, just showing a pair of clear but dark-blue Irish eyes and a broad, low forehead.

His neatness compelled a second glance, and the second look at him proved interesting. The boy's face was bright, cheerful and attractive, for with all the innocence written upon it there was also the knowledge of good and evil, together with the shrewdness born of an early experience. But this shrewdness showed that his innocence was his choice of the good and rejection of the evil, and not merely because he had been kept from contact with the evil. This was Irish Ned, the Winnipeg newsy.

The prince of newsboys was little Irish Ned, small in body, but great in mind, the acknowledged leader of the select circle in which he moved; always bright, winning, punctual and strictly businesslike, he was admired by all who knew and watched on the street for his little dimpled smile. Of course it must be admitted that at times there did come, now and then, a bit of a scrimmage, but Ned was "quite fit" for his size and weight any day; and after all, "sure it was only a bit of fun," as he was known to say, "an' a body must have a bit of a fight sometimes." Besides, being an Irish boy, he dearly loved a "shindy," and Winnipeg's wide streets provided ample room in which to dodge a too powerful enemy. But for all his teasing the big boys never bullied Ned, for all of them loved his bright, intelligent face and manly ways.

In the evening, after his papers were sold, Ned used to wend his way to the schoolroom of the church which was known to him and his chums as "Peter's Church." There he spent many a happy hour with the Gymnasium Club, tumbling on the bars, swinging the clubs, performing feats wonderful in the eyes of the "greenies," and successfully wrestling with boys twice his size. Many a prize did he carry off, and many a "newsy" envied him the night he won the gold button for being, as he styled it, "the best kid in the whole bunch." As a Boy Scout, he would sit for hours and listen to the wonderful stories related by the Scoutmaster, or play the grand game of Kim, or join an expedition of endurance or skill or discovery, on which the painstaking Scoutmaster used to take and train his boys. A proud boy indeed was Ned when with his troop he marched with the Veterans and Military to St. John's on "Decoration Day" to place a wreath on the graves of the Canadian heroes who gave their lives for Queen and Country in the Rebellion of '85. His chest would expand, his head would be lifted high, and his step assume a manly stride, as the band of "The L.B.D.'s," in which one of his chums was playing, would strike up "The Maple Leaf Forever," or "Pork, Beans and Hard-tack, Hard-tack, Tra-la-la-la!"

But the greatest day of all the year to Ned was the Sixth of July. That was the day, the glorious day, of St. Peter's Picnic to Winnipeg Beach. That was the day when Ned was in his glory, and bubbled over with excitement. Helping to carry the big banner, or dodging here and there through the long procession of children and teachers as it wound its way along Selkirk and Main to the C.P.R. station, his shrill voice leading every now and then in the great yell, "Ice-cream, soda-water, ginger-ale and pop! St. Peters, St. Peters, they're always on the top." Ah! what a glorious time it was! And then the big train and the long ride, and the Beach, with its sand and the boating and the swimming; the sports in the afternoon, from which Ned managed to carry off his share of the prizes; to say nothing of the sumptuous dinner and supper for which the teachers had worked and planned for many moons. Ah, it was grand! And then to reach home again in the gathering twilight, to scream once more the dear old yell, "Always on the top!" to fall asleep with the refrain, "Ice-cream, soda-water," ringing in his ears, and wishing each day were picnic-day—ah, those were the happy, happy spots in the life of little Irish Ned, the Winnipeg Newsy.

## CHAPTER II.

Little Irish Ned was scarcely three months old when his mother died. His grandmother reared him, and a hard fight she had to do it. All went well for a time after his mother's death, but when Ned was about five years old he lost the love and guidance of his father, and his grandmother was deprived of her only support. Ned's father was employed as a motorman by the Winnipeg Street Railway Company. He was steady and prosperous; when suddenly a "strike" was called, and then there were riotous times in Winnipeg's streets. Matters went from bad to worse, until at last the Mayor called out the soldiers, and they came with all the pride and pomp of war and with a great Gatling gun to overawe the rioters. A hot time was in process on Main Street, three cars had been smashed to atoms, the police with drawn batons had charged the crowd, when Ned's father, who had entered a car to get his overcoat, left there the night before the strike, was arrested as he was leaving the car. No explanation was asked or taken. A "striking motorman," he was caught in the act; and accordingly he was sentenced to a long term of imprisonment in Stony Mountain Penitentiary. Then began the hard struggle against poverty and disease, the hard struggle in which thousands have already been worsted, the battle against fearful odds which so many are now fighting. With no one to support her and little Ned the old woman was forced to go out and scrub offices and to do a day's work wherever it could be got, in order, as she said, "to get a bit an' a sup an' a few rags to keep the boy in dacency."

Selkirk Avenue was not then the congested district that it is to-day. Then happy homes, not many on the street, but each with a nice large plot of ground and its own garden shaded with maple trees, covered the district where now stores and offices and tenement blocks are trying to shut out the sunshine. Never did a braver, more generous, kinder-hearted people dwell together than those of North Winnipeg in the good old days when each was known to all and all to each. The hungry and the destitute never pleaded then in vain. Like the Green Isle from which they sprung, "their doors opened wide to the poor and the stranger"; like the land of their adoption, Canada, the broad and free, their hands and purses were ever open to the call of charity. Among them these two friendless ones found friends indeed. They lived in a little home just east of where the Exhibition Buildings now stand. A cleaner and neater one, though poorly furnished, could not be found in all the city. On the walls were a few pictures, and the one Ned loved best was that of Archbishop Machray, the great prelate who had

done so much for Western Canada in general and Winnipeg in particular. Often he would sit for hours to hear Granny tell of the deeds of the early pioneers in this great "Lone Land," and especially, so far as she knew, those of the great Saint whom Ned was proud to claim as his hero.

Often on a summer's evening, when the darkness was beginning to fall, and Granny had rested a little after her day's work, she and the child would walk down towards the church. Not a handsome edifice, merely a frame shell on a stone foundation. Not old and fragrant with ancient memories, like the churches of the "Dear Isle" so far away, where tired and weary workers, after long and dreary toil, in the evenings would step in and reverently kneeling would lose sight of the world and its weariness, in prayer and communion with God—a custom of the people which gave them the strength and fortitude to bear a burden unknown to the boys and girls of this Canada of ours. No, not grand and old and magnificent, but still to these two sacred and hallowed because it was God's House and theirs. They knelt on the chancel step—the old woman and the little boy. There they knelt and prayed—ay, prayed for the mother and the daughter now dead and gone; "for all who are any way afflicted or distressed in mind, body, or estate"; and for one so dear to them suffering, after the example of his Saviour, punishment for a crime he did not commit.

Ah, would to God we had more like these; would to God the evenings were hallowed with more such visits to our city churches; would to God that more hungry hearts were eager for such quiet communion with their Heavenly Father in His own House! What a beautiful picture it made: The setting sun shining through the western window falling on the gray hair and wrinkled, upturned face of the old woman, and on the sweet young head and innocent countenance of the little child so close to her side. Ah, often has the Rector, standing in the shadow, gazed with love and gratitude on this scene—a scene of heaven upon the earth, a picture artists love to paint, a sermon without words, an evening incense, the strong, prevailing prayer of Youth and Age.

### CHAPTER III.

Seven bright summers have passed away since little Irish Ned first saw the light of day. In his own estimation he is now quite a man. Granny must put him in long pants, and then he will trot out to earn a living for himself. Down to the newspaper office he goes with a friend who tells his story. The "Circulation Manager" is very sympathetic, and Ned gets his first bundle of papers. Oh, how proud he was. Not a prouder boy or man in all Winnipeg. At six o'clock in the morning his little feet would carry him across the overhead bridge to Portage Avenue, and soon his voice would be heard crying "Free Press! Morning Free Press!" along Portage Avenue, up Main Street and down Selkirk to his home. In the afternoon the same shrill call would be heard heralding the evening papers, "Press, 'Bune and Telegram." Of them all he preferred the Free Press, but necessity knows no law, and it was, as he said, "to make his pile and get rich quick," that he sold the "'Bune and Tely."

On Sunday he was always at morning service, sitting in the South Transept near the Font. He loved the Sunday School, and right joyously rang his sweet, childish treble in the chants and hymns; but when it came to the hymn, "Just as I am, I come," then his whole soul seemed afire, and the thrilling, rapturous music gushed from his little throat and ascended Heavenwards—as the angels' songs must ascend to the summit of God's Throne.

"In the glad morning of my day,  
My life to give, my vows to pay,  
With no reserve and no delay,  
With all my heart I come.

"Just as I am, young, strong and free,  
To be the best that I can be,  
For truth and righteousness and Thee,  
Lord of my life, I come.

"And for Thy sake to win renown,  
And then to take the victor's crown,  
And at Thy feet to cast it down,  
O Master, Lord, I come."

It was the sweet, enchanting strain of a pure and innocent soul registering its determination to be worthy of the God from Whom it sprung.

Day followed day, and week in week out, in sunshine and in rain, Ned sold his papers and won his way. All came to know and admire and love little Irish Ned. His honest, bright, little face and winsome, dimpled smile won him hosts of friends; but he never forgot the dearest friend of all, his good old Granny. And still as long as evening twilight lingered, the setting sun, peeping through the western window in the green frame church, found the two kneeling on the chancel step offering up the prayer of Faith and Love.

#### CHAPTER IV.

The summer days were ended. The bright fall days were come. All nature had donned her many coloured garments made beautiful by the frost before she laid them away for the winter rest. The world was beautiful, but darkness and dismay reigned in the newspaper offices, for Irish Ned was missing. "No one to take his papers?" "Where is he?" "At home, sick." "What?" "Typhoid fever." Yes; the curse of Winnipeg in its earlier days, the dread disease responsible for so much poverty and suffering, had Ned in its grip, and held him fast. He lay on his bed very, very ill, and his grandmother tried to comfort and soothe and bring him back to health—her darling, her loved one, her only one—but all in vain. His course was run, his hour had come, his brief day of trial was over. "Oh, sir," he said to the Rector, "I know *you'll* tell me the truth. The doctor won't tell me, and Granny tries to, but she can't, you know, sir; but you will, I know: Am I going to die, sir?" The good man asked, "How do you feel about it yourself, Ned, my son?" And the lad bravely answered, "I think I am, sir." Then the Rector said, "Ned, my own brave boy, you will see Jesus before we do; are you afraid to go to Him?" And the sick boy answered, "No, sir; not now, sir." Quietly and calmly he lay and listened as the Rector told over and over again "the old, old story of Jesus and His love"; and after a simple childlike prayer, in which the minister committed the boy to "God's gracious mercy and protection," the little chap asked them to sing his favourite hymn. With breaking hearts and voices full of emotion they sang the wished-for hymn, the dying boy joining in at the verse—

"In the glad morning of my day,  
My life to give, my vows to pay,  
With no reserve and no delay,  
With all my heart I come."

Along Selkirk Avenue, through North Winnipeg to St. John's, down Main to Portage and Broadway, across the river to Fort Rouge and Norwood flew the news that Irish Ned was dying. Many an eye was filled with tears, many a breast heaved a throbbing sigh, many a heart had an aching load: Irish Ned was dying. Round at the Church and in Sunday School on that clouded Sunday morning they missed the bright, winsome face and dimpled smile, and many a prayer was sent on the wings of faith to the Throne of Grace for the little boy and his lonely friend. Yes, the Angel of Death was waiting to take "home" little Irish Ned. Some of his chums went to see him on Sunday night and sang at his request, "Tell me the old, old Story." Afterwards the Rector went and stayed till the end. A great calm settled down upon the boy. He lay so quietly all night, while his grandmother clasped one hand in hers and with her other gently brushed back the fair hair from his brow. At last, after a long silence, he said, "Say 'Just as I am' for me." Again they said it. Then the Rector read the Prayers for the Dying. As the dawn was breaking, the sun gilding spires and housetops, and the sparrows twittering their morning hymn of praise on the eaves, with the words, "Lord of my life, I come," upon his lips, little Irish Ned gave a gentle sigh, and yielded up his spirit to the God who gave it.

He was dead. The world without was bathed in sunshine, but all was dark to her he loved, now left alone. His little bird was singing merrily in its cage, "but the strong heart of its child master was mute and motionless forever." For the last time earth had felt the springing tread, and listened to the merry whistle of little Irish Ned.

They buried him in the cemetery at Brookside, far removed from the city's noise in which he so loved to mingle, far from the haunts and the turmoils and the troubles of men. As the Rector with choking voice uttered the words, "Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust," many a heart heaved with sorrow, many an eye filled with tears, many a breast throbbed with sobbing; but as he went on to proclaim in triumphant tones, "In sure and certain hope of the Resurrection to Eternal Life through our Lord Jesus Christ," an awed silence fell upon that sorrow-stricken assembly and a new hope was begotten in their hearts.

"Father, in Thy gracious keeping  
Leave we now Thy servant sleeping."

## CHAPTER V.

*"Is it well with the child? It is well."*

"Safely, safely gathered in,  
No more sorrow, no more sin,  
No more childish griefs or fears,  
No more sadness, no more tears;  
For the life so young and fair  
Now hath passed from earthly care;  
God Himself the soul will keep,  
Giving His beloved sleep.

"Safely, safely gathered in,  
Free from sorrow, free from sin,  
Passed beyond all grief and pain,  
Death, for thee, is truest gain;  
For our loss we must not weep,  
Nor our loved one long to keep  
From the house of rest and peace  
Where all sin and sorrow cease.

"Safely, safely gathered in,  
No more sorrow, no more sin.  
God has saved from weary strife,  
In its dawn, this fresh young life,  
Which awaits us now above,  
Resting in the Saviour's love;  
Jesu, grant that we may meet  
There adoring at Thy feet."

—*Henrietta O. Dobree.*

(Hymn 284, Book of Common Praise.)

## CHAPTER VI.

Men come and go. Nations rise and wane. Suns rise and set. The seasons roll around. The days and weeks and months succeed each other in rapid succession, and Time, the great Physician, heals our wounds. Once again 'tis Christmas Eve, and in a certain city church the Rector lingers for a while to see that all is in readiness for the festal morning. Loving hands have decorated the neat little church. Beautiful it looks, with its evergreen holly and ivy, and red berries, and white sparkling frost crystals, and pure white carnations on the altar. All is ready for to-morrow's services, and with thankful heart the Rector kneels on the chancel step to thank God for His best gift to the world—The Babe of Bethlehem—and to beseech that His people may appreciate that Gift and come in large numbers to the Holy Table. As he is about to leave the church an old woman comes tottering up the aisle bearing in one hand a silver "challenge" cup, and in the other a bunch of white flowers. With trembling voice she beseeches the minister to take and place them upon the altar. "The cup was Ned's, sir," she said, "he won it for shootin' at the Boys' Brigade. I bought the flowers myself, your riverence, for I know he would love it to be filled with flowers on the altar to-morrow; and I want it placed there as his gift to God this blessed Christmas Day."

Her request was granted. Ned's gift was "placed there" and all who heard the story were reminded of the saying, "He being dead, yet speaketh." In his life he bravely "did his duty in that state of life unto which it had pleased God to call him"; he gave himself up to bring joy and sunshine wherever he went; he gave his prayers, his service, his will to God; for "with all my heart, I come," he said.

And may we not feel this happy Christmastide, when the world is glad and joyful, when friends are true and the skies are blue and the sun is shining, when in God's House we

thank Him for the Babe of Bethlehem and unite with the whole Heavenly Host in singing "Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth peace to men of good-will"; may we not feel that with all the voices in that mighty throng, one voice we know will also be lovingly heard by our Father; and that will be the voice of Irish Ned, the Winnipeg Newsy.

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