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Memphis Mourns an Angel. (NCWC)

"Like sunshine on a gray day, there sometimes comes to us the story of a life that must make even cynics know their creed is not right - that there are those who more than make up for the ones who do not care. Such a life has just closed at St. Joseph's hospital, here, when Mary O'Reilly died at the age of 74.

"A sheaf of flowers, tied with crepe, hung from the closed door of a little frame grocery, and all up and down the street, and neighboring streets and lanes, as well, men, women and little children were sorrow-stricken, for scarcely one of them all but had cause to remember the kindness of Mrs. O'Reilly.

"More than 40 years ago, she opened that little store, as she often said, 'on a shoe-string.' Back in '92, folks looked askance at a woman who had the courage to 'go in business.' But the store was opened, and before long, the friendliness of the little Irish woman reached far beyond the confines of her neighborhood. Customers increased, and business prospered.

"The years went on. In good times, trade was brisk, and the cash register clicked merrily. In bad times, business went on just the same, although perhaps the cash register did not click some times at all, for when there was a family without funds, there was always groceries to be had 'on time' at the little store, for that was Mrs. O'Reilly's way. It was her way, too, to see that children who were ill, never wanted for food or medicine.

"In the passing of the years, the little store became a sort of meeting place for her friends. When she opened the little store, there were two small children to care for - clothes to mend, stockings to darn, hurts to make well, and all this was done 'between customers.' Somehow, through the years, Mary O'Reilly, although a frail looking little body, found time to make a garden, and to raise chickens. For sale? Never a vegetable, or a chicken or egg was sold - but how they were given away! There was always something for the neighbor who had none; always a chicken, fresh egg, or bowl of broth where it was most needed. Yet, with it all, she found plenty of time to work for her church - St. Joseph's Catholic church.

"She came to Memphis from County Mayo, Ireland, when but a slip of a girl, married Thomas O'Reilly, and was a mother before she was 19 years old. They were very happy together, but there came a day a few years afterward, when he was brought home to her dead - killed by a runaway horse. The shock was almost too much for her, but remembering she had little children dependent upon her, and no money, she began the battle of life for them by making aprons. This is how she made the money with which she opened the little store.

"Her life was as simple as it was filled with real Christian charity. Yet when she was dead, few were the high officials of that section who did not go to her little home, not as they said, to honor her, but to honor themselves. The big dailies of Memphis, and nearby sections, told of her in lead editorials, but had she known she would have said: 'What does it matter? A Hail Mary would be worth far more than it all!'

"Ill of pneumonia, two weeks before Christmas, she was up and around, but hospital authorities did not want her to leave until after the holidays. But, several days before Christmas, she told them she had to go home, saying that 'some out there would be without Christmas unless I am there to let them have what they need, and nobody knows but me.' As she lived, so she died For others. -- Tributes of the costliest flowers were sent her, but if she knew, she valued most the little pot of narcissus, - the tribute of a little shut-in who loved that flower as he loved his life - but loved Mary O'Reilly more."