North, South and over the Sea eBook

North, South and over the Sea

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.



BOOKRAGS

Contents

North, South and over the Sea eBook....1

Contents....2

Table of Contents....9

Page 1....10

Page 2....12

Page 3....14

Page 4....16

Page 5....18

Page 6....20

Page 7....22

Page 8....24

Page 9....26

Page 10....28

Page 11....30

Page 12....32

Page 13....34

Page 14....36

Page 15....38

Page 16....40

Page 17....42

Page 18....44

Page 19....46

Page 20....48

Page 21.....50

Page 22.....52

Page 23.....54

Page 24.....56

Page 25.....57

Page 26.....59

Page 27.....61

Page 28.....63

Page 29.....65

Page 30.....67

Page 31.....69

Page 32.....71

Page 33.....73

Page 34.....75

Page 35.....77

Page 36.....79

Page 37.....81

Page 38.....83

Page 39.....85

Page 40.....87

Page 41.....89

Page 42.....91

Page 43.....93

Page 44.....95

Page 45.....97

Page 46.....99
Page 47.....101
Page 48.....103
Page 49.....105
Page 50.....107
Page 51.....109
Page 52.....111
Page 53.....113
Page 54.....115
Page 55.....117
Page 56.....119
Page 57.....121
Page 58.....123
Page 59.....125
Page 60.....127
Page 61.....129
Page 62.....131
Page 63.....133
Page 64.....135
Page 65.....137
Page 66.....139
Page 67.....141
Page 68.....143
Page 69.....145
Page 70.....147

Page 71 149
Page 72 151
Page 73 153
Page 74 155
Page 75 157
Page 76 159
Page 77 161
Page 78 163
Page 79 165
Page 80 167
Page 81 169
Page 82 171
Page 83 173
Page 84 175
Page 85 177
Page 86 179
Page 87 181
Page 88 183
Page 89 185
Page 90 187
Page 91 189
Page 92 191
Page 93 193
Page 94 195
Page 95 197

Page 96.....199
Page 97.....201
Page 98.....203
Page 99.....205
Page 100.....207
Page 101.....209
Page 102.....211
Page 103.....213
Page 104.....215
Page 105.....217
Page 106.....219
Page 107.....221
Page 108.....223
Page 109.....225
Page 110.....226
Page 111.....228
Page 112.....230
Page 113.....232
Page 114.....234
Page 115.....236
Page 116.....238
Page 117.....240
Page 118.....242
Page 119.....244
Page 120.....246

Page 121.....248
Page 122.....250
Page 123.....251
Page 124.....252
Page 125.....254
Page 126.....256
Page 127.....258
Page 128.....259
Page 129.....260
Page 130.....262
Page 131.....264
Page 132.....266
Page 133.....267
Page 134.....269
Page 135.....270
Page 136.....272
Page 137.....274
Page 138.....276
Page 139.....278
Page 140.....280
Page 141.....282
Page 142.....284
Page 143.....286
Page 144.....287
Page 145.....289

Page 146.....291
Page 147.....293
Page 148.....295
Page 149.....297
Page 150.....299
Page 151.....301
Page 152.....303
Page 153.....305
Page 154.....307
Page 155.....309
Page 156.....311
Page 157.....312
Page 158.....314
Page 159.....316
Page 160.....318

Table of Contents

Table of Contents

Section	Page
Start of eBook	1
GOLDEN SALLY	1
THE CONQUEST OF RADICAL TED	25
HEATHER IN HOLBORN	42
SENTIMENT AND “FEELIN’”	47
THE ROMANCE OF BROTHER JOHN	53
GILES IN LUCK	59
BLACKBIRD’S INSPIRATION	74
THE GIRL HE LEFT BEHIND HIM	80
ELLENEY	87
IN ST. PATRICK’S WARD	105
THE FLITTING OF THE OLD FOLKS	112
ROSEEN	132

Page 1

GOLDEN SALLY

The long warm day was drawing to its close; over the sandhills yonder the sun was sinking in a great glory of scarlet and purple and gold. The air was warm still, and yet full of those myriad indescribable essences that betoken the falling of the dew; and mingling with, yet without dominating them, was the sweet penetrating odour of newly-cut hay.

John Dickinson walked moodily along the lane that led first to his uncle's wheat-field, and then to the sandhills. He was a tall, strapping young fellow, broad of shoulder and sturdy of limb, with nevertheless something about him which betokened that he was not country bred. His face was not brown enough, his hands were not rough enough, the shirt sleeves, rolled up above his elbow, were not only cleaner than those of the ordinary rustic after a hard day, but displayed arms whereof the tell-tale whiteness proclaimed that they were little used to such exposure. These arms ached sorely now; all day long had John been assisting in "carrying," and the hours spent in forking the hay from the ground to the cart had put his new-found ardour for a country life to a severe test.

John had been born and brought up in Liverpool, having since he left school acted as assistant in his father's shop. But on the latter's death, his affairs were found to be so hopelessly involved that it was impossible for his family to carry on the business. Mrs. Wilson and her daughters had obtained employment in "town," and John had announced his intention of taking to farming. Having been more or less master in his father's small establishment he could not brook the idea of accepting a subordinate post in the same way of business; and, indeed, as his mother's brother, burly old Richard Waring of Thornleigh, had offered to take him into his household and teach him his work, there seemed to be no reason why he should not adopt the career which was more to his mind.

John had frequently made expeditions into the country before, and had spent many pleasant hours in the company of his aunt and uncle, and their buxom daughter Jinny; but he found a vast difference between these pleasure excursions and the steady routine to which he was now subjected. All the household were abed at nine, an arrangement to which John objected. As his aunt opined that it was "a sin an' a shame to burn good lamps i' summer time when days was long enough for onybody as was reasonable," he bought a supply of candles out of his own meagre store, and, being fond of reading, spent an hour or two with book or paper before retiring to rest. But the worst of this arrangement was that when, as it appeared to him, he had just settled comfortably to his first sleep, it was time to be astir again. His uncle thumped at his

door, his aunt, from the bottom of the stairs, called out shrilly that if he wanted any breakfast he had best make haste, for she was “goin’ to side the things in a twothree

Page 2

minutes." Jinny made sarcastic comments on his tardy appearance, and laughed at his heavy eyes. That was the worst of it—Jinny was always laughing at him; she "made little" of him on every possible occasion. His "town" speech, his "finicky" ways, his state of collapse at the end of the day, his awkwardness in handling unaccustomed tools, were to her never-failing sources of amusement. John set his teeth and made no sign of being wounded or annoyed, the sturdy spirit inherited from his mother's people forbidding him to cry out when he was hurt; but his spirits were at a low ebb, and to-day he had walked forth after tea with a heart as sore and heavy as those over-strained arms of his. Jinny had come out to the field with the "drinkin's," and her face looked so bewitching under the sun-bonnet, and her waist so tempting and trim beneath the crisp folds of her clean bed-gown, that John had made bold in cousinly fashion to encircle it with his arm, whereupon she had freed herself with an impatient twirl, remarking that she didn't want no counter-jumpers to be measurin' of her—a sally which had been regarded as exquisitely humorous by the bystanders. John's cheeks burned as he thought of it.

"She needn't be afraid—I'll not come nigh her again," he muttered vengefully.

He was skirting the wheat-field now, the tall, green ears stirring with a pleasant rustling sound; in some distant reeds a bunting was warbling, a belated lark was circling slowly downwards over his head. From the village yonder voices and laughter fell faintly on his ear, and all these mingled sounds served but to accentuate the prevailing impression of peace and stillness; as John strolled onwards, his heavy steps crushing out the aromatic perfume of the thyme which grew profusely along the path, he was insensibly soothed and calmed by the evening quietude.

Over the wooden railings now, and across the dewy pasture and up the tallest sandhill, from the top of which he could, as he knew, look down upon the sea. The waters would be ruddy and golden at this hour, but by day ran brown and sluggish enough over the mud banks of the Alt. On the other side of the shining expanse the houses of New Brighton would stand forth all flecked with gold, and farther still the very smoke of Liverpool would appear as a luminous yellow haze, and the masts and riggings of the ships lying at anchor would be turned into bars of gold. John knew these things by heart, but was never tired of gazing upon them, and as he climbed the hill his heart grew lighter and lighter; the salt, tart breeze that lifted his hair as he topped it gave new vigour to his tired limbs, and a sudden sense of exhilaration to his whole being. He stood at last with folded arms on the summit letting it sing past him, and gazing about him in vague delight. A golden world indeed; just what he had expected to find. A

golden sea, a golden sky, the very sand and grasses at his feet appeared to be golden too.

Page 3

Now, what was that? About twenty paces beneath him, on the seaward side of the dune, he caught a glimpse of another golden object, an unusual object, the nature of which he did not at once identify. He shaded his eyes with his hand, and presently began to laugh softly. That golden thing which had caught his eye was the uncovered head of a girl. She was seated in a hollow of the hill, and the tall star-grass and blossoming ragwort grew so freely at this spot that only her head was visible. All at once a hand was thrust out from behind the screen, and a sudden shower of gold fell downwards from that glittering crown. John laughed again as the girl began very composedly to comb her hair.

He came down the hill, stepping as lightly as he could, and paused in front of her quaint 'tiring-room. She looked up as his shadow fell across her, paused a moment with the comb poised in mid-air, and then calmly drew it through her yellow locks. What hair it was! It fell round her like a veil as she sat: it would reach almost to her knees, John thought, if she were standing. He looked at her with a kind of awe; for a moment the strange tales he had so often heard of mermaids and witches recurring to his mind. But he was reassured on a closer inspection of the girl and her attire. She wore a bed-gown and apron like Jinny's, but not, alas! so neat or clean; her stuff petticoat, too, was ragged and old, and the feet, which were stretched forth from under its folds, were brown and bare as the hands which so deftly wielded the comb.

John's eyes rested with intense disapproval on these shapely feet, and travelled slowly backwards over the ragged petticoat and the pink cotton jacket—which, instead of being neatly buttoned over at the neck, fell loosely open, disclosing the girl's throat, firm and round as a pillar—and so on till they reached her face; then suddenly drooped before the disconcerting gaze of another pair of eyes, very large and bright.

"I hope ye'll know me again," said the girl.

John looked up with a grin. "It'll be hard work if you keep your face covered up with all that hair," he said.

She gathered together the heavy yellow masses with both hands, twisted them up with astonishing speed and deftness, and let her arms fall upon her lap.

"Theer!" she said.

It was not a pretty face John at first decided; tanned as it was to the colour of ripe corn, and the eyes, such a light blue and with such blue whites, looking so strange in this setting. The cheeks, moreover, were not rosy like those of his cousin Jinny, nor rounded in their contours—the chin was too pointed; yet even as John looked a sudden

dimple flashed there, and a smile, swift and mischievous, lit up the whole face. Then he did not feel quite so sure.

[Illustration: *Golden sally* “I hope ye’ll know me again,” said the girl]

“What in the name of fortune are you doing here?” he asked abruptly, almost roughly, for the smile nettled him. “Can’t you find some better place than this to do your dressing in?”

Page 4

“If I didn’t comb my hair i’ th’ sandhills I wouldn’t comb it at all,” she returned. “It’s the on’y place I have to do onythin’ in. Mony a time when th’ owd lad is fuddled, me an’ my Aunt Nancy sleep on ’em.”

“Sleep out o’ doors!” ejaculated John, much scandalised.

“Aye, oftener than not, I can tell you. Tisn’t so very coomfortable when theer’s snow about—though we mak’ up a bit o’ fire an’ that; but it’s reet enough this time o’ year. Aye, I like to lay awake lookin’ up at the stars, an’ listenin’ to the wayter yon. The rabbits coom dancin’ round us, an’ th’ birds fly ower we’r ’eads when the leet cooms. It’s gradely.”

John slowly lowered himself down on the sand beside her, as if to endeavour to look on this strange aspect of life from her level. His respectable commercial soul was shocked, but he was nevertheless interested.

“My word!” he ejaculated; and then, after a pause, “What’s your name, if I may ask?”

“Sally.”

“Sally? It’s a good enough name. What’s th’ other one?”

“I haven’t got no other one as I ever heerd on. My uncle’s Jim Whiteside, an’ soom folks call’n me Sally Whiteside, an’ then he gets mad an’ says ‘tisn’t none o’ my name. An’ soom folks call’n me ’Cockle Sally.’ Aye, that’s what they call’n me mostly.”

Dickinson looked at her disapprovingly. He had heard of the wild, disreputable “Cockle Folk” who roamed about the sandhills; who were worse than tramps in the opinion of respectable people, and who had, many of them, no fixed abode of any kind.

“Well,” he remarked, “it’s a pity. I could ha’ wished ye’d ha’ belonged to different folks. I don’t hold with these cocklers. They’re a rough lot, ar’n’t they?”

The girl laughed.

“My Aunt Nancy says I’m as rough as ony mysel’. Would ye like soom cockles?” she asked, breaking off suddenly. “I’d fetch ye soom to-morrow if I’ve ony luck. They’re chep enough—an’ big ones. Wheer do ye live?”

“At Mr. Waring’s farm,” responded John, distantly; adding, more truthfully than politely, “I doubt you’d best keep away though. My aunt ’ll be none too pleased if you come yonder.”

“Aye, I knows her. Hoo buys mony a quart of me, an’ then hoo chivies me out o’ th’ road. I’ll coom. If you’re not there, I’ll coom to the field.”

“Well, you might do that,” agreed John, accommodatingly. “Some o’ th’ other chaps ’ud be glad enough to take a few of these cockles off you. ‘Twould be a bit of a change wi’ th’ bread and cheese. We’re goin’ to cut the big meadow to the right as you go to the village. Come to the top of the hill, and I’ll show it you.”

“Nay, I’ll not go near field if they’re all theer. I went once, an’ farmer he said he’d set dog at me; an’ th’ lads began o’ jokin’ an’ laughin’ at me. Aye, I get mad wi’ nobbut thinkin’ on’t.”

She coloured as she spoke, and John’s face clouded over, as though her indignation had infected him. In fact, he had too recently suffered from the rude jests and laughter of his fellow-labourers not to sympathise with Sally.

Page 5

“I know them,” he said bitterly, “and a rough lot they are. They leave me no peace; they give me plenty of their impudence too, if it’s any comfort to you, Sally, to know that.”

“Eh dear!” cried Sally in amazement. “Why, whatever can they find amiss wi’ you?”

The blue eyes were upturned with such genuine and admiring astonishment that John could not but be touched and flattered. In this actual mood, moreover, when his spirit was still smarting from the remembrance of the manner in which scornful Jinny had turned him into a laughing-stock, Sally’s respectful appreciation was doubly sweet to him.

“I’ll bring ye th’ cockles if ye’ll coom up th’ lane at dinner-time,” she went on. “I’ll stand near the white gate. Coom, I’ll show ye.”

She sprang up and began quickly to ascend the hill. Her figure had the erectness common to those accustomed to carry burdens on their heads, and also a grace and freedom of movement which impressed John with vague astonishment. As she turned upon the summit to point out the place of meeting, her face sparkling with animation, her eyes alight and eager, the golden coronet of hair radiant in the mellow glow, he gave a little gasp of amazement. The girl was beautiful! What a pity she should lead such a life!

“Yonder, see,” she continued. “Aye—why do ye stare at me that way?”

“Sally,” said practical, plain—spoken John, “I’m lookin’ at you because I think you’re real handsome, an’ I think it’s a terrible pity for ye to be traipsin’ about like this. Why don’t you leave your uncle and aunt and go to live with decent people—and put on shoes and stockings?” he added severely.

The girl gazed at him in amazement.

“Whatever put that i’ your ’ead? Decent folks wouldn’t have nought to say to me. I’d as soon go cocklin’ as do onythin’ else—an’ I couldn’t do wi’ shoes an’ stockin’s.”

“Didn’t you ever go to school?”

“Nay, scarce at all. We was wonderful clever ’bout that. We shifted an’ shifted an’ gi’ed ’em all th’ slip.”

“Don’t you go to church on Sundays?”

“Eh dear! I wonder what they’d say if me an’ Aunt Nancy an’ Uncle Jim was to go paddlin’ in among all the fine folks—wi’ bare feet an’ all.”

She laughed grimly.

“Will yo’ coom yonder for the cockles?” she inquired presently.

John nodded, and, turning, she ran down the hill, fleet as a hare, and disappeared round its curved base.

John walked homewards thoughtfully, his own troubles quite forgotten in the consideration of Sally’s lot. All that evening, and even during his work on the following morning, he pondered over it, and it was with a portentous face that he betook himself at noon to the trysting-place. So punctual was he that he stood there for some minutes before a musical cry of “Cockles! fine cockles!” came ringing down the lane, and presently Sally appeared, the basket poised upon her head throwing a deep shadow over her face, but the curves of her figure strongly defined by the brilliant summer sunlight. Halting by the gate she balanced her basket on the upper bar, and immediately measured out a quart by way of greeting.

Page 6

“How much?” inquired business-like John.

“Ye may have ’em for nought; I’ve got plenty, see. They’re fine ones, ar’n’t they?”

“I’d sooner pay you for them. You want the money perhaps.”

“Well, then,” said Sally, and thrust out her brown palm.

“Sally,” said John, seriously, “I’ve been thinking a deal about you. I think it is somethin’ dreadful the way you are livin’—you so comely an’ all. It’s an awful thing to think you don’t know anythin’ and never go to church or that. Do you never say your prayers?”

Sally looked at him, and twisted open a cockle before replying.

“Nay, I dunnot. Aunt Nancy doesn’t neither.”

“Do you know who made you, Sally?”

“I larned at school, the on’y time I went, but I forget now.”

“Well, Sally, I’ve been thinkin’—somebody ought to teach you. I could teach you myself of an evening if you’d come yonder to the big sandhill.”

Sally looked reflective, but presently nodded.

“I will while I’m here,” she said; “but we’s be shiftin’ afore aught’s along—we’re allus shiftin’. We have to be terrible careful not to get cotched for sleeping out. They’re that sharp wi’ us they won’t let a body do naught, so we dursen’t stay too long i’ one place. But I’ll coom, an’ ye can teach me if ye’ve a mind. If ye dunnot see me when ye coom to th’ top o’ hill, jest call out ‘Cockle Sally! Cockle Sally!’ an’ I’ll coom.”

“No; that’s an ugly name,” said John, who had been idly watching the play of the sunbeams on the little curling strands of hair which were lightly lifted by the summer breeze. “I could find you a better name than that, I think. You look like—”

He paused.

“What do I look like?” inquired Sally.

John’s glance once more travelled over her whole figure. The faded buff jacket, the not altogether immaculate apron of unbleached calico, were transfigured by the all-pervading sunshine; golden lights outlined the tanned face and hands; as for the hair, it was at that moment a very glory.

“I reckon I’d call you Golden Sally,” he said with a laugh. “You look as if you were made of gold this morning, and I’ll engage you’re as good as gold,” he added gallantly.

“Coom, that’s too fine a name for me,” cried Sally, well pleased, nevertheless, and smiling broadly.

“I’ll christen you by it all the same,” replied John, smiling too. “You must be good and mind what I tell you,” he added with mock severity. “If you don’t, I must find some other name for you.”

Sally’s long eyelashes suddenly drooped, and she drummed on the gate nervously.

“I’ll do my best to please ye,” she said. “I’ll coom when ye call,” she added after a pause.

Lifting up her basket, and balancing it once more on her head, she raised her downcast lids, and flashed a farewell smile at John as she turned away. In another moment she was speeding in the opposite direction.

Page 7

John was vexed and disappointed that she should terminate the meeting so abruptly, but consoled himself with the reflection that he was free to assume the office of instructor that very evening if he chose.

The long, toilsome day seemed slow of passing, the company of the farmer and his men more tedious even than usual, but by way of compensation Jinny's sallies seemed to have lost their power to wound him. It was late when, the last waggon-load having been conveyed from the field and the evening meal disposed of, he found himself free to attend to Sally's education. He strode along the sandy lane and across the field at a very different pace to that of the previous evening, and was almost breathless when he found himself on the top of the tall dune, gazing about with anxious eyes. No golden head was to be seen amid the star-grass and ragwort this time; no graceful girl's figure was outlined against the evening sky. His heart sank, and it was in a disconsolate, uncertain voice that he called aloud:

"Golden Sally! Golden Sally!"

Then, starting up, as if by magic, from some unsuspected place of ambush, she came quickly towards him. Her face was blushing and eager, her hands outstretched; and John was somehow so glad to see her after the chill disappointment of the moment before, that he not only grasped the hands, but kissed the glowing cheek.

It would be difficult to say how much Sally learnt from her zealous young instructor—for zealous he was, sincere and earnest in his desire to improve her mind. But he taught her one thing very rapidly and completely—to love himself with all her undisciplined heart. After a time she made no secret of this devotion, and John was oddly abashed and disconcerted by her occasional outbursts of affection. He was much interested in Sally, very much attracted by her. Her worship of him was distinctly pleasant, if a little too demonstrative. Now and then he himself could not refrain from a tender word or a caress; but he was thoroughly convinced of her inferiority, and nothing could have been further from his thoughts than the wish to marry her.

Sally sometimes made him presents: bags of cockles, which, on leaving her, he not infrequently dropped into a ditch; a few flowers, procured he knew not how; and once she astonished him by producing, carefully wrapped up in paper, a very handsome silk handkerchief, with a curious pattern of sprigs and flowers.

"Why, Sally," he cried, "I scarcely like to take this. It's worth a deal of money I'm sure."

"It is," said Sally, with an odd look. "Aye, I am fain that ye like it. I wish I could find summat better to give ye. Theer's nought too good for ye."

John, much flattered, and moreover sufficiently of a dandy to rejoice in the possession of a handsome and unusual article of wearing apparel, thanked her warmly, and assured her that he would value it all the days of his life.

Page 8

On the following Sunday he was tempted to wear it, and came down to breakfast much pleased with his appearance; but he was both astonished and alarmed at his aunt's demeanour on beholding it.

"Lor', John, wheerever did ye get yon 'andkerchief? Dear, now, I could swear it's the same as the one Mr. Lambert, of Saltfield, lost a five or six week ago. Mrs. Lambert towd me 'bout it when we drove yon on neighbourin' day. Eh, hoo was in a way! It's been i' th' family for years an' years; and hoo'd weshed it hersel' an' put it on th' hedge to dry, an' soombry coom an' whipped it off. Eh, I mind it well. Hoo'd often showed it me. Hoo thought a dale of it."

John coloured up to his temples, a horrible suspicion darting through his mind; but he was nevertheless determined to carry off the situation in a high-handed manner.

"This can't be hers, anyhow," he returned angrily, "seein' it's mine."

"Well, I could ha' sworn it were the same," retorted his aunt. "Such an old-fashioned thing too. It's strange ye should get one of the same pattern. How long have ye had it, John? Happen them as stole it sold it again."

John hated telling a lie, but conceived it advisable to tell one now.

"I've had this years an' years. My father gave it to me."

"Well, if he gave it you so long ago as that it can't be the same, I suppose, but it's wonderful like it. I wonder wheer he got it. It's a pity we can't ask him, but he's dead, as how 'tis, poor fellow! Coom, pull up an' tak' your breakfast."

John dutifully drew his chair to the table, but he felt as though every morsel choked him. His own falsehood, to begin with, stuck in his throat, while the thought of Sally's possible perfidy seemed to turn the wholesome farmhouse bread to sand in his mouth. Was it possible, could it be possible, that this love-token of hers was stolen? Had she dared to offer him that which it was a disgrace to possess If such were the case, of what avail was all his teaching? To what purpose had he stooped to associate so constantly with one so much beneath him?

Meanwhile the eyes of all the Waring family were fixed upon his luckless neckerchief in a manner which made him feel more and more uncomfortable; and he was fairly beside himself when, after church, his aunt informed him that she was thinking of axin' Margery Formby, who was Mrs. Lambert's sister, to step round after dinner and have a look at it, "It's so amazin' like the one Mr. Lambert lost, I reckon it 'ud be a kind o' comfort if hoo could tell Mrs. Lambert hoo needn't set sich store by it, as sich things is easy to be got."

“Well, aunt, I’m not goin’ to stop in to have Margery Formby pokin’ and pryin’ at my things. I never see such queer folk in my life. ‘Tisn’t thought manners in other places to be passin’ remarks an’ askin’ questions about a fellow’s clothes.”

“Well I never!” ejaculated Mrs. Waring, scarlet with indignation. “Upon my word, John, if it’s thought manners in town to be givin’ impudence to your own aunt ye’d best go back theer. It’s not thought manners here, and what’s more, we won’t put up with it. Your uncle’ll ha’ summat to say, I’ll warrant.”

Page 9

John heard no more, for, seeing that the good woman was working herself up into a most unchristian fury, and being, moreover, in no mood to meet the astonished queries of Margery Formby, he went quickly out of the room and out of the house, resolved to extract an explanation from Sally without delay.

Very bitter and angry was his mood, far more bitter and angry than on the evening when he had first beheld her. That which he had originally dismissed as an unjust suspicion had now grown to be almost certainty; and he waited doggedly the word which must confirm it. His blood boiled within him as he thought of Sally's effrontery. It was an insult, an unpardonable impertinence; one which he was, indeed, resolved never to pardon. He would make her confess, and then he would have done with her for ever.

Had his temper been less wrathful he might have been touched at the joyful alacrity with which she sprang to meet him. It had needed no call to bring her to his side; some instinct seemed to have warned her of his coming, and she had caught sight of him while still a long way off and hastened towards him as he approached. She uttered a little cry of joy as her eyes fell upon her gift.

"Eh! ye've got it on! It looks gradely."

"It looks gradely, does it?" returned John grimly. "I've a word or two to say to you about this, Sally? Where did you get this? Is this the handkerchief that was stolen from Mr. Lambert of Saltfield?"

Sally looked back at him quite unabashed, and began to laugh.

"Think o' your guessin'!" she cried. "Well, doesn't it suit ye a dale better nor yon ugly owd chap?"

John turned quite pale; then, with an oath and a sudden fierce gesture, tore the handkerchief from his neck and threw it on the ground.

"How dare you?" he cried, turning on Sally with flashing eyes. "How dare you look me in the face after treating me like this? Insultin' me—makin' a laughin' stock of me—"

He stopped, stammering with rage. The angry colour had now returned to his face; it was Sally who was pale. She stared at him aghast, and presently began to sob like a frightened child.

"I'm sure I dunno whatever I've done to mak' ye so mad," she cried brokenly. "I did but look to please ye."

“Please me!” cried John, stamping his foot. “How could it please me for you to give me a thing that no respectable man ought to touch—a thing as was stolen? I was a fool to think it could have been honestly come by; but when you gave it me, looking so innocent, I never guessed you’d gone and picked it off a hedge.”

“I didna,” sobbed Sally. “I took it out of Aunt Nancy’s bundle. Hoo’ll be soom mad when hoo finds out, and hoo’ll thrash me for ’t. Hoo reckoned to pop it as soon as we’d getten a bit further away fro’ Saltfield.”

John turned quite sick. This gift of Sally’s had, then, been doubly stolen. He had been wearing an adornment which had been stolen from a thief! Words failed him, but he looked at Sally as though he could slay her.

Page 10

“Dunnot be so mad,” she pleaded, laying her hand upon his arm. “I didn’t think to vex ye. I nobbut looked about for the best I could find. They flowers ye didn’t seem to set mich store by, and I could on’y get a twothree now and again when theer was nobry about.”

He shook her off with an angry laugh. “So the flowers were stolen, too! Now, look you, Sally, I’m goin’ to have an end o’ this. You may pick up yon handkerchief and take yourself off. I’ll have no more to say to you after this. I’ll have nothing to say to a thief. Don’t you ever think to come botherin’ me again, for I’ll have no more to do wi’ you.”

She stood looking at him stupidly for a minute or two, and then, to his great annoyance and discomfiture, flung her arms round his neck, sobbing out inarticulate words of entreaty and remonstrance. She didn’t think to vex him, she didn’t think it was any harm.

He shook her off roughly and impatiently. Sally had evidently no sense of decency or even decorum. “Get out of my sight,” he cried fiercely, “or if it comes to that I can go myself. I’ve done with you, I tell you—ye needn’t come after me no more.”

She had been looking at him piteously, the big tears standing in those strange blue eyes of hers, and on her tanned cheeks; but now a curious sullen expression came over her face. Stooping and picking up the handkerchief, she tore at it fiercely, first with her hands and subsequently with her teeth. A kind of angry curiosity caused John to delay his departure.

“You’ve no right to make away with Mr. Lambert’s handkerchief,” he cried. “If I did what was right I’d give notice to the police.”

“Well, why dunnot ye?” she retorted with a fierceness which startled him. “Ye can if ye’ve a mind.”

And she walked away slowly, still plucking at the handkerchief.

* * * * *

A year later, on just such another Sunday afternoon, John stood on the same spot with a woman by his side—the woman was Jinny, and Jinny was his wife. Many things had happened since John had parted in wrath and bitterness from the girl whom he had once called “Golden Sally.” His demeanour towards his aunt on the momentous morning alluded to had led to a violent quarrel with her and her husband, which had had unexpected results, for Jinny had taken his part—Jinny who was the idol of her parents and the pivot on which the whole establishment turned. John’s whilom indifference had

led first to pique on Jinny's part and then to interest. John, perturbed of spirit and sore of heart, had been grateful for her favour. The attachment which poor Sally had for a time diverted was soon re-established, and before six months had passed the young couple were courting in due form.

Page 11

Farmer Waring was at first a little annoyed, but consoled himself with the reflection that blood was thicker than water. He had no son of his own; it would be pleasant to keep Jinny still at the farm with a husband whom he could "gaffer" and break in to his own ways; so, by and by, consent was given, and John Dickinson was treated with great respect by all at the farm, and already assumed the airs of a master. As for Sally, he had never set eyes on her since the moment of their parting. It had once come to his ears that she and her aunt were in prison for sleeping out of doors, and, shortly after their release, she had apparently "shifted" with the rest of her family. John thought of her as little as possible, for the mere recollection of the manner in which he had been duped, and, as he conceived it, disgraced, filled him with disgust.

There was certainly no memory of her in his mind now as he climbed the hill with Jinny on his arm. They had only been married a few days, and his attitude towards her was still that of a lover. They sat down on the summit of the hill, and John put his arm round Jinny's waist. After the manner of their kind they did not talk much, but were vaguely content with one another and their surroundings. Jinny had some sweets in her pocket, and crunched one occasionally. John did not care for sweets, but was thinking of having a pipe by and bye. The larks were singing, and the little sandpipers fluttering about them, uttering their curious call.

"Here's soombry comin'," remarked Jinny all at once, between two sucks of a lemon drop.

John looked round without removing his arm. He gave a start, however, as his eyes fell on the figure which was rapidly advancing towards them along the irregular crest of the hill. Half unconsciously he released Jinny, and turned over a little on the sand to avoid meeting the direct gaze of the new-comer.

"It's nobbut wan o' they cocklers. You've no need to mind," remarked Jinny a little petulantly. She had thought John's arm in the right place.

John made no answer. He did not dare to raise his eyes, but his ears were strained to catch the swift patter of the approaching bare feet. If Sally should recognise him—*if*, of course she must—if she should speak, what irreparable mischief might not be made in a few moments!

The steps came nearer; there was a pause, Dickinson's heart beating so loudly that he feared his wife must hear it. He did not raise his eyes, but from beneath their drooped lids he caught sight of Sally's well-known skirt. He made no sign, however, and after what seemed an interminable time the skirt brushed past, actually touching him, and the soft *pat pat* sounded a little farther off. Even then John did not raise his eyes, but

continued to draw patterns on the sand with his forefinger. The silence seemed to him unbearable, and yet he did not dare to break it. He could hear Jinny crunching her sugar-plums with irritating persistency. Why did she not speak?

Page 12

At last she edged round on the sand, and he felt that she was looking at him.

“What’s the matter wi’ you?” she cried peevishly. “You’re as dull as dull. Can’t you say summat?”

John rolled round, squinting up at the pouting, blooming face. “There’s not much to say, is there? What’s the good of talkin’ if you’re ’appy?”

“I’m glad to hear you’re ’appy, I’m sure,” retorted Jinny somewhat mollified. “I can’t say as you look it, though,” she added.

Words did not readily occur to John, but he made the best answer that was possible under the circumstances. Throwing out his arm he drew Jinny’s face down to his and kissed it.

“Now do you believe I’m ’appy,” he said.

“Well, if you ar’n’t you ought to be,” said Jinny coquettishly. “Did you see that cocklin’ wench, Jack?”

“Her as went by just now?” inquired John indifferently. “Nay, I didn’t take much notice.”

“Hoo was a funny-lookin’ lass,” pursued Jinny. “A bit silly, I think. Hoo stood an’ hoo stared at us same as if we was wild beasts or summat.”

“Perhaps she wanted us to buy some of her cockles,” remarked John, hurriedly volunteering the first explanation that came into his head.

“Eh! very like hoo did. My word, I wish I’d thought on axin’ her to let us ‘ave a quart—-I’m rale fond o’ cockles. Could we run arter her, think ye, Jack?”

This was the very last thing which John wished to do, and in order to divert Jinny’s mind, he hastily proposed that they should hunt for cockles themselves.

“Nay,” she returned, “I’ll not go seechin’ for cockles—I’ve got my weddin’ dress on, see, an’ my new boots an’ all.”

“Well, then, I will,” cried John eagerly. “I need but to kick off my boots an’ socks, an’ turn up my trousers, an’ paddle down yon by the river; there are plenty hereabouts, I know.”

“Tide’s comin’ in—you’d best be careful,” screamed Jinny as he bounded barefoot down the slope; but he was already out of earshot.

There sat Jinny on the sunny, wind-swept hill-top; her silk skirt carefully tucked up, and the embroidered frill of her starched white petticoat just resting on her sturdy, well-shod feet. One plump hand, in its tight kid glove, toying with her posy of roses and "old man," the other absently tapping John's discarded foot-gear. Her eyes followed the movements of the lithe young form that wandered hither and thither on the sandy expanse below; her lips were parted in a smile of idle content. All at once a shadow fell across her, and, looking up, she beheld the strange cockle girl standing beside her with folded arms. Jinny stared at her for a moment in astonishment from under the brim of her fine befeathered hat:

"Have ye got any cockles to-day?" she inquired at length.

"Nay, I haven't," responded the girl rudely; "an' if I had you shouldn't ha' none."

"My word!" exclaimed Jinny angrily, "ye might as well keep a civil tongue i' your 'ead. I don't want none o' your cockles, as it jest falls out—my 'usband's gone to get me some."

Page 13

“Your ’usband,” repeated the girl, clapping her hands together in what Jinny thought a very odd and uncalled-for way. “Your ’usband!”

Jinny felt very uncomfortable; the girl’s demeanour was so strange that she began to think she had been drinking. Hastily collecting John’s socks and boots she scrambled to her feet.

“He’s gone cocklin’, has he?” inquired Sally, fixing those queer blue eyes of hers on the wife’s face with an extraordinary expression; “an’ you’re takkin’ care o’s shoon till he cooms back? Ha! ha!—happen he’ll ne’er coom back.”

Jinny turned very red and walked indignantly away; most certainly the girl was either mad or drunk. “Happen he’ll ne’er coom back,” indeed! Such impudence! Jinny did not quite like being left alone with her in that solitary place, and partly on this account, partly to disprove her ridiculous assertion, bent her steps towards the shore, calling loudly to her husband to return.

But a fresh breeze was blowing, and the waves were leaping shoreward with unusual haste and energy; her voice did not reach him, and he wandered still further away from her, stooping ever and anon to examine the sand. He had crossed the river some time before, and was now pacing the opposite shore. The muddy waters of this little tidal river had been shallow enough for him to wade through not half-an-hour previously, but were now rising rapidly. He would find his return difficult if not dangerous, and the difficulty and danger were increasing every moment. When Jinny realised this, which she did suddenly, she forgot all about her silk dress and her new boots, and ran frantically towards the water’s edge, screaming with all her might; and at last John heard, and began to walk placidly towards the spot where he had originally crossed. The mud banks were out of sight now, and a broad belt of water was spreading rapidly on the other side. It was advancing rapidly also at his rear; soon the stretch of shore, half sand, half mud, on which he stood, would be entirely submerged.

“John! John! coom ower at once!” screamed Jinny, as he paused, looking about him.

“I’m in a fix,” he called out. The breeze, which had baffled her endeavours to make herself heard, bore, nevertheless, his words to her. She beckoned and gesticulated, continuing her useless entreaties the while. John laid down his handkerchief full of cockles and began to roll up his trousers higher. Jinny fairly danced with impatience. He made a step or two forward—the water was up to his knees; he walked on, plunging deeper at every step.

Suddenly Jinny uttered an even wilder and more piercing scream—John had disappeared from her sight, and, for a moment, the only trace of him which was evident was his hat rolling and tossing on the brown wavelets. But, before she had time to reiterate the anguished cry, he reappeared, pale and drenched, on the opposite bank.

“Run lass,” he cried, “run quick an’ fetch a rope, else I’ll be drowned. I can’t get across the river—the water’s nigh ower my head as ‘tis, an’ my feet keep sinkin’ into the mud.”

Page 14

Almost before he had ceased speaking Jinny had turned and was staggering with trembling limbs towards the sandhills. How should she get help in time? There was no habitation within a mile at least, and the water was rising moment by moment. It would be better for him to make a bold dash for safety now. Surely he could get across where he had crossed before, by those brown stepping-stones.

What Jinny took for stepping-stones were in reality the remains of a submerged forest, and no doubt, if John could have discovered their whereabouts, would have afforded him a tolerably secure footing, but they were indistinguishable now beneath the brown, swirling waters. Oh! he would be drowned!—he would be drowned! The yielding sand crumbling beneath Jinny's feet rendered her faltering progress even more slow. She paused hesitating, ran distractedly backwards a few paces; then, as John imperatively waved his arms, plunged forward again and toiled up the slope. All at once her distracted eyes met those of the girl from whom she had fled a little while before, the cockling girl, who was seated very composedly on an out-jutting point of the sandhill, whence she must have had a good view of John and his recent struggle. Jinny, panting upwards, cast a desperate glance upon her.

"For God's sake help me! My 'usband 'll be drowned before my e'en. Wheer can we get help? Will ye run one way an' I'll tak' t' other?"

Sally looked down at the convulsed face. "I'm not goin' to run noways," she retorted. "Run yoursel'; I'm not goin' to be sent o' your arrands."

"But he'll be drowned!" gasped poor Jinny.

"He'll be a fool if he drowns then," retorted the girl with a sneer. "He can get across easy enough if he finds th' reet place."

"Oh, thank God for that!" cried Jinny with momentary hope. "Will ye show me wheer's th' reet place, quick, for the wayter's coomin' in awful fast. It's down by th' steppin'-stones yon, isn't it?"

"Aye," replied the girl, 'it's down theer; ye'd best go an' look for 'em."

"Eh dear! won't ye show me?" cried Jinny wringing her hands. "I'll gi'e you all as I 'ave i' th' world. My watch, see—an' I've money i' th' box a' whoam—I'll gi'e you everythin'. Eh, do run down wi' me now, else it'll be too late."

"I want noan o' your brass an' stuff," cried Sally violently. "He's nought to me—let him drown if he can't save hissel'. He's yourn an' not mine. Ye'd best see to him."

“Eh, you wicked, wicked wench!” sobbed Jinny. “’Owever can ye find it i’ your ’eart—but I’ll waste no more time on you.”

Page 15

She clambered on, and soon was flying down the slope on the farther side. How long she ran she could not tell—it seemed to her a century since she had left the shore behind. Her brain reeled, her heart throbbed to suffocation—the terrible thought was ever present to her mind: "At this moment perhaps he is drowning—I may find him dead when I go back." Her very desperation lent her speed, and, moreover, fortune favoured her quest, for it was in reality only a very few minutes after her parting with Sally that she came upon a loving couple seated by the road-side. The man was a fisherman well known to Jinny. How she explained and what she promised she never quite knew, but, in an inconceivably short space of time they were speeding back together, the man preceding her with long, swinging strides. There was no time to lose in looking for a rope—he thought he knew a place where he could get Mr. Dickinson across; if not available, he himself could swim.

But, lo and behold! when they reached the summit of the hill and were about to plunge downwards to the shore, an unlooked-for sight met their eyes. There, on the hither side of the river stood John, alive and well, though plastered with mud from head to foot, and by his side was Sally, with her drenched raiment clinging to her, and the water dripping from the loosened strands of her long hair.

"Seems soombry else has had the savin' of him," cried the fisherman, astonished and perhaps a little disappointed; Mrs. Dickinson had promised such wonderful things.

Jinny, speechless with joy, ran down the slope and flung herself upon her husband. His face was pale and all astir with emotion.

"Jinny," he said, when at length she allowed him to speak—"Jinny, *she* saved me."

Jinny turned to Sally. "Eh, how can I ever thank you," she cried brokenly. "You saved my 'usband arter all. I don't know how to thank you."

Sally looked round with a fierce light in her eyes. "Ye needn't thank me—I didn't save him for you."

"I'm sure," said John, in a voice husky with emotion, "I don't know what to say mysel'—it is more than I could have expected, that you should risk your life for my sake."

"'Twasn't for your sake neither then," said Sally still fiercely.

"Then, in the name of fortune! why did you do it?" he ejaculated.

"I did it—for mysel'," said Sally.

She turned away, the water dripping from her at every step, and bounded up the slope with the erect carriage and springing gait which John remembered of old.

The fisherman retired somewhat disconsolately, and husband and wife, still palpitating, walked slowly away together; while “Golden Sally,” once more standing aloft on her sandy pinnacle, wrung the moisture out of her yellow hair.

“*Th*’ *owdest member*”

Page 16

Doctor Craddock rode slowly along the grassy track which led from Thornleigh to Little Upton, and as he rode he smiled to himself. Though he had been settled for more than a dozen years in this quiet corner of Lancashire, his Southern mind had not yet become accustomed to the idiosyncrasies of his North Country patients. He had just been to see old Robert Wainwright, who was suffering from an acute attack of gout in his right foot, and who was, in consequence, unapproachable in every sense of the word, answering the Doctor's questions only by an unintelligible growl or an impatient jerk of the head. Moreover, on being informed that he must not expect to set foot to the ground for several days more, he had emitted a kind of incredulous roar, and had announced his opinion that his medical adviser was a gradely fool. Poor Mrs. Wainwright had subsequently apologised for her lord's shortness of temper, explaining in deprecating tones that he was apt to be took that way sometimes; adding that he had been moiderin ever sin' mornin' about Club Day.

"He reckons he's th' owdest member, ye know. Him an' Martin Tyrer, of Little Upton, is mich of an age, an' they'n walked same number of times—they're a bit jealous one o' th' t'other an' our Gaffer reckons if he bides awhoam, owd Martin 'ull be castin' up at him, an' sayin' he's beat him."

"There'll be no Club meeting for Tyrer, either, to-morrow," Doctor Craddock said; "he's laid up with a bad attack of bronchitis."

"Eh, is he?" exclaimed Mrs. Wainwright, with such visible satisfaction that the Doctor smiled now as he recalled it; she had barely patience to escort him to the door, and before he mounted his horse, he heard her joyfully informing her Gaffer that owd Martin Tyrer had getten th' 'titus, and she hoped that now he'd be satisfied and give ower frettin' hissel'.

"I shall have an equally warm reception here, I suppose," said the Doctor to himself, as he dismounted before Tyrer's door, "but, whatever happens, the old man must not think of going out to-morrow. It would be serious if he caught fresh cold."

Martin Tyrer was sitting, almost upright, in his bed, supported by many pillows, for when he lay down, as his wife explained to the Doctor, he fair choked. He was an immensely tall and stout man, with a large red face, and a stolid lack-lustre eye, which he brought solemnly to bear upon the Doctor as he entered the room.

"Well," said Craddock, "how are you to-day, Tyrer? Better, I hope."

Tyrer rolled his eyes in the direction of his wife, apparently as an intimation that she was to answer for him.

“Noan so well,” said Mrs. Tyrer lugubriously, proceeding thereupon to give accurate, not to say harrowing, particulars of her master’s symptoms; Tyrer, meanwhile, suffering his glance to wander from one to the other, and occasionally nodding or shaking his head. It was not until she paused from want of breath that he put in his word.

Page 17

“I mun get up to-morrow,” he remarked, apparently addressing no one in particular.

“If you do you’ll make an end of yourself, my friend,” returned the Doctor decidedly. “You stay where you are, and go on with your gruel and poultices—by-the-bye you needn’t make those poultices quite so thick, Mrs. Tyrer—and I’ll come and see you on Wednesday. You mustn’t think of getting up. If you go out in this east wind, it will be the death of you. Really you people are mad about your Club Day—you should have seen old Robert Wainwright, when I told him just now that it would be quite impossible for him to go out.”

“He’s not goin’ to walk!” cried husband and wife together, their faces lighting up much as Mrs. Wainwright’s had done.

“He’d be very much astonished if he were to try,” said Doctor Craddock; “he can’t so much as put his foot to the ground.”

[Illustration: *The owdest member* “I mun get up to-morrow,” he remarked]

“Coom,” said Mrs. Tyrer, looking encouragingly at her spouse, “that’s one thing as should mak’ thee feel a bit ‘appier. He were takkin’ on terrible, ye know,” she explained, “thinkin’ Robert ‘ud be crowin’ ower him at not bein’ able to walk. He’s allus agate o’ saucin our mester is yon—he reckons he’s th’ owdest member o’ th’ Club, an’ my ‘usband he’s turned seventy, an’ he’s walked fifty-two times. Ah, fifty-two times it were last Club Day, weren’t it, Martin?”

“It were,” agreed Martin, endorsing the statement with a nod; “but Robert, he says he’s walked fifty-two times, too, an’ he’s seventy-one last Lady-day, an’ so he reckons *he’s* th’ owdest member, an’ he’s ever an’ allus throwin’ it i’ my face.”

“Eh, sich a to-do as he mak’s about it you’d never believe,” put in the wife, “he’ll never let our Gaffer tak’ a bit o’ credit to hissel’—eh, it’s terrible how he goes on! I b’lieve if he were fair deein’ he’d get up an’ walk sooner nor let poor Martin ha’ th’ satisfaction o’ sayin’ he’d walked once oftener nor him. An’ th’ folks has getten to laugh at ’em both, an’ to set ’em on, one agin th’ t’other. At th’ dinner yonder, at th’ Thornleigh Arms, soombry ’ll allus get up an’ call for th’ ‘ealth o’ th’ owdest member, an’ then th’ two owd lads ‘ull get agate o’ bargin’ one another, an’ Upton folks ‘ull be backin’ up Martin, an’ th’ Thornleigh folks ’ull be backin’ up Robert, an’ they mak’ sich a din, they say as nobry can hear theirsel’s speak.”

The Doctor laughed loud and long. “Well, it must be a drawn battle this year,” he said; “certainly Wainwright will not be able to go to the Club meeting unless he hops on one leg.”

With a cheery nod he withdrew, chuckling all the way downstairs; Mrs. Tyrer duly escorted him to the door, and then climbed slowly up again, every step creaking beneath her weight. When she entered the sick room she found her husband drumming on the sheets with his fingers, and staring in front of him with a somewhat peculiar expression.

Page 18

“Well,” she cried, letting her ponderous person sink into the old-fashioned elbow chair that stood by the bedside, “owd Robert, yon, ‘ull ha’ to keep quiet for once! He’ll noan be castin’ up at thee this year as how ’tis.”

Martin rolled his head from side to side, but said nothing.

“Ye’ll be able to start fresh next Club Day,” resumed his spouse cheerily. “Happen th’ gout ‘ull mak’ an end on poor owd Robert first, though.”

Martin looked at her with a startled air. “Happen it will,” he assented doubtfully; “ah, it ‘ud ha’ been a fine thing if I could ha’ stolen a march on th’ owd lad this time! I never got the chance before, but theer he lays yon, fast by the leg! If I could ha’ made shift to walk this year he could never ha’ cotched me up—eh, I’d ha’ had a gradely laugh at him.”

“Well, well, ye’ll happen ha’ th’ best on’t another time,” said Mrs. Tyrer soothingly. “Happen he’ll noan be able to walk no more next year nor this—happen he’ll noan be here! Dunnot thou go frettin’ thysel’ this road; nobry knows what’s goin’ to come about i’ this world.”

Martin’s eyes travelled slowly from the ceiling to her face with a puzzled, discontented gaze.

“If th’ owd lad dees afore next year it ’ull spile everything—’twouldn’t be no satisfaction to walk oftener nor him if he were dead.”

“Well, dunnot thou go frettin’ thysel’ as how ’tis,” repeated his missus with a vague attempt at consolation.

Meanwhile old Wainwright had somewhat calmed down since his wife had imparted to him the welcome tidings that his rival had unwillingly “paired” with him for the morrow’s festivities. He ceased roaring at his sons and daughters and throwing his bandages at his wife’s head; it must be stated that he never employed any more dangerous missile even in moments of supreme irritation. Robert Wainwright’s bark was on all occasions worse than his bite, and though recently his bark had been very loud indeed, no one in the little household was in the least scared by it. This evening, however, “our Tom” and “our Bob,” who had of late satisfied themselves with screwing their bullet heads and a small portion of their persons round the angle of the door, walked boldly in, and cheerfully inquired how feyther felt hissel’; while “our Annie” and “our Polly” actually helped their mother to “straighten” the bed, and ventured to draw the sheet lightly over feyther’s afflicted toe. The Gaffer, moreover, consented to swallow a basin of gruel with just a dash of spirits in it to take away the sickliness of it. Doctor Craddock had

forbidden all stimulants, but, as Mrs. Wainwright remarked, “a little taste like that, just to make the gruel slip down, couldn’t coom amiss.” It certainly did not seem to come amiss to Robert, who grew quite jovial as he scraped the basin, and commiserated “owd Martin Tyrer, yon,” with genuine sympathy.

Page 19

“Poor owd lad! To think of his being laid up just when Club Day cooms! Eh, he will be takken to. Ye mind how he allus got agate o’ boastin’ about bein’ th’ owdest member o’ th’ Club? an’ he nobbut seventy! Eh, I ‘ad to get vexed wi’ him soomtimes—he would have ’t ye know, as ‘twere him as were th’ owdest, an’ he’d get up, when th’ folks had called for me—eh, I could scarce stand it!”

“He’ll be soom mad,” cried our Tom, chuckling.

“Nay, thou munnot mak’ game o’ th’ poor owd chap’s misfortun’,” said his father with a tolerant air as he handed the empty basin to Annie. “It’s bad enough for him to be layin’ theer wi’out havin’ folks crowin’ ower him.”

Tom, much abashed, grinned sheepishly, and old Robert continued, after a pause, still evidently in high good-humour:—

“Well, wheer’s thy cornet? Thou should be practisin’ i’stead o’ standin’ about findin’ fault wi’ thy neighbours.”

Tom, who was a member of the Thornleigh band, had secretly resolved to retire presently to the cartshed that he might prepare for the labours of the morrow without being overheard. He was rejoiced, however, to find that he might pursue his musical avocations in the house without causing the old father chagrin or irritation.

“Mun I practise a bit i’ th’ kitchen?” he inquired joyfully.

Old Wainwright consented, and presently the somewhat husky tones of Tom’s cornet resounded through the house.

The next morning dawned bright and sunny, though the unseasonable east wind still blew pitilessly keen. The Wainwright’s house was only divided from the main road by a little patch of garden, and old Robert’s bedroom window looked out upon the street. Beside this window he insisted on establishing himself, being half carried thither by his two stalwart sons, whose stout necks he encircled with either arm, while he hopped with his sound leg across the floor; Mrs. Wainwright supported the injured limb in front and Annie and Polly brought up the rear carrying pillows and blankets. Thus, by the united exertions of the whole family, old Bob was safely deposited in his straight-backed arm-chair, a good deal redder in the face and shorter in the temper than before the transit, but otherwise none the worse. Polly pushed forward a chair under the limb which her mother was still embracing. The pillows were put at feyther’s back, the blankets over his knee, his pipe and screw of ’baccy being placed handy on the window-sill; then Tom and Bob withdrew to assume their Sunday suits in preparation for the day, while Mrs. Wainwright and her daughters made the bed and tidied the room. Presently the girls

slipped away, and, after pausing for a moment, hands on hips to make sure that her Gaffer was coomfortable, Mrs. Wainwright remarked that she'd better be seeing to things downstairs a bit, for they lasses 'ud be sure to be off arter the Club as soon as her back was turned.

"If thou wants me, thou'll shout for me, wunnot thou?" she asked, turning just at the door.

Page 20

“I’ll not want for aught,” returned Bob gruffly. “I don’t want no doin’ for, I’m out o’ th’ road up here, an’ ye’re fain enough, all on ye’! Thou can be off arter th’ Club thysel’ if thou’s a mind to.”

With many protests Mrs. Wainwright withdrew, and her husband, left to himself, proceeded to relieve his feelings by tossing his pillows over the back of the chair, and extricating his suffering limb from the blankets.

“I’m welly smoored,” he remarked indignantly, half aloud, “welly smoored I am. They reckon I’m a babby to be croodled and cossetted this gate. I’ll be that nesh afore they’n done, I’ll be fit for nought when I get about again.”

Leaning forward, and supporting himself on one leg, he threw open the window. The air, fresh and invigorating if keen as a knife, circled round the room, lifting his thick white hair, and making the prints on the wall flap and rustle.

“That wakkens me up a bit,” cried Bob; “does me good, that does. Our missus may barge as hoo likes, I’ll keep it oppen.”

He could hear voices and hurrying feet in the road below; people were beginning to assemble at the church; by-and-by the whole procession, headed by the band, would go marching down the street and in at the park gates to be refreshed and complimented at Thornleigh Hall; then it would take its way across the fields to Upton, turning the big banner so that the arms of the Squire of that place would be most *en evidence* when they halted for similar entertainment before the door of *his* mansion. Thence, through Upton village along the lane to the Thornleigh Arms; then the dinner—mirth and jollity lasting till evening. Old Bob, with knotted hands clasping the wooden arms of his high-backed chair, saw it all in fancy, his memory conjuring up each detail of the well-known scenes. He could see the grassy fields and the hedges white with bloom; he could smell the fragrance of the trampled earth; he could feel the sunshine and the brisk air; and then the warmth, the brightness, the good cheer at the Thornleigh Arms—his mouth watered at the thought of them. Would any one miss the oldest member, and drink his health? Well, this time at least, old Martin would not be there to dispute the honour.... Now he could hear the gate of his little garden swing open and then bang; the lads were starting. Bob, leaning on his elbow, craned his neck forward to see them. A certain expression of gratified parental pride stole over his face as he took note of the brave appearance presented by young Bob, who with his be-ribboned hat placed a little aslant on his curly locks, his Sunday suit brushed till not a speck of dust rested on its glossy surface, and his white staff held jauntily in his sunburnt hand, was indeed the picture of a comely young holiday-maker. When the father glanced at “our Tom,” however, his face darkened. There was Tom with his ill-fastened shoelaces trailing, his smart

bandsman's coat buttoned awry over a pair of trousers which were neither his Sunday best, nor the white-piped blue ones which formed part of his uniform as musician—-these were a shabby, shiny, pair of worn broad-cloth usually kept for wet Sundays and Saturday expeditions to town; a suit, in fact, which had long been considered by no means presentable.

Page 21

“Slovenly chap,” growled the father with great irritation, “my word, if I were near enough I’d larn thee to put on the reet mak’ o’ clooes of a Club Day! I’d holler now, an’ mak’ thee coom back an’ change ’em, if our missus wasna so nigh, but if hoo chanced to look an’ see me at th’ window, hoo’d be bargin’ me for opening it.... Ha, th’ owd lass has called him back hersel’. Reet! hoo’ll noan let him mak’ sich a boggart of hissel’—hoo’ll fettle him up afore he goes.”

He chuckled to himself, as Tom was hauled back, sheepish and sulky, and pushed into the house by the womankind; presently emerging in full bandsman’s dress, tied shoe-laces—in every way as spick and span as father or mother could desire. Brandishing his instrument, he ran clattering down the street to overtake his brother, only just in time apparently, for, a minute or two after he had disappeared, the distant sounds of music could be heard.

“They’re coomin’,” said Bob, drawing a long breath, and rubbing his withered hands together. His eyes grew suddenly very round and red, and he felt a queer choking in his throat. Yes, they were coming; he could distinguish the tune now, and the *tramp, tramp* of many feet. Bob again leaned forward, thrusting his head almost through the window in his anxiety to see and hear. The missus and the lasses standing at the gate were too intent on watching and listening to notice him. Now they were rounding the corner—a brave sight; the big banner with its gay streamers held well aloft, the stewards with their white wands also decorated with ribbon; the fine old Thornleigh Arms were to the front this time, and the Thornleigh folk too—there they came rolling along, every man happy and merry, and here was “th’ owdest member,” who had walked his fifty-two times, laid by the heels in his solitary upper chamber! His big, old, gnarled hands shook as they rested on the sill, his underlip trembled and drooped like a child’s, babyish tears gathered in his eyes.

But what was this? The lads were pulling up, the big banner halted right opposite his door, just as if it had been the Squire’s—with a sudden crash the band stopped short, and somebody called out loudly:—

“Three cheers for th’ owdest member!” And thereupon ensued lusty “Hip, hip, hurras,” long kept up with vigour and enthusiasm by the Thornleigh members, while the Upton folk, standing aloof and silent, eyed each other askance and seemed rather glum.

Poor old Bob! His wrinkled rubicund face was a study as he leaned forth, nodding to his cronies, and shouting at intervals, “Thank’ee lads, thank’ee.”

Mrs. Wainwright was too proud and jubilant to scold him for his temerity, and stood smiling at her gate, calling to the neighbours to “Jest see our Gaffer! Theer, he’s gone an’ oppened window all hissel’, an’s lookin’ out same’s ony on us.”

At last the procession moved on again, the band—at least that portion of it which hailed from Thornleigh playing “He’s a Jolly Good Fellow,” while the Upton musicians tried to drown the efforts of their comrades by striking up “See the Conquering Hero Comes.”

Page 22

The meaning of this last was presently made clear to Old Bob Wainwright, whose triumph was of but short duration, for lo! beneath his window, the second part of the procession suddenly halted, and there in the middle of the Upton folk, stood his rival, Martin Tyrer! Much enveloped, indeed, in wraps and comforters, rather pale as to complexion, very hoarse as to voice, but nevertheless no other than Martin Tyrer himself. Bob's face fell, and he stared vacantly forth without attempting to move.

"Well," cried Tyrer huskily, but triumphantly, "thou'rt theer, art thou, owd brid? I'm fain th' lads gave thee a cheer to keep thy sperrits up—we'se drink thy health jest now. I've cotched thee at last thou sees! This here's fifty-three times as I've walked. Fifty-three times!" raising his voice to a bellow—"I'm th' owdest member, now, as how 'tis. Good-day to thee, Robert, I hope thou'lt be about wick an' hearty this time next year—thou'lt be *second* owdest member, an' we'se be fain to see thee among us."

With a cheer and a roar of laughter the party moved on, Martin, turning after a few steps, to hold up all five fingers of one hand, and three of the other, intending thereby, according to an arithmetical system of his own, to denote the number of fifty-three. Bob quite understood the exasperating allusion, and grew, if possible, redder in the face than before, though, for the moment, his surprise, anger, and humiliation left him absolutely dumb.

His family had a bad time of it during all the remainder of that day: bandages were flying, pillows were pitched aside, food was spurned and upset, and plates were broken. The choice language, however, which usually accompanied these tokens of displeasure was not heard to-day. Since the insult which had followed so close upon the heels of the old man's triumph, he had continued vengefully mute.

The lads came home at nightfall, not quite perhaps as hilarious as usual after a Club Day dinner, but with their tongues sufficiently loosened by Jack Orme's good beer to make them less cautious and more garrulous than was their custom when within earshot of their father. Old Bob, sitting up in bed and clutching wrathfully at the blankets, heard them relate how they had been told that Martin Tyrer was that set on walking that day, that though his missus had locked up his hat and boots, he had managed to give her the slip, and had run across the road and had got Tom Lupton's Sunday hat off him and also his best boots. Mrs. Tyrer was in an awful to-do, and had come to fetch him at the Thornleigh Arms. The doctor said it would be the death of her Gaffer, she declared—but old Martin wouldn't go. He had stayed till the very end, drinking healths with everybody, and boasting and bragging he had beaten Bob Wainwright, and *he* was th' owdest member now. At this point of the narrative Bob senior overturned his gruel—which till now he had respected on account of the flavouring—and kicked so hard at the bed-clothes that he hurt his gouty foot, and

uttered a roar of rage and pain which caused his sons to lower their voices to a discreet whisper.

Page 23

Next morning news came that Martin Tyrer had been taken very bad, and that the doctor had a poor opinion of him. When Doctor Craddock, indeed, called later in the day to see Bob Wainwright, he confirmed the report with a sigh and a shake of the head:

“I am afraid the poor old fellow has done for himself,” he said gravely. “It is astonishing how obstinate some of these people are. I am glad that you at least have had more sense, Wainwright”—turning with a smile to Bob.

“I sh’d ha’ gone if I could ha’ getten foot to th’ ground,” returned Bob, glowering at him.

“Well, well, luckily for you you couldn’t, though it might not have been quite so serious with you. But Tyrer was very ill indeed when he went, and now naturally he is very much worse.”

“Raly, it looks like a judgment,” observed Mrs. Wainwright, with an air of pious regret, “soom people might say it was, ye know, Doctor. Martin, he’s been goin’ on awful to my husband—that set up he were—”

“Howd thy din!” interposed Bob, wrathfully; whereupon Mrs. Wainwright retired outside the door, waiting to pursue the conversation till the doctor should be ready to go downstairs.

When, a day or two after, Martin Tyrer died, Mrs. Wainwright received the tidings with the same mournful satisfaction. It was what she had looked for, she remarked; she “couldn’t but feel that Martin was callin’ down a judgment on hissel! Well, it was to be ‘oped that th’ A’mighty wouldn’t be ’ard with him, not but what he was ’ard enough, Martin was, wi’ other folks. A body would ha’ thought that when he see the Gaffer laid up in’s chamber on Club Day he wouldn’t ’ave ’ad it in’s ‘eart to go castin’ up at him, same’s he did.” But Mrs. Wainwright would say no more, Martin Tyrer was gone, poor man, an’ it did not become her to judge him. Upon which she proceeded to say a great deal more, in exactly the same strain, until her Gaffer hammered on the floor with his stick, and requested her to stop that.

The whole family were much astonished on receiving invitations to Martin Tyrer’s funeral. They had, indeed, heard that Mrs. Tyrer was going to give him a very nice burying—that all Upton folks were going and a good many from Thornleigh too—it was to be “summat gradely” every one said. It was the kind of festivity which, as a rule, the Wainwrights much appreciated, but on this occasion they were rather affronted at being bidden to assist, and both the young men declared stoutly that they’d noan go if they knew it.

“Why not?” growled feyther from his big chair in the corner. (He was now well enough to hobble down stairs.) “You yoong chaps thinks too mich o’ yoursels—*I’m* goin’ as how ’tis.”

Mrs. Wainwright positively gasped. “Gaffer, thou’ll noan think o’ sich a thing—thou as couldn’t so mich as walk on Tuesday! I’m sure thou needn’t be puttin’ thysel’ out for Martin Tyrer!”

“I’m goin’ as how ’tis,” repeated Bob gloomily; he had been very gloomy all these days. “I’m goin’ to foller Martin Tyrer to his long home, if I ha’ to hop,” he added sternly. “Him an’ me has walked together for fifty-two year, an’ I’ll walk at Martin Tyrer’s buryin’! Theer now, my mind’s made up.”

Page 24

Young Bob and Tom stared at each other, then they remarked, unwillingly, that if he went of course they would go too; upon which old Bob returned that they might please theirsel's—*he* was going.

When Doctor Craddock was told of this decision, he said that now Robert was so much better it might not do him any harm, adding that he thought it showed very good feeling on his part. Mrs. Wainwright was much elated at the compliment, but Robert himself received it in stony silence. When the report circulated round the village every one was touched and edified. Wasn't it beautiful, people said, and who'd have thought Robert Wainwright had that much feeling! He had a wonderful good heart, Robert had—he wasn't one to say much, but he felt the more. Mrs. Wainwright went about shaking her head and casting up her eyes. She had begun by being exasperated at this sudden determination, but finding how very much other folks admired and respected her Robert for it, she had gradually become infected by the general enthusiasm; and, indeed, when she hunted out and carefully brushed her husband's Sunday clothes, she murmured tearfully to her daughters that "Feyther was a'most too good for this warld," and that "it 'ud be mich"—with a sniff—"if they weren't gettin' ready blacks to weer for him next!"

"It mak's me go all of a shake," the good woman added. "Eh, I cannot tell ye! It seems onnatural-like. Yer Feyther's noan like 'issel'. To think of his takkin' on that gate about owd Martin Tyrer; mony a one 'ud be fain enough as he were out o' the road!"

Meanwhile Robert himself certainly did not say much, as the neighbours observed; in fact, he said nothing at all. When his friends came and stared at him after the manner of their kind, and made remarks to each other or to Mrs. Wainwright about how strange it was that he should be that taken to about Martin Tyrer—though some of them added, sympathetically, that he *would* be like to miss him, he *would*, when all was said and done; him and Martin had walked together such a many years—"rale cronies ye know for all their fallin's out"—Robert would stare at them and heave a deep sigh; occasionally he would take his pipe out of his mouth as though about to make a remark, but invariably put it in again without uttering a syllable. Then his friends would go away, shaking their heads and sighing, after pausing to impart to Mrs. Wainwright their conviction that her Gaffer was failing.

When the day of Martin's funeral came Robert was, with the assistance of his wife and daughters, attired in his best "blacks"; he himself saw to his foot-gear, having possessed himself of a pair of shears with which he cut a large piece out of the top of one boot. Mrs. Wainwright had been tearful enough with sentimental foreboding all the morning, and, when she saw the irreparable damage wrought by Feyther's ruthless hands, she began to cry in good earnest.

Page 25

“I knowed as summat was boun’ to happen,” she groaned; “dear o’ me, seventeen-an’-six, no less—an’ the soles scarce soiled! Eh, Gaffer!—it’s downright flyin’ i’ th’ face o’ Providence to be so wasteful.”

Gaffer, meanwhile, purple in the face with suppressed anguish, had forced his foot into the mutilated boot, and now silently and frowningly pointed to his hat.

The Wainwrights started early, for, though many neighbours had offered to give Bob a lift, the old man had insisted on walking all the way. It was a very painful pilgrimage, but he set his teeth and leaned hard on his stick, and hobbled along dauntlessly, though every now and then his injured foot would give a twinge which made him snarl to himself and stagger.

They arrived just as the mourning procession was setting forth from the widow’s door. Bob had counted upon being refreshed by a short rest and a glass of “summat”; but there was no time for that now, so he merely wiped his face, drew a deep breath, and fell into line. The Upton folk were surprised and gratified by his presence; many of them nodded to him in a friendly way, and a few came up and spoke to him. One or two told him they considered it “rale ’andsome” of him to come. Bob nodded back, and said nothing.

He stood by, solemnly, while the final sad rites were being performed, and lingered even after all was over. At last, however, he heaved a deep sigh and turned to go. Mrs. Wainwright tenderly supported his left elbow and cast a tragic glance round.

“I doubt it’s been too mich for him,” she sobbed—she always sobbed at funerals, being a very feeling woman, but on this occasion she surpassed herself, some of the Upton folk indeed thought it was scarce decent. Young Bob and Tom began to blubber too; Polly remarked to Annie that “Feyther’d go next for sure.” Friends and neighbours gathered round with long faces and sympathetic murmurs. Robert Wainwright, however, pushed them aside and hobbled forward a few paces without speaking; then he suddenly halted and jerked his thumb over his shoulder.

“Well,” he said with a chuckle, “*he* walked on Club Day—ah, he did—but I’ve walked to his buryin’, so I reckon I’ve cotched him up. I wonder who’s th’ owdest member now!”

THE CONQUEST OF RADICAL TED

It was Saturday afternoon, and Ted Wharton and Joe Lovelady had left off work early, as was their custom on that day of the week. They were now betaking themselves with solemn satisfaction to the “Thornleigh Arms,” where a certain portion of their weekly

wage would presently transfer itself from their own pockets to that of its jovial landlord. Joe Lovelady was a great, soft, lumbering fellow, who was considered rather a nonentity in Thornleigh; but Ted Wharton was a very different person. He was the village Radical —an adventurous spirit who, not content with spelling out his newspaper conscientiously on Sunday, was wont

Page 26

to produce, even on week-day afternoons, sundry small, ill-printed sheets, from which he would read out revolutionary sentiments the like of which had never before been heard in Thornleigh. For the most part his neighbours considered it extremely foolish of Ted to be "weerin' his brass on sich like," when a ha'porth of twist would have been so much more satisfactory. They cared nothing at all about Home Rule, and did not see that the labour question in any way bore upon their own case. What they wanted to know was when Government was going to raise the price of wheat, and what was the use of growing 'taters when it wasn't worth while carting them to Liverpool?

But Ted was not only the village Radical: he was also the village wag, with a reputation for humour which rendered him enormously popular. He was about thirty-five years old; a small man with sandy hair, a serious, not to say solemn, expression of countenance, and twinkling light grey eyes, which he had a trick of blinking when about to perpetrate a joke. His trousers were a little too short, his coat-sleeves—when he wore a coat—a little too long. On ordinary occasions his hat was tilted to the back of his head, and when in a jocular humour he cocked it knowingly over one eye. Probably these peculiarities, coupled with a certain dry method of enunciating, added largely to Ted's renown.

As they walked briskly along this hot summer's afternoon, the two men did not take the trouble to converse with each other. Joe, indeed, was at all times a taciturn person, and Ted was probably reserving himself for the delectation of the cronies whom he expected to meet at the "Thornleigh Arms." When he had caught up Joe on the road he had volunteered that he was steppin' up yonder, and Joe had replied that that was reet, jerking his head forward at the same time as an indication that he was steppin' up yonder too; thenceforth they had, as a matter of course, proceeded together, Ted walking a pace or two in advance and whistling to himself.

The village was now left behind, and on one side of the road, behind the dusty hedge, some colts were keeping step with them, occasionally starting and floundering forward after the manner of their kind, and then wheeling and coming slowly back with foolish heads extended and ears pricked, all ready for another bounce if either of the pedestrians raised his hand or kicked a stone out of his path. To their left the corn stood tall and yellow, almost ready for the harvest. Now they approached some woods, familiarly known as "the Mosses," from the peaty nature of the soil. A few weeks before the thick undergrowth of rhododendrons had been ablaze with clustering purple blossoms, and many wild flowers grew now on the borders of the deep ditch which surrounded them. These woods lay cornerwise with the main road, a sandy lane

following the angle they described. On the grassy border of this lane a flock of geese were tranquilly

Page 27

basking, and, as Ted approached, a vigilant and pugnacious gander rushed towards him, flapping its wings and extending its long neck with portentous hisses. Ted had been carrying his coat over his arm for the sake of coolness, and now, whether because he thought it would be a humorous thing to do, or because he was secretly a little terrified at the rapid advance of the bellicose gander, he struck with it at the luckless bird with such force that he stretched it on the sod.

"Hello!" cried Ted, stopping short, astonished and perturbed at his sudden victory, "I b'lieve I've done for th' owd chap."

"My word," commented Joe, "if thou has thou'll be like to hear on it! That theer's Margaret Hep.'s gander; hoo thinks the world on't, hoo does."

Ted was meanwhile bending over his prostrate foe, which, to his relief, was not absolutely dead, though it was gasping and turning up its eyes in rather a ghastly manner. He took it up in his arms, still enfolded in his coat.

"It's wick still, as how 'tis," he remarked. "Eh! how it's kickin' out with they ugly yaller legs! Now then, owd lad, what mun we do wi'it, think'st thou? Mun I finish it off an' carry it wi' me to Jack Orme's for a marlock? Eh! the lads 'ud laugh if they see me coomin' in wi' it! I'll tell 'em I'd brought 'em a Crestmas dinner in July. My word, it's tough enough! I reckon it 'ud want keepin'; it wouldn't be ready mich afore Crestmas!"

Joe's wits, at no time very nimble, required some time to take in this audacious proposal, and he was just beginning the preliminary deprecating roll of the head, which he intended to precede a remark to the effect that Margaret 'ud happen have summat to say about that, when the angular figure of Miss Heptonstall herself appeared at the corner of the lane. She paused a moment aghast at the sight of the struggling gander, still enveloped in Ted's coat, and then, with extended hands and wildly-flapping drapery, hastened towards him—her aspect being not unlike that assumed by the unfortunate biped in question when he had first advanced to the attack.

"Victoria!" she gasped, when she at last halted beside the men. "Eh! whatever's getten Victoria?"

"Do ye mean this 'ere?" questioned Ted, hoisting the gander a little higher up under his arm. "Well, I cannot think whatever coom to the poor thing. Joe and me was goin' our ways along to Orme's when we heerd it give a kind of skrike out, and we looked round,

and it were staggerin' along same as if it were fuddled, ye know, and all at once it give another skrike an' tumbled down aside o' th' road. Didn't it, Joe?"

Joe again rolled a deprecatory eye at his crony and cleared his throat, but did not otherwise commit himself.

"It mun ha' been a fit or soom sich thing," continued Ted, cocking his hat over his eye and glancing waggishly at Lovelady. "When Joe see it, says he, 'My word, there'll be a pretty to do! This is Margaret Hep.'s gander,' says Joe—no, I think he said, 'Miss Heptonstall's gander.' Didn't thou, Joe? Joe's allus so respectful and civil-spoke, pertic'larly when it's a lady as he's a-talking about."

Page 28

Joe grinned and began to look jocular too. His friend's last assertion pleased him better than the wild flights of a little time before.

"That's it," said Joe. "Ho, ho! Reet!"

"He'd never go for to call ony lady out o' their name," pursued Ted, placing his hat yet a little more aslant; "never did that in's life. He's quite a lady's mon, Joe is. Haw! haw!"

"Coom!" said Joe, grinning still more broadly.

At this juncture the invalid gander made a frantic struggle, and, freeing one wing from Ted's encircling coat, began to flap it wildly.

"Ye've no need to stan' grinnin' an' makkin' merry theer when th' poor dumb thing's goin' to dee, as like as not," cried Margaret indignantly. "Hand him over to me this minute—theer, my beauty, theer—missus'll see to thee."

"Well, an' ye ought to be very thankful to me," asserted Ted; "didn't I pick him out o' th' road, an' put my own coat o'er him an' fondle him mich same's if he was a babby? Why, he 'ud noan be wick now if it hadn't ha' been for me. Theer, my boy, howd up! Theer, we'se tuck in thy wing for thee, and cover thee up warm an' gradely—'tisn't everybody as 'ud be dressin' up a gander i' their own clooes. Do you know what 'ud do this 'ere bird rale good? Just a drop o' sperrits to warm his in'ards for him—that's what he wants. See here, I'll carry him awhoam for ye, and ye mun jest fotch him a glass o' whisky, and in a two three minutes he'll be as merry as a layrock."

Margaret looked doubtfully at him.

"Do ye raly think it 'ud do the poor thing good?" she asked dolefully.

"I'm sure on't," returned Ted, firmly pinioning the gander's struggling legs, and setting off at a brisk pace towards Margaret's cottage. "Theer's nought as is wick as wouldn't feel the benefit of a drop o' sperrits now an' again."

Joe considered this a very proper sentiment, and gave a grunt by way of endorsing it; he, too, followed Ted and the gander, being as much amused at the transaction as it was in his nature to be at anything.

Margaret kept pace with Ted, every now and then uttering lamentations over her favourite.

“He were as good a gander as a body need wish for; wonderful good breed he were, an’ as knowin’! Eh, dear, I never wanted for coompany when Victoria were theer.”

“Victoria!” ejaculated Ted, stopping short and facing her; “why, that’s a female name!”

“It’s the Queen’s name,” rejoined Margaret, with a certain melancholy triumph.

“I thought it had been a gander; it *is* a gander, surely?”

“Oh, it’s a gander reet ’nough. But I thought it were a goose to begin wi’. It were the biggest o’ th’ clutch, an’ the prattiest, an’ so I called it Victoria, an’ it geet to know th’ name, an’ to coom when I called it—eh, it ‘ud coom runnin’ up an’ croodle down aside o’ me, turnin’ its yead o’ one side that knowin’! Eh, dear, theer never was

Page 29

sich a bird. An' when it were upgrown, an' turned out to be a gander, I 'adn't it i' my 'eart to change th' name, seein' as it had getten to know it so well, an' arter all, seein' as it's th' head of all th' fowls i' my place, it doesn't seem to coom amiss. Canon, he wanted me to call it Prince Consort, or else Albert Edward, but it didn't seem natural like, an' I've allus been used to call my white drake Albert Edward; and Prince Consort, he's th' owd rooster."

"Well," said Ted, hoisting up the gander again under his arm, and chuckling as he walked forward, "well, that beats all! I never heerd sich a tale i' my life. Coom, Victoria, howd up, owd lad; we'se soon be theer now. An' so th' owd rooster is Prince Consort? An' the drake's th' Prince o' Wales? Ho, ho! Have ye getten any more royalties yonder?"

"I've used up pretty near all th' royal fam'ly," replied Margaret, with a recurrence of her former dolorous pride; "it's the only mark o' respect as I can show my sovering. Every time Her Gracious Majesty gets a new grandchild or great-grandchild, Canon, he cooms an' says, 'Margaret, have you any more chickens as wants names?' An' soomtimes the one christening 'ull do for a whole brood; they royal childer has sich a mony names, ye know."

Ted sneered and looked immensely superior; the loyalty of this benighted woman filled his Radical mind with as much contempt as amusement. He was about to utter some scathing remark, when his attention was diverted by their arrival at Margaret's cottage.

Throwing open the little wicket-gate which divided her premises from the lane, she pressed forward, and unlocked her door. Ted followed her into the kitchen, while Joe stood without, craning forward his neck to see what was going on in the interior of the cottage, and drawing the back of his hand across his lips when he saw Miss Heptonstall produce a small bottle of whisky.

"He looks a dale livelier now," remarked Ted, uncloaking the gander and setting it on its legs on Margaret's immaculate table. "Whoa, steady theer," as the bird began to struggle in his grasp, flapping uneasy wings, and making a sickly attempt at a hiss.

Margaret, who had been about to uncork the bottle, paused, surveying Victoria with her head on one side.

"Theer dunnot seem to be mich amiss, do theer?" she remarked; "it seems a'most a pity to be givin' it sperrits. It'll upset it again as like as not."

“Theer mun ha’ been summat amiss i’ th’ first place, though,” returned Wharton, with a judicial air, “else it wouldn’t ha’ been took bad same as it were. If I was you, Miss Heptonstall, I’d give it a drop to strengthen its in’ards a bit.”

“Ah,” agreed Joe from the doorway.

Ted fumbled in his pocket and produced a large red cotton handkerchief, which he carefully spread on the table beneath the gander.

“It ’ud be a pity to let this here table get dirty,” he observed, looking admiringly at its spotless surface. Margaret eyed him with more favour than she had hitherto displayed; then, smiling sourly, began to pour out the contents of her little black bottle.

Page 30

“Fill up, Miss Heptonstall, fill up!” cried Ted, energetically; “eh, if you dunnot gi’ it no more nor that, Victoria met jest as well be a bantam. He’ll noan as mich as wet that great yaller beak of his wi’ that drop.”

Margaret smiled no more, but she filled up the glass. Joe, in the doorway, cleared his throat reflectively. Ted, again encircling the gander with his arm, forced open its beak.

“Now then,” he whispered eagerly, “fotch a spoon, Miss Hep. Coom, owd bird, this’ll fettle thee up, an’ no mistake.”

But whether Victoria’s struggles were more lively than he had anticipated, or whether Ted purposely relaxed his hold, certain it was that the gander, with a scream of fury, backed out of his grasp and fluttered on to the floor; proceeding to waddle with great speed and evident indignation across the kitchen into the yard without.

“He’s teetotal,” said Ted, gazing at Margaret with a twinkle in his eye. “I met ha’ knowed he’d be, seein’ as he’s bin brought up so careful, an’ took to water nateral fro’ th’ first.”

Miss Heptonstall had been about to restore the liquor to its bottle, but she now hesitated, looking towards Ted with a grim smile; his style of humour tickled her. Seized with a sudden fit of generosity, she extended the glass to him.

“You’re noan teetotal, I’ll be bound,” she observed. “Theer! Sup it up.”

“Your ’ealth!” said Ted, nodding towards her, much elated. Joe again cleared his throat tentatively, but Margaret ruthlessly corked the bottle, and, assuming her usual frosty air, remarked with somewhat scant politeness that it was time for her to be setting about her business, and there was no need for other folks to be waiting.

Thereupon the “other folks” were constrained to depart, Ted being still jubilant and Joe very glum.

“Well,” began the former, as soon as they had advanced some paces, “t’ folks up yon ‘ull laugh fit to split when they hear this tale! Th’ owd lady is a dacent sort o’ body when all’s said an’ done. Hoo behaved uncommon ’andsome to me.”

“Ah,” returned Joe with surly sarcasm, “uncommon ’andsome. Hoo gave thee th’ gander’s leavin’s, didn’t hoo? Ho, ho! gander’s leavin’s.”

Joe so seldom made a joke that he was quite astonished at himself, and after three or four repetitions of the same, with much wagging of the head, and a few knowing jerks of his thumb over his shoulder, apparently to accentuate the point of the jest, he became

quite good-humoured again, and the pair walked on in amicable silence, each preparing to astonish his cronies with the recital of his own prowess.

The Thornleigh Arms was a snug old-fashioned hostelry standing a little back from the high-road. An air of homely jollity and comfort seemed to pervade the place; the ruddy afternoon sun lit up the small-paned windows with as cheerful a glow as that which in winter was reflected from the roaring fire piled by old Jack half up the wide chimney; the very Thornleigh lion of the imposing sign seemed to lean confidentially on his toe and to grin affably, as though to assure the passers-by of the good cheer within.

Page 31

Ted and Joe found the usual Saturday customers already there, and presently shouts of laughter made the very rafters ring as he recounted his adventures with Margaret Heptonstall and her gander; his companion meanwhile sipping his beer with an air of suppressed importance. By-and-by he, too, would add his quota to the evening's entertainment, but he would wait till the culminating point of Ted's story was reached, and the company was, so to speak, ripe for it.

"Me an' Miss Hep. is meeterly thick now, I tell ye," summed up Ted at the conclusion of his tale. "Hoo thinks a dale o' me, if hoo doesn't think mich o' menfolk in general."

"Hoo gived Ted the gander's leavin's," put in Joe, seizing his opportunity, and bringing out his joke with a great shout and a vigorous nudge to his nearest neighbour. "Th' owd lad needn't be that set up—hoo give him nought but the gander's leavin's, when all's said an' done."

"Hoo didn't give *thee* a drop as how 'tis," retorted Ted. "Poor Joe were stood i' th' doorway, ye know, an' he sighed an' licked his lips, th' poor chap, but he didn't get nought. Miss Hep. didn't fancy nobody but me."

"Thou'll be for coortin' her next," suggested somebody humorously.

"Nay, nay," said an odd little short man with comically uplifted eyebrows. "'T wouldn't be no use coortin' Margaret Heptonstall. Eh, I remember when our missus reckoned hoo were deein' an' took a notion to mak' up a match between Margaret an' me—"

The rest of his narrative was drowned in a roar of laughter. Every one knew that story.

"Hoo wouldn't ha' noan o' thee, would hoo Tom?" cried one.

"Thy missus couldn't bear the notion of havin' all they dumb things about as Margaret sets sich store by?" queried another.

"Nay, 'twas me as couldn't bear the notion of her," rejoined Tom stoutly. "I'd be hard put-to to do wi' onybody at arter our Betty. Hoo's wick an' 'earty, an' I dunnot want nobry; but if I did have to pick a second missus, it shouldn't be Margaret Hep."

"Hoo's reg'lar set in her ways, isn't hoo?" put in old Jack. "Ah, hoo's reg'lar cut out for a single life, Marg'ret is. I reckon nobody'll want to coort her at this time o' day, an' if onybody did, hoo'd send him packin'."

"I haven't tried my hand yet, ye see," remarked Ted, looking round for applause. "If I was to get agate o' coortin' Margaret Hep., hoo'd be fain enough."

There was general laughter at this statement, which nearly every one present hastened to deny. All agreed that were Ted to urge his pretensions he would be very soon sent to the right-about.

“Well, then,” cried Ted when the uproar had somewhat subsided, “I’ll bet you a nine-gallon cask of owd Jack’s best to a five-shillin’ bit that Margaret Hep. an’ me ’ull be shouted before the month’s out.”

The din at this point reached such a height that Mrs. Jack hastened in from the back premises to inquire what was to-do, and Ted himself was obliged to hammer on the table with his knuckles before he could make himself heard.

Page 32

“Well,” he resumed, “I’ve said it, an’ I’ll stick to it. You’ll see, Margaret an’ me ‘ull be keeping coompany afore aught’s long, an’ Canon ‘ull be shoutin’ us at th’ end o’ th’ month.”

“Mon, you’re noan goin’ to wed sich an owd, tough, dried-up body as yon, for sure?” cried comfortable Mrs. Orme incredulously. “Ye mun be a good ten or fifteen year younger nor her.”

“I didn’t say we’d go as fur as wedlock,” explained Ted, with a wicked leer. “I said we’d be shouted. Eh, theer’s mony a slip ‘twixt cup an’ lip, ye know. Margaret an’ me ‘ull happen fall out afore weddin’ day cooms; but once Canon shouts us ye mun down wi’ your five shillin’s.”

“Ah, th’ marlock ’ull be cheap enough at five shillin’,” cried some jovial spirit. “My word, I would laugh to hear the names called! I reckon Canon hisself ’ud scarce keep a straight face.”

“Nay, but think of th’ poor wench,” cried Jack, with an explosion of mirth. “Ted, it’s rale cruel o’ thee to play an innicent trustin’ lass sich a trick.”

“I reckon Margaret Hep. can take care of herself,” put in Mrs. Jack. “Hoo can keep her e’en oppen as weel’s onybody. I don’t know but what it ’ull be Ted as ‘ull ha’ to pay for th’ nine-gallon cask. Ye’d best be savin’ up your brass, Ted, for we wunnot give no credit for ’t.”

With this professional sally she retired. Thomas Alty, remarking in an undertone that his Betty would be coming to look for him if he didn’t make haste home, withdrew also, after a good-humoured nod to the friend who had treated him; for, as Mrs. Alty invariably impounded Tom’s wage, it was only when he met with a crony in a generous humour that he visited the Thornleigh Arms.

It was not till considerably later that Ted betook himself homewards; the plan which he had at first proposed out of a mere spirit of bravado having now, owing to the gibes of Jack and the rest, become a fixed resolution.

On the following afternoon, just at the time when young Thornleigh went a-coortin’, and elderly Thornleigh took off its boots and coat, or put a clean white handkerchief over its cap, the better to enjoy its Sabbath snooze in the ingle-nook, Ted Wharton cocked his hat over his eye, put a posy in his coat, and set off to call on Margaret Heptonstall. He found that damsel engaged in neither of the avocations already stated, but, with her Sunday gown pinned behind her, and her week-day sun-bonnet hanging limply over her face, feeding her numerous family in the middle of her yard.

“Good day to ye, Miss Heptonstall,” remarked Ted, approaching with a jaunty air, “I thought I’d just call round to ax how Victoria finds hissel this morning.”

“Mich the same as us’al, thank ye,” replied Miss Hep. with a starched air. “Get out o’ the road, Alice,” addressing an adventurous pullet. “Thou’rt allus runnin’ under a body’s feet. Chuck! chuck! chuck! Coom G’arge, coom Adylaide, coom Maud! Now then, Alexandra! Chuck! chuck! coom lovies! That theer vicious Frederick has been a-chivying of you till you’re freetened to death, you are.”

Page 33

Ted stood by with his thumbs in his waistcoat pockets, smiling to himself.

“Yon’s gradely chickens,” he remarked presently. “Ye never eat ’em do ye? ’Twouldn’t be respectful, I shouldn’t think.”

[Illustration: THE CONQUEST OF RADICAL TED “Yon’s gradely chickens,” he remarked]

Margaret vouchsafed no reply. Ted resumed, with bitter sarcasm.

“H’m, mich the same as their r’yal namesakes, I reckon—kept for show an’ no manner o’ use to nobry.”

Margaret hastily scattered the remainder of the grain in her apron, and whisked round.

“Howd your din,” she cried angrily, “or else tak’ yoursel’ off. I’ll noan stand by an’ hear sich talk i’ my place.”

Ted, feeling he had made rather an inauspicious beginning, suddenly became lamb-like.

“No offence,” he pleaded humbly. “Mun I carry your basin for you into th’ house?”

Margaret looked over her shoulder and snorted; then, without returning yea or nay, she stalked over the cobble-stones and entered her kitchen, followed meekly by her visitor. Miss Heptonstall did not turn her head until the sound of Ted’s boots, falling upon her tiled floor, made her look round sharply.

“If ye’re for coomin’ in ye’d best wipe your feet,” she announced briefly.

Ted obediently retraced his steps and polished his boots on the mat outside the door. Then he re-entered, walking gingerly on the tips of his toes, and casting about in his mind for a suitable topic with which to inaugurate the conversation. Margaret’s spare angular figure and sharp-featured face did not look encouraging; but surely never before was seen such a dazzling white apron, such a stiffly starched collar, such spotless cuffs. Margaret’s cleanliness had in it, it was true, an aggressive quality, but Ted admired it nevertheless. The kitchen and all its appurtenances bore witness to the same scrupulous nicety. No floor in Thornleigh village was raddled so carefully, no fire-irons glittered so bravely; the very walls seemed to shine; and as for the pots and pans they positively winked at one another in the ruddy glow. Ted rested a sunburnt hand on each of his knees, drew a long breath, and remarked fervently—

“Ye mun be wonderful house-proud, Miss Heptonstall.”

He could not have chosen a more pleasing theme; Margaret wrinkled up her nose with a sniff and a smile.

“Well, I believe I’m reckoned to be,” she remarked modestly; “theer’s nought else i’ this world as I care for mich, but I’m wonderful fond o’ cleanin’ and scrubbing’, an’ I’ve allus said I’d sooner do things for mysel’ nor let onybody do it for me.”

Ted sighed and cast up his eyes.

“It seems a pity, Miss Heptonstall, as it’s only yoursel’ ye’re doin’ it for—”

“Why so?” interrupted Margaret snappishly.

“Well, it seems sich terrible waste, ye know. It seems a pity ye shouldn’t be doin’ for soombry else at th’ same time.”

Page 34

“I dunnot want to do for nobry, nobbut mysel’,” returned Margaret with a toss of her head. “Did ye think I’d be for takkin’ lodgers at this time o’ day?” she added suspiciously. “Nay, nay, I’ll noan ha’ strangers here, botherin’ an’ messin’ about.”

“Eh, I wasn’t thinkin’ o’ strangers,” explained Wharton, hitching his chair a little nearer. “I were jest wonderin’ to mysel’, seein’ you’re so manageable an’ clever an’ that, as you hadn’t never thought o’ gettin’ wed an’ doin’ for a husband as well as yoursel’. I raly do wonder, Miss Heptonstall,” he repeated insinuatingly, “as ye haven’t getten wed.”

He expected Margaret to be surprised and flattered, but she gave no indication of being either the one or the other. She fixed her steely blue eyes sternly on the visitor, and inquired stiffly what he thought she wanted a husband for, and what use he reckoned sich-like ’ud be to her. Ted edged his chair yet a little nearer, and thrust forward his face till it was within a yard of Margaret’s.

“A good husband ’ud be a great comfort to ye, Miss Heptonstall,” he urged. “He’d—he’d love ye, ye know”—(hesitating)—“an’ work for ye.”

This last was said with more assurance. Margaret appeared unconvinced.

“Eh, he’d be more bother than he was worth,” she remarked trenchantly. “Think ‘o th’ litter alone he’d mak’ coomin’ in an’ out o’ th’ house. It’s bad enough to be cleanin’ up arter th’ cats an’ the dog—poor dumb things, they knows no better! But a mon stumpin’ in an’ out wi’s dirty boots, an’ clooes as ‘ud allus want mendin’, an’ stockin’s weerin’ at th’ ’eel! Eh, theer’d be no end to ‘t! An’ then th’ doin’ for; gettin’s mate an’ that—turnin’ up ‘s nose very like—ill-satisfied wi’ a washin’-day dinner! Nay, nay, I’d sooner bide as I am wi’ nobbut mysel’ to look to.”

Ted threw back his head and coughed behind his hand, nonplussed for the moment; presently, noting that the practical side of the case was the only one likely to meet with favour, he resumed artfully—“Think how coomfortable it ‘ud be of a rainy day, i’stead o’ startin’ out i’ th’ wet to feed pig an’ do for chickens, to say to your gaffer, ‘Sitha, thou mun see to they things afore thou goes to thy wark’—an’ of an evening, when he’ coom awhoam, ye could set him to get th’ ‘taters, an’ chop wood an’ that.”

Margaret crossed her arms and appeared to reflect.

“An’ of a Saturday—pay day, ye know—ye’d jest say: ’Hand o’er, wilto?’ An’ he’d hand o’er.”

A faint smile began to play about the lady’s lips; she leaned back in her chair and looked attentively at Ted.

“’Tisn’t everybody as ‘ud be willin’ to do that,” she remarked after a pause; “theer’s a mony as ‘ud sooner spend their brass at th’ Thornleigh Arms.”

Ted privately thought this extremely likely, but he assumed an air of virtuous indignation.

“Theer’s chaps an’ chaps! I reckon if onybody was to ax to wed *you*, Miss Heptonstall, he’d be a steady-goin’ sort o’ fellow as wouldn’t be up to they mak’ o’ games.”

Page 35

Margaret smiled outright. Ted thought he would follow up his advantage and clinch the point at once.

"Now, Miss Heptonstall," said he, "for instance, if *I* was to coom coortin' ye, I wouldn't be thinkin' of onything but makkin' ye coomfortable. I reckon ye'd mak' *me* coomfortable"—(with an air of great fairness and impartiality)—"that's wheer 'tis; it 'ud be 'give an' take, give an' take.' I feel dreadful lonely of an evenin', an' it's a sad thing when a man allus has to do for hissel'. I'd be thankful if ye'd have me—"

"I reckon ye would," interrupted Margaret with disconcerting frankness; "I've a good bit o' brass saved."

This was news to Ted, and he looked at her with genuine interest.

"Have ye?" said he. "I raly didn't know. Well, I'm doin' pratty well too, an' I've got a nice little place—"

"Nay," put in Margaret, "it isn't mich of a place; this here's twice th' size, an' a dale coomfortabler. Nay, if we was to get wed, ye'd ha' to coom here—I wouldn't go yonder."

Ted started for a moment, somewhat taken back by the matter-of-fact coolness with which his advances were received; he might as well finish the job now however, he reflected, and as he did not mean the business to proceed beyond the "shouting" stage, it would not hurt him to make any concession that Margaret might please to exact.

"Ah, I could coom here," he remarked heroically; "my little nook isn't sich an ill place for all that; but I'll do it, an' I'll gi' ye my wage reg'lar an' do th' dirty work all round, an'—an' turn teetotal if ye want it."

"Naw," said Miss Heptonstall, "I wouldn't go as far as that; I like a glass o' beer mysel' at dinner-time—I allus keep a little cask i' th' buttery yon—but you'll ha' to gi' o'er callin' at th' Thornleigh Arms."

"Tisn't like I'd want to be callin' at th' Thornleigh Arms if I'd a coomfortable place like this to set in o' neets, and a missus o' my own to look to."

He had for a moment contemplated qualifying the word "missus" with some such adjective as "bonny," but a glance at Margaret's face nipped this poetical flower in the bud. After a moment she sat upright, gazing at him stolidly.

“I’ll think on ‘t,” she said. “Theer’s things for it an’ theer’s things agin it. One thing’s agin it—I dunnot fancy your talk out o’ th’ newspapers—speakin’ ill o’ th’ Queen an’ that—I reckon we’d ha’ words if ye carried on that road when we was mon an’ wife.”

Wharton rubbed his hands and looked embarrassed; he had hitherto had no hesitation in perjuring himself, but he could not for the life of him swallow his principles.

Margaret marched across the room and took down a framed photograph from a shelf of the old-fashioned dresser. It represented Her Majesty in royal robes.

“This here Canon give me at th’ time o’ th’ Jubilee,” she pursued. “I’ve vallyed it—well, I couldn’t say how mich I’ve vallyed it an’ *do* vally it. See here, dunnot hoo look noble? I couldn’t do wi’ onybody i’ th’ house as didn’t respect this same as I do.”

Page 36

Ted cast a depreciating eye towards the portrait, but, after a glance at it, suddenly regained his tongue and his spirits.

“See here, Miss Heptonstall,” he cried eagerly, “th’ Queen’s not like that! Theer now, it just shows how poor folks gets imposed upon! I’ve seen the Queen mysel’—walked all the road to Liverpool when I didn’t know no better, an’ I see her, an’ hoo were nought but a wumman i’ black! Theer now, I’ll tak’ my oath on ’t! Hoo hadn’t no crown on, nor yet no blue ribbon, an’ none o’ they fal-lals o’ medals, an’ nought i’ her hand. Hoo was jest an ord’nary wumman same ’s ony other wumman. ‘Well,’ thinks I to mysel’, ‘if yon is to be stuck up at th’ ‘ead o’ Government, an’ we all mun bow down afore a wuimman as isn’t nought different to ony other wumman, it’s a shame,’ I says. An’ it *is* a shame, Miss Heptonstall.”

Ted was working up into a fine declamatory vein, and would probably have continued to hold forth for some time had not Margaret indignantly interrupted him.

“Stop that! I’ll ha’ noan of it i’ this ‘ouse, an’ so I tell ye. Did ever a body hear sich talk! Ye ought to be ashamed o’ yoursel’, Edward Wharton! If you was a mon ye should be ready to lay down your life for your Queen!”

“Lay down my life!” repeated Ted, who was getting slightly irate in his turn. “I’d do no sich thing. I wouldn’t put mysel’ onyways out o’ my road for th’ Queen, now I know what hoo is. Hoo’s fools enough to fight for her and wark for her. I wouldn’t do nought for her.”

“Ye would then,” said Margaret, suddenly becoming calm again and smiling grimly to herself. “Theer’s one thing ye’d do for her, Edward Wharton—ye’d drink her ’ealth.”

Before he could retort she rose and went into the buttery, returning after a moment or two with a foaming brown jug in one hand and a quaintly shaped Toby-mug in the other. She placed them both on the table in inviting proximity to Ted.

“Now then,” she said persuasively, “ye’ll drink Long Life to Her Gracious Majesty.”

The day was exceedingly warm, and if there was one thing on earth for which Radical Ted had a weakness it was his native nut—brown ale. He looked at Margaret and grinned—the grin of compromise. Margaret, still smiling, slowly filled the beaker, a beautiful creamy head bubbling over the brim.

“Coom,” she said, “ye’ll say: ’Her Majesty’s ‘ealth, an’ long life to her.’”

Ted stretched out his hand and grasped the tempting handle; then, averting his eyes, he hastily mumbled the prescribed words, burying his face in the mug immediately after. While he slowly drained its contents Margaret chanted the last verse of the National Anthem, to a tune which might possibly have been like “God Save the Queen” if it had not borne an equal resemblance to “The Dead March in Saul.”

Music, we know, has charms to soothe the savage breast, and, whether because of Margaret’s patriotic outburst, or because the beer was of excellent quality, Ted’s face was wreathed in smiles when he set down the mug.

Page 37

“Ah,” he said, “we’se never ha’ no words if ye tackle me this gate. I’d drink the Queen’s ’ealth again if you axed me.”

“Enough’s good as a feast,” returned his hostess sententiously. “It’ll be tay-time afore aught’s long.”

“Mun I bide for tay?” inquired Ted, with his head on one side.

“Ye can if ye’ve a mind,” said Margaret, accommodatingly. “Ye can be lookin’ round if ye like while I’m gettin’ things ready.”

Ted complied, nothing loth, and stalked about the place with his thumbs in his armholes and an air of proprietorship. Everything without was as snug, neat, and prosperous as everything within. The garden was well-stocked and weedless; the potatoes seemed to be coming on nicely; the pig was as fat as a self-respecting pig ought to be, and the chickens were healthy and well-grown. Ted re-entered the house, scraping his feet carefully this time, and looking at Margaret with increased respect as she bustled about. The kettle already sung merrily on the hob, a plateful of most inviting buttered toast was keeping warm within the fender, and Miss Hep. was in the act of placing on the table a smoking dish of nicely-browned sausages.

“I made ’em mysel’,” she explained briefly. “I dunnot often have ’em at this time o’ day, but this here’s an occasion.”

Ted looked blank for a moment, then, suddenly remembering that this was practically a betrothal-feast, responded heartily, and drew in his chair to the table with pleased anticipation.

Miss Heptonstall, he remarked, had everything “gradely” about her. The table-cloth was not only snow-white and beautifully mended, but of fine quality; the spoons were silver, worn to egg-shell thinness, but resplendently bright; the teapot, a heavy, old-fashioned Britannia metal one, was polished till it might have been of the same precious ore; the cups and plates were of delicate transparent china. Margaret came of good old north-country stock, and these possessions were heirlooms. Ted looked at her, and a queer feeling suddenly came over him. Supposing—only *supposing*—that instead of a jest his wooing had been undertaken in sober earnest, he would be doing rather well for himself than otherwise. Now that he was at leisure to survey Miss Heptonstall with an impartial eye, it appeared to him that she really was not ill-looking, and he didn’t believe she could be more than nine or ten years older than he was. She certainly was a notable sort of body; she kept her place wonderful nice, and she had a tidy bit of brass laid by in the bank. There was a very comfortable ring about this last item. It was odd that from

the time these reflections took possession of him Ted became pensive and serious. The conversation flagged, and by-and-by he rose to take his leave. Margaret accompanied him to the door.

“Ye’ll be lookin’ in again, I fancy, afore th’ weekend?” she remarked casually.

Ted cleared his throat and replied that very like he would. He walked rather slowly till he reached the corner of the lane, and there he paused, slapping his thigh as he suddenly remembered something.

Page 38

“I haven’t said a word about the shoutin’!” he cried in a vexed tone. He retraced his steps more quickly, and presently re-entered Margaret’s cottage.

“Miss Heptonstall,” he began, screwing his head insinuatingly round the doorpost.

“Well?” returned Margaret. She was standing with her back to him, gazing meditatively into the fire.

“I were thinkin’,” continued Wharton, “you an’ me, ye know—theer isn’t much use in waitin’, is theer?”

Margaret turned and looked at him, but did not speak.

“We met as well let Canon begin o’ shoutin’ us, dunnot ye think?”

Margaret reflected. “It ‘ud be a pity for ye to gi’ up your house afore th’ end o’ th’ year,” she remarked. “Th’ agent wouldn’t let ye, would he? Ye’ll ha’ to gi’ six months’ notice, wunnot ye? Theer’s time enough as how ’tis.”

Ted bethought him of the cask of beer, and his face fell. If he was to win his wager the banns must be published before the end of the month, and but ten days of it remained to run.

“Well, I’d as soon as not hurry up things,” he said, screwing a little more of his person on the other side of the door. “I’m awful tired o’ livin’ by mysel’. An’ we met let my house an’ turn o’er a bit o’ money that way. If we was to get wed at once ye’d be havin’ the benefit o’ that as well’s me. It ’ud be more to our mutual advantage,” delivering this phrase, culled from one of his favourite papers, with great emphasis, “nor for both of us to remain single. That’s what *I* think, Miss Heptonstall, but ye mun do as *you* choose.”

“Well, theer’s summat i’ what ye say,” returned Margaret. “Happen ‘twould be best to get the job done. Dear o’ me, it seems sudden like! I raly never thought o’ changin’ my state. Once before, ye may ha’ heerd, Mrs. Alty wanted me to wed her Thomas. I was again it, dreadful again it at first, but hoo persuaded me, so I very nigh gave in. But him an’ me didn’t agree so well at arter, and Betty didn’t dee, so that settled it. Well, then, I said to mysel’, ‘It’s all for th’ best,’ an’ I reckoned to bide as I were. But raly now, as ye’ve coom,” a sudden smile lit up her face, a smile less frosty, less sour, less grim than any that had hitherto found their way there, “I dunno how it is, but I seem to ha’ taken a fancy to ye. I did fro’ th’ first. I reckon ye’ll mak’ a good husband.”

Ted left off embracing the lintel of the door and walked straight up to her, quite forgetting to wipe his feet. His face was very red and his eyes avoided hers; making a sudden dart at her hand, he shook it solemnly.

“I will, Margaret, I will,” he said huskily, “an’ I reckon ye’ll mak’ a good wife—better nor I deserve.”

In another moment he was gone, walking very rapidly this time, almost running indeed, as though to give himself no time for thought. When he reached home, he shut the door hastily behind him and sat down on the nearest chair.

Page 39

“Well,” he said, scratching his head, with an exceedingly perturbed expression, “this here’s a queer kind o’ business! I didn’t quite know what I were lettin’ mysel’ in for, it seems.”

Once or twice during the week he called upon his lady-love, who, on one occasion, permitted him to inspect her Savings Bank book, and, on another, presented him with a handsome silver-mounted pipe, which her father had won many years before at some village sports. It was bestowed, it must be owned, on the understanding that it was never on any account to be used, but Ted’s pride of possession was none the less great. At the conclusion of each visit she had not failed to make him drink Her Majesty’s health.

On the following Sunday, when the Canon with the portentous “Hem,” and solemn glance round which invariably preceded the announcement of banns, began: “Be it known unto all here present,” it was observed that the corners of his mouth were twitching in a most peculiar manner, and his voice actually trembled as he coupled the names of Margaret Heptonstall and Edward Wharton.

Had any stranger chanced to enter Thornleigh church at that moment, I fear he would have been much disedified; every single member of the congregation was a-grin; the Canon himself was smiling; the only person who preserved his entire seriousness being Radical Ted himself.

Those among his cronies who were in the secret of the wager considered this gravity affected, and part of the joke; and greeted him hilariously on quitting the church.

“Well done, owd bird! Thou’s lost no time as how ’tis.”

“Ah,” replied Ted, still solemn, “I haven’t lost mich time.”

“Well, thou’s won th’ bet i’ gradely style! When wilto coom to Thornleigh Arms to have th’ five shillin’ paid over?”

“Eh, I doubt Ted ‘ud sooner ha’ th’ five shillin’ worth,” suggested one of Ted’s boon companions.

“I dunno,” replied Ted; “I reckon I’d as soon ha’ th’ brass.”

“Ah, but thou’lt coom to Orme’s for it?”

“Nay—I fancy one on you had best bring it to my place—hoo met get to hear on ’t, ye know,” he explained with a sheepish smile.

There was a great guffawing and stamping of feet at this. Ted was slapped on the shoulder, his friends declaring that nobry could beat him. By-and-by he managed to make his escape, and walked pensively homewards, shaking his head now and then, and muttering to himself:—

“Ah, hoo’d happen get to hear on ’t if I went yonder; aye, the brass ’ull coom in reet ’nough. I’ll say nought about that.”

He continued his courting assiduously during the ensuing week, and on the Sunday he and Margaret were “shouted” for the second time.

The ecstasy of his friends knew no bounds. Was there ever such a chap as Ted for a marlock? How long would he keep it up? they wondered. In a day or two the news flew from mouth to mouth that Ted had given the agent six months’ notice, and that he had announced his intention of letting his house and taking up his abode at Margaret’s after their wedding.

Page 40

“Well! well!” cried the initiated, casting up their hands and eyes to heaven; the more moderate among them were of the opinion that Ted was carrying things a bit too far, particularly when’ it became known that Margaret was boiling hams and killing chickens —yes, Sophia and Ernest, William and Augusta were laid low—in preparation for the forthcoming nuptial feast.

On the third Sunday the general excitement reached fever-height, and when once more the Canon linked the names of Edward Wharton and Margaret Heptonstall, a kind of amazed murmur rippled from bench to bench. All those who had been party to the plot against Margaret’s peace were totally at a loss to account for the conduct of the chief conspirator. They made up their minds to take him to task at the earliest possible opportunity; but, as on that particular morning he did not come to church, they were forced to restrain their curiosity till later in the day.

After dinner, therefore, a select deputation waited on Mr. Edward Wharton at his own residence, but was again doomed to disappointment; that gentleman having gone to call on his charmer, and not returning till evening. However, the ardour of the deputation, though damped, was not extinguished, and when the shades of night were falling, it again betook itself to the abode of the bridegroom elect.

As the half-dozen members who made up the embassy walked at the usual slow and somewhat shambling pace which the Lancashire rustic assumes at times of leisure—-pausing every now and then to emphasise the point of some remark, switching at the hedge with their sticks, playfully kicking up the dust, or sending a tempting pebble spinning along in front of them—faint notes of music reached them, coming apparently from the direction towards which they were bending their steps. These notes were feeble and faltering, as though the player were practising an unfamiliar air; in another moment or two it became evident that the sounds proceeded from Ted’s cottage, and that the musician was no other than Mr. Wharton himself.

Quickening their pace, the hilarious party burst open the door, discovering the master of the house seated astride a wooden chair, concertina in hand; his face wore a most serious, not to say dismal, expression, and his whole attitude betokened absorption.

Joe Lovelady advanced and clapped him on the shoulder with a loud laugh; the others followed, less jubilantly; one or two of them, indeed, felt themselves somewhat aggrieved at Ted’s unaccountable demeanour.

“Coom,” cried Joe, “thou mun explain a bit, Ted, lad. We’re gettin’ fair moidered wi’ this job; how long dost thou mean to keep it up?”

“Haven’t you and Margaret fallen out yet?” put in another. “Ye’re carryin’ on th’ coortin’ longer nor we looked for.”

“Ah, thou said thou’d content thysel’ with bein’ shouted, didn’t thou? Thou allus said thou didn’t mean it to coom to wedlock.”

Page 41

Ted heaved a deep sigh, and looked solemnly from one to the other.

“Theer’s no knowin’ i’ this warld what folks cooms to,” he replied seriously. “We says one thing an’ we reckon we’se do it, an’ when th’ time cooms it’s impossible.”

A blank silence fell upon the company, broken presently by Joe.

“Why,” he said, “thou doesn’t mean thou’rt goin’ to carry out this here business?”

Ted nodded, seriously and regretfully.

There was a general shout.

“Thou’rt never goin’ to wed owd Marg’ret Hep.?”

“Hoo’s noan so owd as that cooms to,” retorted Ted indignantly. “Her an’ me’s mich of an age—I *am* goin’ to wed her. Now then! I’ve coorted her, an’ we’n been shouted, an’ I’m goin’ to let it go forrud. Theer! I hope nobry hasn’t got no objections.”

Nobody hadn’t none, it appeared, though from certain low murmurs and a general shuffling of feet, it was evident that this unexpected outcome of Ted’s joke caused a good deal of dissatisfaction. Joe, indeed, gave voice to the universal opinion when he observed that it wasn’t what he had looked for, and he couldn’t think it altogether ’andsome of Ted. Somebody else wanted to know what about their five shillin’?

“Well, an’ what about the five shillin’?” repeated Ted, reddening, however, a little uncomfortably.

“Well, this here isn’t what we expected; nay, not by a long road. We was lookin’ for summat joy’al, a gradely marlock, thou knows. This here’s an ord’nary kind o’ business.”

“Ah, we all paid up—we did that, an’ we’n been waitin’ for thee to look in yonder at Orme’s! We was all expectin’ a bit of a do, thou knows—an’ thou’s never so much as coom nigh th’ place. An’ thou settled to get wed an’ all, wi’out namin’ it to nobry! It’s scarce honest.”

Ted scratched his jaw reflectively; the argument seemed to touch him. After a pause he rose and crossed the room to a chest of drawers in the corner. Unlocking an upper drawer he took out a greasy leathern purse with which he returned to the expectant group. Opening it, with a kind of groan, he extracted five shillings, which he handed over to Joe Lovelady.

“Theer,” he said, “it is but fair when all’s said an’ done. Theer! ye can have a wet wi’ that.”

“Reet, I knowed ye wasn’t one as ’ud play us a dirty trick. Coom along, an’ we’se have a drop all round, an’ drink thy ‘ealth an’ th’ bride’s too. Ho! ho! ho! Aye, we’se wish thee an’ thy missus good luck! Coom, we’se step out an’ mak’ up for lost time.”

“Nay, nay,” said Ted, shaking his head with gentle melancholy. “I’ll noan go wi’ you—I met rue it at arter. Nay, I’ll wish ye good-bye an’ good luck, all on you, but I’ll bide wheer I am.”

He returned thereupon to his concertina, meeting all further persuasions by deep sighs and obdurate shakes of the head; and, finding their efforts useless, the party withdrew at last, to drink his health without him.

Page 42

As they retraced their steps the uncertain notes of Ted's concertina came floating after them, borne upon the evening breeze; gradually these shaped themselves into a tune, a tune which their incredulous ears were at last forced to identify. Joe Lovelady suddenly paused and threw out his hand.

"'Ark, all on ye, 'ark at that! Do ye know the tune th' owd lad's hammerin' at?"

They all paused, holding their breaths; and then shouts of laughter broke the stillness.

Radical Ted was playing *God Save the Queen*.

HEATHER IN HOLBORN

"I can scarce fancy her living here," said the man, pausing half-way up the stairs to look upwards at the dusty length which remained to be traversed. "Nay, she could never live here. I'm come on a fool's errand, but I may as well see it through."

His tall, broad-shouldered figure disappeared behind another angle, and halted at length on the fifth floor. On the door facing him a name was neatly painted:—*Mr. Whiteside*.

"'Tis a Lancashire name, right enough," he said, "but there weren't any Whitesides in our part when I was a lad. It'll be some stranger as our Molly took up with—well, let's go for'ard."

His tap was answered by a fresh-coloured woman, neatly clad in a stuff gown. The man surveyed her with a curious searching look, and she stared back at him.

"What was you pleased to want, sir?" she inquired at length, growing uncomfortable under his scrutiny. "Mr. Whiteside—that's my husband—is out."

"Does Mrs. Rigby live here? No, I'm sure she does not—I beg your pardon—it is a mistake."

"No, sir, no mistake at all; it's quite right. Mrs. Rigby does live here—she's my mother."

The stranger again darted a swift, eager glance at her.

"Right," he said. "I'll come in; I want to see her."

Mrs. Whiteside hesitated for a moment. "My mother doesn't often have visitors," she said. "We've been here more nor ten year now, and nobody's ever come lookin' for her."

“I’ve come a long way to look for her,” said the man; “I’ve come from Australia. I’m bringing her news of her son Will.”

“Eh dear!” cried the woman, clapping her hands together, “ye don’t say so! My word, mother will be pleased. We didn’t know rightly whether he were alive or dead. Tis twenty-five year or more since he left home. Tisn’t bad news I hope, mester?” she added anxiously, for the brown face, as much of it as could be seen under the thick dark beard, wore a troubled look.

“Bad news? No,” returned he with a gruff laugh. “It wouldn’t matter much anyway, would it? seein’ as you’d lost sight of him for so long, and by all accounts he wasn’t worth much at the best o’ times.”

“He’s my brother,” said Mrs. Whiteside shortly. “Will ye please to step in, sir?”

He followed her into a narrow passage, and thence into an odd, little three-cornered room; a room furnished in mahogany and green rep, with a few brightly-bound books on the shining round table in the centre, framed oleographs on the walls, stuffed birds in glass cases on the mantel-piece, and a pervading odour of paraffin.

Page 43

“I’ll call mother,” said Mrs. Whiteside, backing towards the door and eyeing her visitor suspiciously, for her mind misgave her as to whether it would be safe to leave him alone with the Family Bible or the stuffed birds. “Mother!” she cried, raising her voice, “will you come for a minute? There’s a visitor here.”

“Nay, lass, I can’t leave the bread,” called back an old woman’s voice, shrill yet strong. “Ax the body to step in here, whoever ’tis.”

“Will ye come into the kitchen?” said Mrs. Whiteside unwillingly. “My mother, ’tis a notion she has, ’ull never set foot in this ’ere room. We’re Lancashire folk, ye see, mester, and tis the custom there to live mostly in the kitchen.”

The visitor followed her in silence across the passage and into the opposite room. Hardly had he set foot inside the door before he uttered an exclamation, looking down the while at the floor. The boards were scrubbed to an immaculate whiteness and strewn with sand. He rubbed his boot backward and forward over the gritty surface with an odd smile; then, raising his eyes, he looked hastily round the room, averting his glance quickly when it fell upon the figure bending over the great brown pan in the fender. Walking to the window he stood looking out without speaking.

“I hope the man’s got all his wits,” said Mrs. Whiteside to herself, “I never did see a chap act so strange.”

Through the open window a fine view could be had of tall grimy houses, and sooty roofs, with scarce a glint of sky between the chimney-stacks, and far down in the street below was the turmoil of city life; the roar and rush of it came echoing up even to that odd, peaceful little chamber. The man neither saw nor heard; as he stood there it seemed to him that he was looking out upon the moorland, with the smell of the heather strong and spicy and sweet in his nostrils, and the cry of the peewit in his ears. His chest heaved; then he turned about and faced the room again. Yes, it was no dream; here was the house-place of a North Country cottage. The sturdy deal table in the midst of the sanded floor, the oak dresser with its noble array of crockery, the big chest in the corner, the screened settle on one side of the hearth; and there, kneeling on the patchwork rug, the sturdy, strong-backed old woman, in bedgown and petticoat and frilled white cap, with lean, vigorous arms half-buried in a shining mass of dough.

“Well, what’s to do?” inquired she, glancing sharply over her shoulder.

“This ’ere gentleman says he’s brought news of our Will,” said Mrs. Whiteside hesitatingly.

The old woman uttered a cry, and, withdrawing her hands from the dough, wiped them hastily in her apron, and ran towards the stranger.

“News indeed,” she said. “Eh dear, and how is my poor lad? How is he, sir? Eh, bless you for coomin’! I scarce reckoned he were wick, ’tis so long sin’ we’n had a word of him.”

Page 44

She was clasping the new-comer's hands now, and shaking them excitedly up and down, her eyes searching his face the while.

"How is my lad?" she repeated. "He mun be a gradely mon now—a gradely mon! Tis what he said hisself when he wur breeched. Dear o' me, I mind it well. He come runnin' in so proud wi's hands in's pockets. 'I'm a gradely mon now,' he says, 'same's my feyther.'"

She dropped his hands and wiped her eyes.

"My word, mother," said Mrs. Whiteside reprovingly, "how ye do run on! Was my brother well, mester, when ye see him last?"

"Quite well," responded the stranger gruffly. "Well and hearty."

"Thank God for that!" cried the old woman.

"He told me," went on the other, and his voice still sounded rough and harsh from behind his great beard; "he told me if I were anywhere in Lancashire to look up the old place, and tell his folks he was alive and well."

"Has he been doin' pretty well, sir, d'ye know?" inquired the younger woman, politely, but with interest.

"Pretty well—lately; so I've been told," returned he.

"And he didn't send nothin' to his mother? Nothin' besides the message?" she went on. "Well, I call it a sin and a shame; 'twas scarce worth your while to seek us out for that."

"Howd thy din, Mary," cried Mrs. Rigby angrily. "Not worth while! Why, I'll bless the gentleman for it, an' pray for him day an' neet while I live. Wick an' hearty. My lad's wick an' hearty,—an' I was afeared he wur dead. An' he took thought on his owd mother so fur away, an' sent her word, bless him!"

"He might ha' sent ye somethin' else I think," said Mary wrathfully; "I don't hold wi' makin' such a to-do about a chap as never did nothin' for you in his life. There's others as is worth more nor him."

The old woman drew herself up, her eyes blazing in their sunken orbits.

"Mary," she said, "if ye mean to cast up as ye're keepin' me in my owd age, I tell ye plain, though there are strangers here, I think no shame on't. I brought ye into the

world, an' I reared you an' worked hard for you till ye was up-grown, an' kept a whoam o'er your head wi' nought but the labour o' my two hands. An' now as I'm stricken in years an' the owd place is gone, I think no shame o' being' behowden to ye for mate an' shelter."

"La, mother," stammered Mary "whatever makes ye go for to say such things?—I'm sure I wasn't castin' up—"

"Ye've no need to cast up," interrupted her mother fiercely. "I'm not behowden to ye for mich, as how 'tis—I reckon I addle my mate."

The man turned upon the younger woman with a savage glance, but she was too much absorbed in her own grievance to heed him. "I wasn't castin' up, mother," she asseverated. "I nobbut meant it seemed a bit hard as you should think as much of Will as of me."

Page 45

“Eh,” said the old woman, beginning to laugh and shaking her head, “I’ll not deny but what the lad was a great fav’ryite. The only lad ever I had, and my first-born. Dear o’ me, I mind how proud I was when they telled me ’twas a lad. ‘A fine lad,’ said the woman as did for me. Eh, I thought my heart ‘ud fair burst wi’ joy! An’ he wur sech a gradely little chap, so peart an’ lively, crowin’ an’ laughin’ from morn till neet. Dear, yes—soon as ever leet coom he’d come creepin’ up to our bed an’ pull at the sheet. ‘Wakken up, mother,’ he’d say; ‘mother, it’s time to wakken up!’ Eh, mony a time I fancy I can hear the little voice when I wak’ up now, i’ this dark dirty place. I keep my e’en shut, an’ hark at the birds chirrupin’, an’ think o’ the little hand pluckin’ at the sheet, an’ the little voice. An’ then clock strikes an’ I oppen my e’en and see the smoke an’ the black chimnies—eh, I’m welly smoored among ’em all! I could fair go mad to find mysel’ so far away fro’ whoam.”

“But surely,” said the visitor, with a dreamy glance round, “you’ve made this place very home-like.”

“‘Tis, an’ ‘tisn’t. Says I to Mary when she axed me to shift wi’ her, ‘I’ll not coom,’ says I, ‘wi’out I bring th’ clock an’ chest, an’ all they bits o’ things as I’m used to.’ ‘Eh, mother,’ says she, ’what would you be doin’ wi’ ’em down i’ London town?’—’What should I be doin’ wi’ ’em?’ says I. ‘Same as I do here,’ says I. ‘If I coom wi’ you, my lass I mun keep to the owd ways. I’m too owd mysel’ for aught else. I mun keep th’ owd things an’ th’ owd fashions.’—Is that a bit o’ heather as ye’ve getten i’ your hat, sir?”

“Yes,” said the man deliberately; “’tis a bit of heather—and it comes from Boggart Moor. I picked it last week when I went to look for you.”

“’Twas wonderful kind of you to go all that way, I’m sure,” said Mrs. Whiteside. “I doubt our Will reckoned we was livin’ there still. Tis years an’ years since we’ve had a word from him. He didn’t know I’d got wed, very like.”

“No, he didn’t,” said the man. “He thought his mother and sister were livin’ still in the little cot up yonder. I had hard work to trace you.”

“How does the little place look, sir?” asked the old woman, with a wistful look.

“Much as usual,” returned he, half absently. “They’n shifted the horse-block, an’ thrown the two shippons into one, an’ tiled the wash-house roof.”

Mrs. Rigby clacked her tongue, and her daughter stared.

“How did ye know about the horse-block?” she inquired, “an’ how did ye guess the shippons was throwed into one? Did our Will tell you about the place?”

He paused a moment, and then laughed.

“Often and often. He said he could find his way there blindfold, an’ I doubt he made me know it as well as himself.”

Mrs. Rigby stretched out her hand and touched the sprig of heather wistfully.

“The moor mun be lookin’ gradely now,” she said; “all one sheet o’ bloom, I reckon. Eh, I mind how I used to leave windows open, summer an’ winter, an let the air come in, soomtimes hot an’ soomtimes cowd, but al’ays wi’ the smell o’ the moor in it. Dear, when I think on’t I can scarce breathe here.”

Page 46

“Come, mother, we’re keepin’ the gentleman standin’ all this time,” said Mary, suddenly recalled to a sense of her hospitable duties. “Sit ye down, sir, and sup a cup o’ tea with us. Kettle’s boilin’, isn’t it, mother? You’re not in a hurry, are you, mester?”

“I reckon I can stop a twothree minutes,” said the man.

Mrs. Whiteside glanced at him sharply, and her mother clapped her hands together.

“Ye’re a Lancashire lad, for sure,” cried she; “ye speak just same as our own folks up on the moor yon.”

He hesitated for a moment.

“Aye, I’ll not deny the talk cooms natural to me,” he said. “I thought I’d forgot it, but my tongue seems to turn to it when I get agate o’ talkin’ wi’ Lancashire folks.”

“I reckon you and our Will had many a crack together about the bonny North,” said Mrs. Rigby, as she spread the cloth, smoothing it carefully with her wrinkled hands. “I’m fain to think my lad minds th’ owd place. Eh, I doubt he’d be nigh broken-hearted if he knowed we had to leave it—I like as if I could be glad to think he knows nought about it, poor lad. He didn’t ever talk o’ coomin’ back, mester, did he?”

“He met think on’t,” said the visitor slowly, “if he could be sure of a welcome. But he run away, you see, again his father’s will, an’ he wur allus reckoned a good-for-nothin’ kind o’ chap—so he seemed to think.”

“Who said that?” cried the old woman, pausing with the teapot poised in mid-air, and reddening all over her withered face.

“Well, ‘twas a kind o’ notion he seemed to have, and o’ course, though it’s ill blamin’ the absent”—here he uttered a queer little laugh—“when all’s said and done he hasn’t acted so very well. Any chap wi’ a heart in’s breast ‘ud ha’ took thought for his own mother, and ‘ud ha’ seen as she was kept comfortable an’ happy in her owd age, and not forced to shift to a strange place.”

“I’m sure,” put in Mrs. Whiteside indignantly, “I can’t think what you’re droppin’ hints o’ that mak’ for, sir. A woman has to follow her husband, an’ when his business takes him to London he takes her too. Doin’ very well, he is, i’ th’ coal business, an’ I’m sure I make my mother as comfortable an’ as happy as I can. Turn London into the moorside is what I cannot do, an’ I’m not to be blamed for that. As you said jest now if any one was to blame ’twas my brother.”

“Well, I’ll not have nobody blamin’ my lad,” cried the old woman. “He’s not to be faulted for what he knowed nought about. If he’d knowed I doubt it ‘ud ha’ been different.”

“That’s true,” interrupted the man; “if he’d knowed it ‘ud ha’ been different. He’d ha’ kept his mother on the moor. If he was to come back now he’d have her awhoam again afore aught were long.”

“Tis wonderful to hear you takin’ up wi’ that homely talk,” said Mrs. Whiteside, with a laugh, as she set a crusty loaf upon the table. “It fair brings me back. I scarce ever talk i’ th’ owd fashion now, wi’out ‘tis a twothree words now an’ then to please mother. Pull up, sir. Will ye pour out the tea, mother? All’s ready now.”

Page 47

“Nay, fetch me a pot of the wimberry jam,” said Mrs. Rigby. “Theer’s jest two of ’em left. My son-in-law,” she explained to the visitor, “he’s oncommon kind about humourin’ my fancies, an’ every year he fetches me a peck or two o’ wimberries—you can get ’em reet enough here i’ th’ market, an’ I make us a few pots o’ jam—’tis the only kind as ever I could fancy. Eh, what baskets-full the childer used to bring me in i’ th’ owd days! Will ye cut yourself a bit o’ bread, sir? Tis a bit hard, I doubt; ‘tis the end o’ the last bakin’. I wur jest agate with the next lot when ye coom in.”

He cut off a piece, and spread it with the wimberry jam, and ate a mouthful or two in silence; he seemed to swallow with difficulty, not because of the hardness of the fare, but because of a certain stirring at his heart. How long was it since he had sat him down at such a board as this, and tasted bread, pure and sweet and wholesome, such as cannot be bought in shops, with the fruit of the moor for condiment?

“I doubt it’s hard,” said Mrs. Whiteside commiseratingly, “and you’re not eatin’ a bit neither, mother. Come, fall to.”

“Eh, I canna eat nought fur thinkin’ o’ yon lad o’ mine. How could he go for to think he’d not be welcome! Ye’ll write and an’ tell him he’ll be welcome, sir, wunnot ye?”

He nodded.

“Eh, I’d be fain to see him, I would that! Ye’ll tell him kind an’ careful, mester, about me havin’ to shift here, an’ dunnot let him think I’m axing him to do mich for me.”

“It’s time for him to do summat for ye, though,” said Will’s friend gruffly.

“Nay, I don’t ax it—I don’t ax for nought. I nobbut want to see his bonny face again.”

“Happen you wouldn’t know it,” said Mrs. Whiteside; “he mun be awful altered now.”

“Know it? Know my own lad! I’d pick him out among a thousand.”

“I’m not so sure o’ that,” persisted her daughter. “Ye’ve seen our Will lately, I s’pose, mester? Can ye tell us what like he is?”

“He’s rather like me,” said the stranger.

“My word, ye don’t say so!” gasped Mrs. Whiteside, while her mother, leaning forward, gazed eagerly into his face.

“He is very like me,” he said brokenly, and then, of a sudden, stretching out his hand he plucked the old woman by the sleeve: “Wakken up, mother,” he cried; “mother, ’tis time to wakken up!”

SENTIMENT AND “FEELIN’”

As a rule our Lancashire peasants are not sentimental; in fact, degenerate south-countrymen frequently take exception to their blunt ways and terrible plain-speaking. But occasionally they display an astonishing impressibility, and at all times know how to appreciate a bit of romance.

When three months after his wife’s death, for instance, Joe Balshaw married her cousin, because, as he explained, “hoo favoured our Mary,” all the neighbours thought such fidelity extremely touching.

Page 48

I remember once when our little church was gaily decorated for the harvest festival some one had the happy thought of placing among the garlands of flowers and masses of fruit and vegetables—thank-offerings from various parishioners—which were heaped on each side of the chancel, a miniature hayrick beautifully made and thatched, and a tiny cornstack to correspond. The sermon was over, and the service proceeding as usual, when suddenly a burst of sobs distracted the congregation, and Robert Barnes, the bluffest and burliest farmer in the whole property, was observed to be wiping his eyes with a red cotton handkerchief. In vain did his scandalised wife nudge and reprove him; he sobbed on, and she grew alarmed. "Wasn't he well?" she asked.

"Aye, well enough," groaned Robert; "but it's so beautiful. I cannot choose but cry!"

"Is't th' music, feyther?" inquired his daughter.

"Nay, nay—it's them there little stacks. Eh, they're—they're gradely. I never see sich a seet i' my life."

If this was not susceptibility, I don't know where to look for it.

No doubt a certain roughness of speech, an almost brutal frankness, is a noticeable northern characteristic. It strikes a stranger painfully, but is accepted and even appreciated by those accustomed to it from childhood.

A sick man expects to be told he looks real bad, and preserves an unmoved tranquillity on hearing how small a likelihood there is of his ever looking up again, and what a deal of trouble he gives. The visitor unused to our ways shrinks from hearing these subjects discussed in the presence of the patient, but he himself listens philosophically, and, it would occasionally appear, with an odd pleasure in his own importance.

"Eh, I sometimes think it 'ud be a mercy if th' Lord 'ud tak' him," says the middle-aged daughter of a paralysed labourer, eyeing him dispassionately. "Doctor says he'll never be no better, an' I'm sure he's a misery to hissel', as well's every one else. Aren't ye, feyther?"

"Ah," grunts feyther. "I'd be fain to go. I would—I'd be fain."

"What wi's restin' so bad o' neets, an' th' gettin' up an' down to him, an' feedin' him, an' shiftin' him—he's that 'eavy I cannot stir him mysel'—I 'ave to wait till th' lads comes back fro' work—eh, it's weary work! I'm very nigh killed wi't."

"Well, but if he gets better, you know," suggests the visitor, "you'll be glad to have nursed him so well."

“Eh, he’ll noan get better now; doctor says he hasn’t a chance.”

The patient, who has been listening with close attention, and not a little satisfaction, to his daughter’s report, now rolls his eyes towards his interlocutor.

“Nay, nay, I’ll noan get better,” he observes somewhat resentfully. “Tisn’t to be expected. I’m gettin’ on for seventy-eight, an’ this here’s my second stroke.”

“Ah, his constitution’s worn out,” adds the woman; “that was what doctor said. ‘’Tisn’t to be expected as he could recover,’ says he; ‘his constitution’s worn out.’”

Page 49

The rugged old face on the pillow is indeed lined and wrinkled; the one big hand lying outside the coverlet is gnarled and knotted, like the branch of an ancient tree; the form outlined by the bedclothes is of massive proportions. A fine wreck of a man this useless cumberer of the earth.

"I shouldn't be worth my mate if I did get better," he says, reflectively, and without the faintest trace of bitterness. "Nought but lumber—in every one's road. Nay, I'd a deal sooner shift a'together. I've allus worked 'ard—it 'ud not coom nat'ral to be idle. I'm ready to go, if it's the A'mighty's will."

"Eh, He'll be like to tak' ye soon, feyther. He will—He'll tak' ye afore aught's long," says the daughter. "Raly," she adds, as she pilots her visitor downstairs after this consolatory remark, "it's a'most to be 'oped as He will."

Yet when He does, and poor feyther is carried away to his long home by his sons and cronies, there is genuine distress in the little household. When the daughter has got her "blacks," and drawn the club money, and the excitement of the funeral is over, she has leisure to miss the quiet presence, the familiar voice. She starts up at night many a time fancying she hears it, and weeps as she falls back on her pillow again. She polishes "feyther's cheer" reverently, and treasures his pipe, and sobs as she cuts up his clothes for suits for her little lads, and takes in his great-coat to make it fit her gaffer.

"It was a blessed release," she says, wiping her eyes, "an' we had a nice funeral, but it's lonely wi'out him."

"A nice funeral" is the most important of all desiderata, and many are the privations which the living cheerfully endure, that the dead may be interred with due respect and decorum. The most improvident of these people look forward to and prepare for the contingency, inevitable indeed, and yet deemed by other folk unutterably remote.

"Ah! it's bin a struggle to keep 'em," said a poor woman once, speaking of her little flock of ten healthy hearty children. "I've noan bin able to put by much, but theer's wan thing, I've got 'em all in a buryin'-club."

Now and then when the death has been preceded by a long illness, and the family exchequer has sunk low, the neighbours come to the rescue, and with characteristic straightforwardness and goodnature avert impending disgrace. One such case occurred here recently. The father of the family had been hovering for months between life and death, and when he "drew away" at last, wife and children were left absolutely without means. Nevertheless the funeral was beautiful, it was universally agreed. The wheelwright made a coffin free of charge, one of the farmers sent the necessary

refection; each household in the village did something, one supplying a whole dress, one merely a hatband. When the time came for the procession to start, every child had its decent blacks, and though the question of how to live to-morrow was still unanswered,

Page 50

the poor widow, wiping her eyes behind her flowing veil, felt soothed and in a manner elated. No one could say but what her master had a gradely buryin'. She could not repress a certain honest pride, and, oddly enough, though the neighbours were quite aware that without their assistance this desirable appearance would never have been presented, they were none the less impressed, and felt that Mrs. —— deserved great credit.

If sentiment be not common among us, there is no dearth of "feelin'," though it is sometimes exhibited in unusual and rather startling fashion. The doctor, for instance, was somewhat taken aback one day by the reply of a poor man with whom he had been condoling over the death of an only son.

"I tell ye," sobbed the inconsolable parent, "if it hadn't bin for what neighbours 'ud say, I'd ha' had th' little divil stuffed."

There is no rule without its exception, and, though our people are for the most part affectionate and tender-hearted in their own rugged way, I am bound to own there are some Stoics in our midst.

One old woman, in particular, whom I have known to be afflicted in a variety of ways, has never betrayed the least sign of emotion; whether she is incapable of it, or whether she heroically conceals it, I have been unable to discover.

She lost two sons in rapid succession after a few hours' illness.

"What did they die of?" asked some one sympathetically.

As a rule such a remark would have led to a flood of tearful and affectionate reminiscences, but this old lady was laconic.

"One deed of a Tuesday, and one of a Thursday," she replied.

The third son a short time afterwards, returning home from market slightly hazy in his ideas, was run over by an express train as he endeavoured to cross the line.

Next morning the body was found, horribly mutilated, and a porter was despatched to break the tidings to the bereaved mother. The man, overcome with the horror of the event, and full of compassion for the white-haired woman—who stood stolidly awaiting his message, evidently unsuspicious of its tenor—could scarcely find words with which to tell the news.

“There’s bin an accident,” he faltered, “we’n foun’ a mon o’ th’ rails—dead—cut t’ pieces by a train.”

Old Lizzie stared at him in silence; then a light seemed to break in on her.

“Ah,” she said. “Happen it’s our Bill!”

And with that she turned on her heel and went upstairs to select a winding-sheet for him.

Some of our folks like to talk about their troubles. Over and over again they tell you, almost in the same words, exactly how it all came about. A poor woman pleats her apron and gazes at you with pathetic eyes, which she stops to wipe occasionally. The story has grown familiar to both relater and listener, and sometimes you are regaled not only with the tale itself, but with the repetition of your own comments thereon.

Page 51

“I mind ye said so and so,” she says, “an’ it’s often seemed to comfort me.”

Clearly there is nothing for it but immediately to say it again, and you are rewarded by seeing the face brighten perceptibly, much as a child’s brightens as it hears a well—-known point in a familiar tale. These simple people are very like children.

But sometimes the pain is too great to be dilated on, and then a chance phrase or word, infinitely pathetic, betrays the depth of sorrow; sometimes there is silence more pathetic still.

Looking into a cottage, one day, where the week before a little child had been carried to the churchyard, I found the mother hard at work, ironing.

“I will not come in,” I said. “You are busy.”

“Nay, ma’am, coom your ways in an’ sit ye down. There’s no hurry. I’m nobbut puttin’ away our Teddy’s little clothes.”

Not another word did she say in allusion to her sorrow, and no tears fell on the little worn garments. Poor little garments, so pathetically bringing to mind the wee lost personality! Darned socks which had covered active little feet; tiny short “knickers” patched at the knees; shabby coat—moulded, it would seem, into the very shape of the chubby figure—the mother ironed and polished them, and laid them in a tidy heap. As she worked she tried to talk of other things, but her face told its own tale, and I went away with an aching heart.

The men carry their troubles afield; manual labour dulls, if it does not altogether exorcise, them; some have other less creditable means of seeking oblivion. But the poor women, shut in in their little houses, with their anxieties and sorrow staring them in the face—God help them! So narrow are their lives, so few their experiences, that their thoughts must run perpetually in the same groove; everything which surrounds them, their “sticks” of furniture, their little household gods, are reminders of lost joys and present grief.

“Eh, I can scarce ’bide to see my mother’s cheer,” said a poor crippled girl to me. “Her ‘an me was allus sat one aside o’ t’other, an’ now hoo’s gone. Eh, I know I shouldn’t complain, an’ hoo’s in a better place; but hoo’s gone, ye see, an’ I’m awful lonely. I keep settin’ here all day, an’ thinkin’ of her, and fancyin’ I hear her moanin’. Eh dear, yes, it’s a shame for me, an’ I know I ought to be glad hoo isn’t sufferin’ no longer. Eh, at th’ last, ye know, Mrs. Francis, it were summat awful what hoo suffered. Oh yes, I *know*. But, ye see, when I’m sat here all day by mysel’, an’ when I see th’ empty cheer,

an’ o’ neets when I dream hoo’s layin’ aside o’ me, an’ then wakken up an’ stretch out my arms—eh, dear o’ me!”

Page 52

Some of the neighbours thought this poor girl's grief excessive. Nancy indeed, who buried her own exceedingly ancient parent comparatively recently, bade her remember that she was not the only one who knew what it is to lose a mother. It is not, as a rule, considered quite decent to speak in other than cheerful tones of a bereavement which has occurred more than a year ago,—unless, of course, you are taking a general survey of your troubles, in which case it is allowable to include it as a proof the more that you have "supped sorrow." But Mary set etiquette at defiance. Out of the fulness of her heart her mouth spake. To all corners she must needs tell her loneliness and her sorrow.

One day, however, she received me with a bright face and a certain air of mysterious joy.

"Mrs. Francis, I scarce know how to tell ye, but it seems as if th' Lord Hissel sent me a bit o' comfort. Ye see, nobry had no feelin' for me here in village; they all towd me to resign mysel', an' that, an' it were wicked o' me to be ill-satisfied wi' th' A'mighty's will. But, ye see, I wouldn't seem able to give ower frettin'—I raly couldn't. Well but, last neet—I haven't towd nobry, because I didn't want to have 'em laughin', ye know, and, o' course, I dunnot set mich store by dreams; but still, it seemed to comfort me."

She looked at me appealingly, and, being assured of my sympathy, continued—

"Well, last neet I were very lonesome when I geet into bed, an' I began o' thinkin' o' my mother, an' wonderin' where hoo was. An' 'Eh, mother,' I says out loud, 'wheer *are* ye, an' are ye thinkin' o' me, an' are ye in heaven?' An' I geet agate o' cryin' an' axin' mysel wheer was heaven, an' was hoo raly theer. Well, at last I dozed off, an' I had a dream. I thought I saw my mother, in her cap an' apron, an' wi' her sleeves rolled up—just same as hoo used to look when hoo was busy about th' house. An' I thought hoo coom along, lookin' fro' one side to t'other, as if hoo were seechin' soombry; an' I said, 'Here I am, mother.' An' hoo stood a moment, an' smiled. An' then"—sinking her voice and speaking hurriedly and excitedly—"I looked up at sky (we was out o' doors i' my dream), an' then I saw it all full o' light, and rays coomin', goldy rays, same as—same as ye see sometimes on a Christmas card; an' they coom down, an' gathered all about my mother, an' lapped her round. An' then I see her goin' up, up—reet into th' leet; an' then I wakkened. Eh, Mrs. Francis, dunnot ye think—dunnot ye raly think—as th' Lord sent me that dream to comfort me? Eh, I feel sure hoo's in heaven now, an' hoo's thinkin' o' me. I cannot tell ye how 'appy it mak's me."

"Eye hath not seen," says St. Paul, "ear hath not heard." Very different was poor Mary's vision. Think of it: the little old woman in her working dress, with the sleeves rolled up

on her skinny arms—the “goldy rays, same as ye see on Christmas cards.” But, nevertheless, even in her attic room she has had a glimpse of Paradise.

Page 53

THE ROMANCE OF BROTHER JOHN

Mrs. Cross was gardening; it was an occupation in which she took great pleasure, not merely on account of her affection for the little plot of ground which she miraculously contrived to render bright at all seasons, but because it afforded her ample opportunities for supervising her neighbours' affairs. While she watered her stocks, or tied up her carnations, she was enabled to throw an occasional keen glance in at the open doorway on either side of her; she knew precisely what Mrs. Barnes had for dinner, and how large was Mrs. Frizzel's wash. Squatting back on her heels in the intervals of her labours, and negligently scratching her elbows or retwisting her untidy coil of hair, she would even hearken discreetly to such scraps of conversation as enlivened meal or toil. She knew all about Mrs. Frizzel's last letter from her daughter Susan, and could give the precise details of young Barnes' encounter with the stalwart yeoman who had supplanted him in the affections of his sweetheart. She would also hail from over the hedge the driver of any passing tradesman's cart, and was thus enabled to possess herself of the latest news from "town" a mile away. By craning her neck a little to the right she could catch a glimpse of the walls and roofs of this centre of activity, and by extending it in the other direction she had a peep of the high road, where sometimes as many as a dozen vehicles passed of an afternoon.

Her eyes were strained towards this favourite point of view on one particularly sultry August evening; her own hedge, even, was sprinkled with dust, while the double row which guarded the glaring stretch yonder was absolutely white.

Mrs. Cross's little garden was, however, a pleasant spot, even on this glowing, breathless afternoon. She had been watering her borders, and a delicious smell of damp earth mingled with the fragrance of the old-fashioned flowers beneath the mellow old walls of her cottage. A fine array of sweet-williams and larkspurs and hollyhocks stood in a row before them; jessamine and honeysuckle clung to the old brick and festooned themselves over the rickety porch. Between the green tendrils one got a glimpse of the picture within—the dresser with its wealth of shining crockery, the log-fire leaping merrily on the hearth, a little brown teapot winking in the glow, the table spread with a clean white cloth and set out for two. It made a pretty picture, yet, as has been said, Mrs. Cross perpetually turned her eyes towards the patch of high road which climbed painfully up between the dusty hedges. At last she was constrained to rise from her knees and take her stand by her little gate, where, with knitted brows and pursed-up lips, she remained on the watch, until at last her patience was rewarded by the sight of a woman's figure, clad in deep black, suddenly rounding the corner. She immediately smoothed her brow and composed her features to a becoming melancholy. Mrs. Cross was ever as ready to sympathise with her neighbours'

misfortunes to their faces as she was to declare behind their backs that they were well-deserved. To-day, however, her countenance wore an expression of tempered woe, and her voice was only moderately dolorous, for the trouble which she was about to lament was a vicarious one.

Page 54

“I’ve a-been on the look-out for you ever since tea-time, Mrs. Domeny, my dear. Thinks I constant, ‘I wonder how Mrs. Domeny be a-gettin’ on, and I wonder how the poor widow-man be a-bearin’ up.’ Come in an’ sit ye down, do; ye must be mortal hot and tired, walkin’ so far in your deep.”

Mrs. Domeny, a chubby, buxom little woman, who found it hard to eliminate from her rosy face all trace of a cheerfulness which, however habitual, would have been unbecoming on the occasion of a sister-in-law’s funeral, checked the smile with which she had been about to respond to her friend’s invitation, and heaved a sigh instead.

“Well, jist for a minute, Mrs. Cross. There, to tell ’ee the truth, I’m fair wore out, what with a body’s feelin’s and a-walkin’ so far i’ the sun, and the dust a-gettin’ down one’s throat wi’ every sob, so to speak. ‘Ees, my dear, I’m terrible dry, an’ I would like a cup o’ tea, jist about! They hadn’t nothin’ but ham,” she added, “yonder at Brother John’s. ’Twas a bit salt. I always told poor Sarah as I did think she salted her hams too much; but, there! she be gone, poor soul, and it wouldn’t become me to speak ill of her ham now.”

“Ah, my dear,” groaned Mrs. Cross, pouring out a cupful of the inky-looking fluid that had been stewing on the hob for the last hour and a-half. “Ah, my dear, all flesh is grass, as we do know. She was a dried-up-looking poor body, your sister-in-law; I al’ays did say so, ye mid remember. An’ how did ye leave poor John?”

“He was in floods,” responded Mrs. Domeny, her eyes filling with sympathetic tears. “In floods, I do assure ’ee. I did feel for en, I can tell ’ee. ’Twas through me as they did first get to know each other. ’Twas a very romantic marriage theirs was, Mrs. Cross; a real romance me an’ Robert al’ays did call it.”

“Ah!” commented her neighbour, half sympathetically, half interrogatively. She kicked the logs together with her flat shoe, drew a chair close to her visitor’s, filled her own cup, and sat down with an expectant expression.

“’Ees, my dear, quite a romance, as you’ll say when I’ve a-told ’ee. When my sister Susannah was laid up wi’ her ninth, which was a twin, my dear, an’ her husband out of work, and the other eight scarce able to do a hand’s turn for themselves, she wrote to me an’ axed me to come an’ look after things a bit till she got about again. Well, I couldn’t say no, ye can understand, so Robert got Janie Domeny, brother Tom’s oldest girl, to come of a marnin’ to see to en, an’ I did go to poor Susannah. Well, ’twas at Susannah’s, if you’ll believe me,” said Mrs. Domeny, with a solemnity which would have befitted the announcement of an event of national importance, “as I first came across poor Sarah.”

“Well!” ejaculated Mrs. Cross, pausing with a large bite of bread and butter distending her cheek, and uplifting her hands. “Well, to think of it!”

Page 55

"'Ees, as I often did say," resumed Mrs. Domeny, "it did seem from the very beginnin' as though 'twas meant to be. She was a-livin' next door to Susannah—hadn't long come, d'ye see, and didn't know any of the neighbours to speak on. But she an' me took to each other fro' the beginnin'. She were a staid women then, an' not over an' above well-lookin'—nay, I can't say as she was. But she was dressed very fayshionable an' nice, an' she was very pleasant to speak to, an' as for me, you know I'm of a very affectionate disposition; 'tis my natur' to cling, d'ye see. 'Ees, as I often do say to my 'usband, I am as clingin' as—as a worm. So, as I tell ye, we did take to each other fro' the first. Well, when Susannah was a-gettin' about, after the ninth day, ye know, I went home along, and Sarah did say to I, 'I'll come and see you, Mrs. Domeny, if I mid make so bold,' she says in her lady-like way.

"'To be sure, Mrs. Maidment,' says I—"

"Oh, she was a widow then?" interrupted Mrs. Cross. "There now, what notions folks do get in their heads. I al'ays made sure and certain as your sister-in-law was a single woman afore she was your sister-in-law."

"No, my dear," said Mrs. Domeny impressively. "She was a widow, Mrs. Cross, that's what she was. She'd a-buried her first poor husband—an' a very fine man he was by all accounts—nigh upon six year afore ever she took up wi' brother John."

"Indeed!" ejaculated Mrs. Cross, in a tone which signified that the fact redounded greatly to the credit of the late Mrs. John Domeny.

"'Ees, indeed," repeated the narrator triumphantly. "But where was I? 'To be sure, Mrs. Maidment,' says I, 'I'll be main glad to see you whenever ye can anyway make it convenient to come.' Well, one Sunday she did drap in just as my husband and myself was a-sitting down to our tea. So of course I did make her so welcome as I could, and did get out the best cups an' heat up a bit o' toast, and we was all as comfortable an' friendly as could be. But I noticed, Mrs. Cross, as how Mrs. Maidment's eyes was a-fixed constant on my husband; there, I couldn't choose but notice it, it seemed as if she had to look at him, d'ye understand. I thought at first maybe he had a spot on his face or some sich thing, but, no, it weren't that; and she did speak to en so respectful, and hearken so interested-like when he did say a word, which warn't often, ye mid be sure, for Robert bain't no talker."

"Dear to be sure, how strange," put in Mrs. Cross, again pausing in the act of mastication, and preparing to listen to further details with heightened interest.

“Strange!” echoed the other. “Wait till ye hear the rest, then ye’ll think it strange. By-and-by Robert pushed away his cup, ’I think I’ll step out for a bit of a pipe, Mary,’ says he to I. ’I wish ye good day, ma’am,’ says he, noddin’ his head at Mrs. Maidment. The door had no sooner shut behind en,” she continued, leaning forward and speaking slowly and with great unction, “than Sarah she looks me full in the face, and says she, ‘Mrs. Domeny,’ she says, ’I do admire your husband. I think,’ she says, ‘he be a beautiful man.’”

Page 56

“T’ch, t’ch, t’ch,” commented the listener, clicking her tongue, for her astonishment at the sudden development was too great to find vent in mere words.

“‘I do admire your husband,’” repeated Mrs. Domeny impressively. “That was what she said, ‘he be a beautiful man.’ ‘Well,’ said I, ’I’ll not say nay to that, Mrs. Maidment. Him an’ me have been married now goin’ on fifteen year, an’ all I can say about en is as if I were free to choose again, I’d choose the same.’

“‘Ah,’ says she, giving a kind of sigh, this way, ye know” (here Mrs. Domeny sighed noisily). “’Ah, I knowed he was good by the very looks of him. I am sure,’ says she, ’he must come of a very respectable family.’ So of course I did tell her as the Domenys was well known and respected in all the country round, and was real good old Darset stock. ‘There never was a Domeny yet,’ says I, ’as wasn’t a credit to the country.’ ‘Ah,’ says she, sighin’ again, ‘and I d’ ’low, ma’am, they do make very good husbands.’

“‘Ye mid be sure they do,’ says I; ’I can speak up for my own man, and I think Mrs. Tom and Mrs. Ned can do the same for theirs.’

“‘Be they all married?’ axes she, very quick.

“Well, I looked at her—it did seem a particular kind of question, so to speak, an’ she took a fit of coughin’” (here Mrs. Domeny simulated a genteel and hesitating attack of the infirmity in question), “an’ at last, says she, very earnest, ’Bain’t there one of them at all as hasn’t got a wife?’

“‘There is Brother John,’ says I; ’his missus died two years ago, come Michaelmas. He’s a very quiet man,’ says I, ‘very quiet.’

“‘Has he got a nice place?’ says she.

“‘Dear, to be sure,’ says I, ’Brother John be very comfortable. He’s got a good-sized house wi’ a big garden, an’ he do bring up a sight o’ pigs an’ chicken.’

“’That ‘ud do me very well,’ says Sarah. ’I’ve got a bank-book what is worth lookin’ at!’ And then she stood up. ’I should like to meet your brother John,’ she did say; ’perhaps ye’ll think it over, Mrs. Domeny?’

“’Oh, ‘e—es, I’ll do that,’ said I. She did bid me good-bye then, an’ so soon as ever she was gone I called Robert in and telled en the whole tale.”

“I d’ ‘low he were pleased,” put in Mrs. Cross, “about her admirin’ of en, ye know.”

“Well, he be a very modest man, Robert be; he didn’t take much notice. ‘Fancy that!’ says he, when I did tell en.”

“Fancy that!” had also been Mrs. Cross’s inward comment, on first hearing of the effect produced by Mr. Robert Domeny on the impressionable Mrs. Maidment; for if truth be told he was anything but an Adonis. But she wisely kept her surprise to herself, and now once more clicked her tongue in token of appreciation.

“‘Now, Robert,’ says I,” continued Mrs. Domeny, resuming her narrative tone, “‘how would it be if we was to write to Brother John?’

Page 57

"'What 'ud ye tell en?' says he; 'he'd mayhap not quite fancy the notion o' takin' up wi' a woman he did never set eyes on.' 'You just leave it to I,' says I; 'I bain't a-goin' to say nothin' at all about wedlock. I'll jist ax en to come to tea next Sunday, and I'll tell en as a very nice body what we've lately got acquainted wi' be a' a-comin' to tea, too; an' I'll jist set down, careless-like, as she have got a bank-book what is worth seein'. Jist no more nor that.'

"'Ah, that 'ud maybe do very well,' says Domeny, and we did put our heads together, and between us the letter was wrote. Brother John sent us word by the carrier as he was a-comin', and I did send off Janie that same day to let Mrs. Maidment know, and Janie said her face did fair flush up wi' j'y. She kissed the maid so affectionate, an' says she, 'You be another Domeny, my dear. You must favour your Pa, I'm sure, for you be a very vitty maid.'

"Well, Sunday did come, an' I did have a beautiful tea ready; muffins and a bit o' cold ham—not so salt as poor Sarah's—and a pot o' blackberry-an'-apple jam. Brother John were the first to come. He fair give me a start, for I didn't expect en so early; he did put his head in at the door, an' beckon this way, so secret-like." (Here there was the usual accompaniment of appropriate gesture.)

"'Mary,' he whispered, 'Mary, be she come?'

"'Not yet, John,' says I.

"He did squeeze hisself very cautious round the door, lookin' to right an' left, this way" (further pantomime). "'Mary,' says he, right in my ear, 'have 'ee seen the bank-book?'

"'Nay, John,' says I; 'nay; 'twasn't to be expected, but I did hear, John,' says I, 'as it were worth lookin' at.'

"He did sit him down then, an' did begin to whistle to hisself, an' to rub his knees up and down. He had his best clothes on, an' the big tall hat as he'd a-bought for the first poor Mrs. John's funeral. He took it off after a while, and did keep turnin' it round and round in his hands. 'Where's Robert?' says he, all to once.

"'Cleaning up a bit i' the bedroom,' says I.

"'I think I'll go to en,' says he.

"'Not you,' says I, determined-like. 'Sit you there, that's a good man. She'll be here in a minute.'

“But Robert come down first, an’ we was gettin’ a bit anxious when Mrs. Maidment did tap at the door. She was lookin’ real well an’ genteel, in a black silk dress, and wi’ one o’ them little black bags as they did use to call ridicules in her hand. Poor Brother John could scarce take his eyes off it, for he made sure, d’ye see, as she’d a-brought the bank-book inside. Well, the tea did pass off so pleasant as could be, and so soon as it was over I did make a sign to Robert.

“’I’ve summat to show ‘ee’ says I, an’ so soon as I did get en outside, I did sauce en for bein’ so stupid.

“‘How be they ever to get things settled wi’ us two a-lookin’ at ’em?’ says I.

Page 58

“We did stay outside a-kickin’ of our heels for above half-an-hour, an’ then we did come in—an’ there they was a-settin’ one on each side of the fire so comfortable as you could wish. Sarah looked up when I opened the door, an’ she says straight out, ’We’ve pretty nigh settled things, but I shan’t give my promise until I’ve had a look round Mr. Domeny’s place. I’d like to make sure as it ‘ud suit me,’ says she.

“‘To be sure,’ says John, who was lookin’ a bit puzzled, but very pleasant. ’To be sure. Next Thursday—now what ‘ud ye say to makin’ up a party next Thursday, all on ye, an’ drivin’ over in the arternoon? I’d have kettle bilin’,’ says he, ‘an’ all set out so well as a poor lone man can do it, an’ maybe one o’ you ladies ‘ud make tea?’”

Mrs. Cross sucked in her breath in token of intensifying enjoyment, and turned her head yet a little more on one side.

“And so?” prompted she, as Mrs. Domeny paused.

“And so, Thursday come, an’ we did get a trap off Mr. Sharpe, an’ we set off. Brother John was a-standin’ on the doorstep on the look-out for us, and he did lead Mrs. Maidment in and sit her down at the head of the table.

“‘Let’s hope,’ says he, ‘it may be your nat’ral place afore long.’

“She jist smiled back wi’out speakin’; an’ all the time we was havin’ our tea, I could see her eyes a-rovin’ round the room, here an’ there an’ everywhere. The teapot had a chip out of the spout, an’ she did jist pass her finger along it.

“‘T’ud be easy to get a new un,’ says Brother John, for he knowed what she meant. An’ then she looks down at the table-cloth—’It wants darnin’,’ says she. “Tis easy seen as a woman’s hands be needed here.’

“‘They are, truly,’ says he, lookin’ at her so wistful-like.

“‘Well, we’ll see,’ says she, noddin’ at him very kind.”

“An’ did she really look over everything Mrs. Domeny, my dear?” interrupted Mrs. Cross eagerly. “She must ha’ been a wonderful sensible woman!”

“You’d ha’ said so if you could ha’ seen her. There! there wasn’t so much as a pan as she didn’t look into. Behind the doors, and under the bed; she turned over the very blankets, I do assure ‘ee. Upstairs an’ down she went, an’ roun’ the yard, an’ down the garden, an’ into the shed. Poor Brother John kep’ a-trottin’ after her, an’ at last she come back to the kitchen again.”

[Illustration: THE ROMANCE OF BROTHER JOHN “Poor Brother John kep a trottin’ after her”]

“‘Well, Mr. Domeny,’ says she, ’if ye’ll go to the expense of a few buckets of whitewash, an’ give a lick o’ paint to the door here, I think it ‘ull do very well.’ So they settled the day an’ everythin’ there an’ then.”

“Well, to be sure!” ejaculated Mrs. Cross. “It do sound jist like a book; an’ talkin’ o’ that, I suppose she did show en the bank-book?”

“She never gave en so much as a sight o’ it, Mrs. Cross, if you believe me. Kep’ it locked up, she did, and never let him throw his eye over it till the day of her death. I went up to see en so soon as I heard as all were over, an’ found en cryin’ fit to break his heart.

Page 59

"'Come, Brother John,' says I, ''tis a sad loss, as we do all know, but you must bear up.'

"''Tisn't only the loss o' poor Sarah,' says he, ''tis—'tis,' an' his 'eart were that full he couldn't say no more, but jist held out the bank-book to me. My dear, there weren't above three pound in it!"

"Dear heart alive!" ejaculated Mrs. Cross, clapping her hands together, "I never heerd o' such a thing i' my life. Why," she added energetically, "it 'ud scarce pay for the whitewash! An' yet he gave her a nice funeral, ye tell me?"

"'E—es, my dear. Ye see, 'tis this way. Brother John be a very just man, an' so soon as he did get over his first disappointment, he did say to I, m'urnful like, but very patient —

"'Mary,' he says, 'it weren't what I did look for, an' it weren't what I were led to expect, but takin' one thing wi' another,' says he, 'I don't regret it. Poor Sarah was a wonderful hand at managin' pigs,' says he, 'an I never see'd her equal for bringin' up chicken. No!' he says, 'I don't regret it.'"

"Well, he couldn't say no fairer than that," commented Mrs. Cross admiringly. "Yes," she added, drawing a long breath, "'tis just what you do say, Mrs. Domeny—it be a reg'lar romance."

GILES IN LUCK

Giles Maine sat in the middle of the ward, his hands crossed on his new umbrella, while his fellow-inmates gathered together in knots and stared at him, some curiously, some enviously, some a little regretfully, though all were ready to wish him God-speed when the moment of parting came.

By a strange turn of Fortune's wheel, Giles Maine, the oldest inmate of Branston Union, who had in truth for twenty years known no other home, now found himself, at the age of seventy-eight, a comparatively wealthy man. A distant relative, a relative so distant indeed that Giles had been unaware of his existence, had recently died intestate, and Giles proved to be his next-of-kin.

It had taken him some time to grasp the situation, and to understand that he was now free to live where he would, in a position of comfort, not to say affluence. Everybody had taken him in hand, however; the master had ordered a brand-new suit of clothes for him; the matron had engaged rooms in the village, and had put him under the charge of his future landlady, who was a motherly sort of woman, and could be trusted to look

after him; the clergyman had given him much kind advice, and many friendly warnings; and at length the old man found himself ready to depart. He was now, in fact, only waiting to say good-bye to the matron before turning his back for ever on the bare room where he had spent so many monotonous hours.

The prospect ought surely to have elated him, yet his face wore a very blank expression as he sat awaiting the expected summons; his new clothes felt strange and stiff, the high collar of his fine white shirt hurt his neck, his shiny new boots pinched his feet, the knobby handle of his massive umbrella was not so comfortable to grasp as the familiar crook of his battered old stick.

Page 60

“First turn at the end of the lane, then third house on the right, and ax for Mrs. Tapper,” he repeated to himself from time to time. “First turn, and third house—’e-es I can mind it right enough—third house and ax for Mrs. Tapper.”

“’Tis a pity,” said some one for the fortieth time that day, “’tis a pity, Mr. Maine, as you ain’t got no folks o’ your own. Ah, ’tis a pity, sure. ‘Twould ha’ been more cheerful like if you’d ha’ been going home.”

“’E-es,” agreed Giles, also for the fortieth time, “‘e-es I d’ ’low it would, but I ain’t had no folk—there! I can scarce mind when I had any. I never so much as heerd the name o’ this ’ere chap what has left me his fortun’. Never heerd his name—never so much as knowed he were born.”

“Dear to be sure! It seems strange, don’t it? And him to leave ye his money and all. I wonder where ye’ll go, Mr. Maine. P’r’aps ye’ll go to Lunnon?”

“To Lunnon?” gasped Giles, his jaw dropping. “What should I go to Lunnon for?”

“Oh, I don’t know—ye can go where ye like, d’ye see. I reckon I’d go to Lunnon if I was in your shoes.”

“Would ’ee?” queried Giles, interested, but still aghast. “Nay now, ye see, I never was one for travellin’—I’ve never been so far as Darchester, not once all the time I were”—-he jerked his thumb over his shoulder—“outside.”

“Well, your lodgin’ be only took on trial, so to speak, to see how ye do like it,” said another man. “Ye can change it so soon as ye please, and move here and there just as ye fancy. A fine life—I’d give summat to be you.”

“I never was one for movin’ much,” said the old man, uneasily. “Nay, movin’ weren’t in my line. I did use to work for the same master pretty near all my life, till I were took bad wi’ the rheumatiz. ’E-es, he were a good master to I. I could be fain to see en again, but he’s dead, they tell me, and the family ha’ shifted. There bain’t nobody out yonder as I ever had acquaintance wi’ in the wold times. Nay, all ’ull be new, and a bit strange.”

“A pleasant change, I should think,” a gruff man was beginning—an unattractive person this, with a week-old beard and a frowning brow, when an old fellow, who had been sitting disconsolately in the corner of the room, suddenly struck in:

“I d’ ’low, Giles, ye’ll be like to miss we when ye’re all among strangers, I d’ ’low ye will. ’E-es, ye’ll be like to miss we just so much as us’ll miss you.”

Giles rolled his eyes towards him with a startled expression, but said nothing for a moment or two; then he remarked, in a somewhat dolorous tone:

“I d’ ’low I’ll miss you, Jim; you and me has sat side by side this fifteen year—’tis fifteen year, bain’t it, since ye come?”

“Ah! fifteen year,” agreed Jim. “I’ll be the woldest inmate in th’ Union when you do leave.”

“’E-es, Jim, thee ‘ull be gettin’ all the buns and all the baccy now,” cried one of the others, laughing. “He’ll have to stand up and say ‘Good marnin’’ to the gentry when they comes round, and tell his age, and how long he’ve a-been here, and all. I d’ ’low he’ll do it just so well as you.”

Page 61

Giles gazed at the speaker frowningly; he did not seem to like the idea, but if he meditated a retort he was prevented from uttering it by the advent of a messenger from the matron, which was the signal for his own departure. He stood up, and went shuffling from one to the other of his former cronies, shaking hands with them all, but without speaking. He gripped Jim's hand the hardest, and pumped it up and down for so long a time that the messenger grew impatient; and then he went stumbling along the passage, and down the stone stairs to the door, where the master and matron both stood awaiting him. He received the money which had been placed in the master's hands for his actual needs, and scraped his rickety old foot, and pulled his forelock, after a forgotten fashion, as he listened to their kindly words. Then they, too, shook hands with him, and accompanied him to the gate, looking after the feeble old figure until it disappeared.

"I do hope Mrs. Tapper will look after him," said the matron. "He's no more fit to take care of himself than a baby."

Giles tottered on down the hill, his eyes roaming vaguely over the landscape, which was looking its fairest on this mellow June afternoon. Yonder rolled the downs, all golden green in the light of the sinking sun, nearer at hand lay the meadows, very sheets of buttercup gold; every leaf and twig of the hedgerow was a-glitter, too—all Nature, it seemed, had arrayed itself in splendour to correspond with the old pauper's sudden access of wealth. Not that any such fancy crossed his dazed mind. As he shuffled along he thought of how he had walked this way last year, with Jim at his side, on one of their rare outings. They had, in fact, been on their way to the parsonage, and Jim, who had been a farm labourer in a previous state of existence, had called his attention to the "for'ardness" of the potatoes which were growing where the hay grew now.

Giles paused mechanically, and gazed at the billowing grass; and then he went on a little, and stopped again at the next gap in the hedge, where Jim had pointed out the splendid view of Branston.

"I could wish," he muttered, as he turned away, "we was goin' to tea at the rectory now."

Farther down the road was a bench where it was the old paupers' custom to sit awhile on their return journey, before beginning the steep ascent of the hill; Giles sat stiffly down now, and once more stared about him. By-and-by the town clock struck seven and he instinctively rose to his feet, and began hurriedly to retrace his steps, but pulled himself up of a sudden.

"Seven o'clock! It 'ud seem more nat'ral to be goin' up-along. I was nigh forgettin' I be comed away! Mrs. Tapper 'ull think I bain't a-comin' if I don't hurry up."

This time he made up his mind to continue his journey without further interruptions, and very soon arrived at the end of the lane, and even at the third house on the right, where he was duly received by Mrs. Tapper. She was most civil, not to say respectful; called him “Sir” and “Mr. Maine,” hustled her children out of his way, installed him in the elbow-chair in the corner, and waited upon him at tea-time as though he had been a gentleman born.

Page 62

At first Giles rather enjoyed it, but presently the feeling of loneliness and strangeness, against which he had been struggling all day, returned with redoubled force; and when he was finally ushered into his clean tidy little room, and Mrs. Tapper, after calling his attention to the various preparations she had made for his comfort, left him to himself, he sat down on the side of the bed and groaned aloud.

[Illustration: GILES IN LUCK "Waited upon him at tea time as though he had been a gentleman born"]

They would just be about "turnin' in" at the Union, and Jim, laying himself down on the pallet next to his, would be making the time-honoured joke about the absence of spring-mattresses and feather-beds, with which he was usually wont to regale the other inmates at this hour. As Giles turned down the spotless lavender-scented sheets he thought longingly of the workhouse twill.

A week later Giles was permitted to visit his former friends, laden with such a store of buns and baccy as would have ensured his welcome, even had not most of his cronies been genuinely glad to see him.

"Dear heart alive!" cried Jim, receiving his modicum of twist with a delighted chuckle, "these be new times, these be. Who'd ever ha' thought o' Giles Maine walkin' in like a lard wi' presents for us all?"

But Giles was looking round with a foolish wavering sort of smile.

"It'd seem real homely in here," he remarked. "Ah! it do fur sure. There be the papers as us'al, I see—I do miss papers awful out yonder."

"Why, to be sure," cried one of the younger men, "you can buy 'em for yourself now. I'm blowed if I wouldn't have all the papers as comes out if I was you."

"I did go to a shop onest," said the old man, "and I did ax, but they didn't seem able to gi' me the right 'uns. 'I want pictur's o' the snow and folks huntin' and that,' says I. 'Not this time o' year,' says the young lady; 'them's in Christmas numbers.' 'That's what I've bin used to,' says I. 'Well, we can order 'em for you,' says she, but I couldn't mind the names. I knowed one did begin 'G—r—a—p—' so I did ax if they had one about 'Grape—summat,' and they did give I the *Gardener*—ah, that was what they did call it; but there weren't no pictur's in it at all, only flowers and mowing machines, and sich-like."

"Why, ye mean the *Graphic*" cried some one with a laugh; "no wonder the maid couldn't make out what you was a-drivin' at."

But Giles did not heed him; he was gazing hungrily at the greasy pack of cards which lay on the deal table.

“It d’ seem a martal sight of time since I’ve had a game,” he exclaimed. “Light up, Jim; you and me ’ull jist have time for one afore tea.”

When the bell rang for this last-named meal Giles rose with the rest, and was preparing to walk with them down the well-known stairs, when he was astonished by receiving an invitation to tea with no less a person than the matron herself.

Page 63

He smoothed his hair with the palms of his hands, pulled up his shirt-collar, and followed the messenger with an odd mixture of pride and reluctance. It was no doubt highly gratifying to be thus honoured before all his former mates, but he was conscious of a secret yearning to sit down once more in the old place, and munch his allotted portion of bread and cheese with a friend at either elbow.

The matron received him cordially.

“Come in, Mr. Maine, and sit down; I am glad to have an opportunity of chatting with you. It would never do for you to have tea with the others now, you know.”

“No, to be sure,” agreed Giles blankly.

“Well, and how are you, Mr. Maine? Most comfortable and happy, Mrs. Tapper tells me.”

“’E-es, mum,” returned Giles mournfully.

“Sugar and milk, Mr. Maine?”

“Thankee, mum, I likes it best pure naked. I’d be thankful to ’ee, mum, if ye wouldn’t call me Mr. Maine; it don’t seem naitral like.”

“Perhaps not,” agreed the matron, with a kindly laugh. “Well, Giles—I’ll say Giles, then—Giles, do you know that you are quite a remarkable person? They have been writing about you in the papers. ’A lucky pauper,’ they call you.”

“Have they now, mum?” returned Maine, staring at her over the rim of his cup.

“Yes, indeed, and people have been writing to me to know the particulars. ’Tis not often, you see, such a stroke of good fortune befalls an inmate of the Union.”

“I s’pose not,” he agreed, between two gulps of tea.

The matron continued to speak in this congratulatory vein while the old man ate and drank; but though he occasionally muttered a word or two which would seem to endorse her statements, his countenance was far from wearing the joyful self-satisfied expression which she had anticipated.

All at once he pushed away plate and cup.

“Mum,” he said, “if I mid make so bold I’d like to say summat. I’ve been a-thinkin’—couldn’t I come back here?”

“Here!” echoed she in astonishment. “Here! to the workhouse?”

Giles nodded.

“Why, are you not happy at Mrs. Tapper’s?”

“’E—es, oh, ‘e—es, I haven’t got no fault to find wi’ she nor naught; but I—I’d like the Union best.”

“Well, but you see, my dear Giles, the Union is meant for people who cannot live anywhere else. You have got plenty of money now, and—”

“I’d be willin’ to pay,” said Giles.

“Good gracious!” exclaimed the matron.

The old man looked at her stolidly, but made no further remark.

“I’m sure I don’t know what to say,” she went on, after a pause. “I don’t suppose such a thing has ever been heard of—I’m sure the guardians would never allow it.”

“I’d pay handsome,” said Giles. “You ax ’em, mum.”

“Well, I will if you like; but don’t you think you are very foolish? There you are, a man of property, who can hold up your head with the best, and pay your way, and you want to come back here among a lot of miserable paupers.”

Page 64

“I’ve a-been twenty year here,” observed Giles, making the statement in a dispassionate tone. “I know ’em all here, and I’m used to the ways. I couldn’t never get used to no other ways, and no other folks. I’d sooner bide, mum, if ye’d ax ’em to let me. I’d not give no trouble—no more n’ I ever did, an’ I’d pay for my keep.”

“Well, well,” said the matron, staring at him in puzzled amazement.

“Can I go up to ’em again for a bit?” queried the old man. “Me and Jim was in the middle of a game.”

“Oh, yes, you can go up to them.”

He rose, scraped his leg and pulled his forelock as usual, and backed out of the room, leaving his fine new hat on the ground beside his chair.

Coming upon it presently, the matron decided to return it herself to the owner; perhaps she was a little curious to see how he comported himself among his mates.

She opened the door of the old men’s ward so quietly that no one noticed her entrance; the room was full of tobacco smoke, and the inmates were sitting or standing about as usual. Giles sat in his old corner, with Jim opposite to him; both had removed their coats, and the grizzled heads were bent together over the battered cards.

“You be in luck, Jim,” Giles exclaimed as the matron closed the door. “You’ve turned up a Jack!”

“THE WOLD LOVE AND THE NOO”

“Have ye heard the noos?” said Betty Tuffin, thrusting in her head at old Mrs. Haskell’s open door.

“Lard, no, my dear,” returned her crony, hastily dropping the crooked iron bar with which she had been drawing together the logs upon her hearthstone. “There, I never do seem to hear anything nowadays, my wold man bein’ so ter’ble punished wi’ the lumbaguey and not able to do a hand’s turn for hisself. Why, I do assure ’ee I do scarce ever set foot out o’ door wi’out it’s to pick up a bit o’ scroff, or a few logs—an’ poor ones they be when I’ve a-got ’em. I can hardly see my own hand for the smoke. Step in, do, Betty love, an’ tell I all what’s to be told.”

Betty had stepped in long before Mrs. Haskell had concluded her harangue, and had, by this time, taken possession of a comfortable corner of the screened settle, deposited

her basket by her side, folded her arms, and assumed that air of virtuous indignation which denoted that she was about to relate the shortcomings of some third party.

“Dear, to be sure! Souls alive! Lard ha’ mercy me, ye could ha’ knocked I down wi’ a feather when Keeper told I—”

“A-h-h-h, them bwoys o’ Chaffey’s has been poachin’ again I d’ ’low,” interrupted Mrs. Haskell eagerly. “Never did see sich chaps as they be. A body ’ud think they’d know better nor to act so unrespectable-like. Why, as my wold man do say sometimes, ’ye mid as well put your hand in Squire’s pocket as go a-layin’ snares for his hares an’ rabbits—’tis thievin’ whichever way ye do look at it,’ he do say.”

Page 65

“Well, I don’t agree wi’ he,” responded Betty with some heat. She had sons of her own who were occasionally given to strolling abroad on moonlight nights, and usually returned with bulging pockets. “I don’t agree at all. The Lard made they little wild things for the poor so well as for the rich—same as the water what runs through Squire’s park an’ down along by the back o’ my place. Who’s to tell who they belongs to. A hare ‘ull lep up on one side o’ the hedge, an’ then it’ll be Squire’s, an’ it’ll run across t’other side, an’ then it’s Maister’s, an’ then it’ll come an’ squat down in my cabbage garden—then I d’ ’low ’tis mine if I can catch it.”

Mrs. Haskell, who was too anxious to gossip to dally by the way in a disquisition on the Game Laws, assented to her friend’s argument with somewhat disappointing promptness, and returned to the original subject of discussion.

“I be real curious to hear that there bit o’ noos.”

“You’ll be surprised I d’ ’low,” said Mrs. Tuffin. “Ye mind Abel Guppy what went off to the war out there abroad wi’ the Yeomanry? Well, they d’ say he be killed.”

“Dear, now, ye don’t tell I so,” said the other in a dispassionate, and if truth be told, somewhat disappointed tone. A death, though always exciting, was not after all so very uncommon, and when a man “’listed for a soldier,” most of the older village folk looked upon his destruction as a foregone conclusion. “Killed, poor young chap! His aunt Susan ’ull be terrible opset.”

“I d’ ’low she will be opset,” said Betty meaningly, “and it bain’t only along of him bein’ killed, poor feller, but you’d never think, Mrs. Haskell, how things have a-turned out. Ye mind that maid up to Bartlett’s what he was a-courtin’?”

“‘E-es, to be sure I do. A great big bouncin’ wench as ever I did see, wi’ her red head an’ all.”

“Well, it seems afore poor Abel went out he wrote a paper an’ give it to this ‘ere maid, a-leavin’ her everything as the poor chap had in the world.”

“Mercy on me! But she be a-walkin’ out wi’ somebody else they tell me; she’ve a-took up wi’ the noo love afore she did leave off wi’ the wold.”

“She have,” agreed the visitor emphatically. “That be the very thing Susan ’ull find so cruel ’ard. She did say to I to-week afore she knowed her nevvy were killed, ‘If any harm comes to en,’ says she, ’it do fair break my heart to think as that good-for-nothing Jenny Pitcher ’ull have her pick of everything in this place. It bain’t the same as if she’d truly m’urned for en, but she’ve a-taken up wi’ a new young man,’ says she, ‘what walks

out wi' her reg'lar.'—'My dear,' says I, 'if anything should happen to your nevvy, which the Lard forbid, she'll never have the face to come to ax for his bits o' things, seein' as she haven't been faithful to en.' 'She will though,' says Susan, an' 'tis the talk o' the place that *she will*.'"

Mrs. Haskell clapped her hands together. "Well, well! But what a sammy the chap was. He did ought to ha' made sure afore makin' sich a will. It be a will, I suppose, my dear?"

Page 66

“It be a will sure enough,” said Mrs. Tuffin gloomily. “There, Susan did tell I as that there artful hussy made sure he got it signed an’ all reg’lar. There’s a few pounds too in the savings bank—I don’t know if she’d be able to get ’em out or not.”

“Well, I never heerd such a tale. That maid must be a reg’lar Jezebel, Betty, that’s what she must be. That hard-hearted, unfeelin’—Lard ha’ mercy me! Well, well, well!”

Betty took up her basket again, and was proceeding leisurely towards the door, shaking her head and uttering condemnatory groans the while, when she suddenly gripped her friend by the arm with an eager exclamation.

“There she be!—there’s the very maid a-walkin’ by so bold as brass with her young man along of her!”

“I shouldn’t wonder,” said Mrs. Haskell in sepulchral tones, “I shouldn’t wonder but what she be a-goin’ up to Susan’s to pick out poor Abel’s things.”

“Dear, do you raly think so?” gasped Betty, almost dropping her basket in her horror. “Why the noos of him bein’ killed only come this marnin’.”

“I d’ ‘low she be a-goin’ there,” repeated Mrs. Haskell emphatically. “If I was you, Betty, I’d follow ’em, careless-like, an’ jist find out. It do really seem like a dooty for to find out. I’d go along of you only my wold man ‘ull be a-hollerin’ out for his tea.”

A muffled voice was indeed heard at that very moment proceeding from the bedroom, accompanied by an imperative knocking on the wall.

“There he be,” said Mrs. Haskell, not without a certain pride. “He do know the time so reg’lar as church clock. He’ll go on a-shoutin’ and a-hammerin’ at wall wi’ his wold boot till I do come. I do tell en he wears out a deal more shoe-leather that way nor if he were on his feet.”

She turned to go upstairs, and Betty crossing the threshold stood a moment irresolute. Her basket, full of purchases recently made at the shop a mile away, was heavy enough, and her feet were weary; but Jenny’s tantalising red head gleamed like a beacon twenty yards away from her, and curiosity silenced the pleadings of fatigue. Hitching up her basket she proceeded in the wake of the young couple, who were walking slowly enough, the girl’s bright head a little bent, the man slouching along by her side in apparent silence. All at once the observer saw Jenny’s hand go to her pocket, and draw thence a handkerchief which she pressed to her eyes.

“She be a-cryin’” commented Betty, not without a certain satisfaction. “They’ve a-had a bit of a miff, I d’ ’low; well, if the young man have a-got the feelin’s of a man he’d be like to object to this ’ere notion of hers—Nay, now, he do seem to be a-comfortin’ of her. There! Well!”

They had left the village behind, and Betty’s solitary figure was probably unnoticed by the lovers. In any case it proved no hindrance to the very affectionate demonstrations which now took place. Presently Jenny straightened her hat, restored her handkerchief to her pocket, and walked on, “arm-in-crook” with her admirer.

Page 67

“They be a-goin’ to Susan’s, sure enough. Well, to be sure! Of all the hard-hearted brazen-faced—!” words failed her, and she quickened her pace as the couple disappeared round the angle of the lane. A few minutes’ brisk walking brought the pair, with Betty at their heels, to a solitary cottage standing a little back from the lane in the shelter of a high furze-grown bank. As the young man tapped at the door Jenny turned and descried Betty’s figure by the garden-gate.

“Is it you, Mrs. Tuffin?” she inquired. “I can scarce see who ‘tis wi’ the sun shinin’ in my eyes. Be you a-goin’ in?”

“It’s me,” responded Betty tartly, in reply to the first question, while she dismissed the second with an equally curt “I be.”

The door opened and the figure of a stout elderly woman stood outlined against the glow of firelight within. She peered out, shading her eyes from the level rays of the sinking sun, and starting back at sight of Jenny.

“’Tis you, be it? Well, I didn’t think you’d have the face to come, so soon.”

“I did just look in to say a word o’ consolation, Miss Vacher,” said the girl, drawing herself up. “I be very grieved myself about this melancholy noos. I’ve a-been cryin’ terrible, I have, an’ says I, ’Me an’ poor Abel’s dear aunt ‘ull mingle our tears.’”

“Mingle fiddlesticks!” said Susan. “What be that there young spark o’ yours a-doin’ here? Be he come to drop a tear too?”

“He be come along to take care of I,” said the girl demurely. “’Tis Mr. Sam Keynes. He didn’t think it right for I to walk so far by myself. Did ye, Sam?”

“Well, now ye can walk back wi’ her,” said Susan, addressing that gentleman before he had time to answer. “I don’t want no tears a-mingled here. Who be that by the gate?”

“’Tis me, Betty Tuffin,” returned the owner of that name. “I didn’t come wi’ these ’ere young folks—don’t think it, my dear. I come to see if this ‘ere noos be true an’ to tell you how sorry I be.”

“I’d ’low the noos bain’t true, but come in all the same, Betty. I be al’ays glad to see *you*. You’d best be marchin’, Jenny Pitcher, you and your new sweetheart, else it’ll be dark afore you get home.”

Jenny looked at her admirer, who nodded encouragingly and nudged her with his elbow.

“I think as we’ve a-come so far,” she remarked, “I must ax leave to step in for a bit, Miss Vacher. ‘Tis a little matter o’ business, and business is a thing what ought to be attended to immediate.”

Miss Vacher threw open the door with such violence that the handle banged against the wall, and stepped back with sarcastic politeness.

“Oh, come in, do. Come, and poke and pry, and see what ye can pick for yourself.”

Sarcasm had turned to fury by the time the end of the sentence was reached, and, as Jenny, overcome by conflicting emotions, was about to sink into the nearest chair, she darted forward and snatched it away.

Page 68

“That’s mine anyhow,” she cried emphatically. “You shan’t touch that.”

Jenny almost fell against the table, and gasped for a moment or two, partly from breathlessness, partly, as presently appeared, from grief.

“Oh, poor Abel!” she groaned, as soon as she could speak. “The poor dear fellow. Oh, oh dear!”

“I wouldn’t take on so if I was you,” said Betty sarcastically, while even Mr. Keynes surveyed his intended with a lowering brow, and gruffly advised her to give over.

“’Tis a pity to upset yourself so much,” said Miss Vacher, with a shrill laugh. “I don’t believe he be dead. Somebody ‘ud ha’ wrote if he was. The papers—you can’t credit what they say in them papers.”

“Oh, he’s dead, sure enough,” cried Jenny, suddenly recovering herself. “I know he’s dead—I know’d he’d die afore he went out. There, I had a kind o’ porsentiment he’d be killed, and so had he, poor fellow. That’s why he settled everything so thoughtful and kind. Oh dear, oh dear! It fair breaks my heart to think on’t. Poor Abel! he was too good for this world—that’s what he was. We’ll never, never see his likes again.”

“Dear, to be sure, think o’ that now!” cackled Betty. “I hope ye like *that*, Mr. Keynes.”

Mr. Keynes evidently did not like it at all, if one might judge from his expression, but Jenny now turned towards him in artless appeal.

“You do know very well, Sam, don’t you, as poor Abel was my first love? I’ve often told ’ee so, haven’t I? You must remember, Sam, I did say often and often, as ’whatever happens you can only be my second. Don’t ever think,’ says I, ‘as you can ever be to me what he was.’”

At this point Sam’s feelings were too many for him; he made a stride towards his charmer, and imperatively announced that he’d be dalled if he’d stand any more o’ that. “Cut it shart, Jenny, cut it shart, or I’m off!”

“There, I did ought to think more o’ your feelin’s,” said Jenny, drying her eyes with surprising promptitude. “I beg your pardon—I were that undone, ye see, wi’ lookin’ round at all my poor Abel’s things, what’s to be mine now. They do all seem to speak so plain to I—the very clock—”

“The clock!” exclaimed Susan, with an indignant start, “why that there clock have hung over chimney-piece for nigh upon farty year! That clock didn’t belong to Abel!”

“That clock,” said Jenny with mild firmness, “did belong to my poor Abel’s father, and ‘twas his by rights; he’ve a-left it to me wi’ the rest of his things, and I shall value it for his sake. When I do hear it tickin’ it will seem to say to I, *Think o’—me; think o’—me*.”

“Jenny, drop it,” cried Mr. Keynes with a muffled roar of protest; “I tell ’ee ‘tis more nor flesh and blood can bear. If you be a-goin’ to think constant o’ he you’d better ha’ done wi’ I.”

“Sam, dear Sam,” said Jenny in melting tones, “you be all as I’ve a-got left now; don’t you desert me.”

Page 69

“Well, don’t you go a-carryin’ on that way,” said Sam, still unmollified and eyeing her threateningly.

“You don’t lay a finger on the clock,” said Susan Vacher with spirit. “Who told you that clock was Abel’s? It’s a-been there ever since my mother’s time, and I’ve a-wound it up myself every Saturday night.”

“That clock belonged to Abel,” repeated Jenny emphatically, “and he’ve a-left it to me in his will.”

She drew a piece of paper from her pocket, opened it slowly, and proceeded to read its contents aloud, with great dignity.

“‘In case o’ my death, I, Abel Guppy, bein’ firm in mind and body—’”

“What does he mean by that?” interrupted Betty. “Lawyer Wiggins did make my father’s will an’ ’tweren’t wrote that way. What’s ’firm in mind and body’?”

“This ’ere was copied from a pattern will what was bought for sixpence up to Mr. Marsh’s in town,” said Jenny loftily. “It do begin, ’*I, M.N., bein’ o’ sound mind though infirm in body*’—Abel, d’ye see, weren’t infirm in body; he were as well as ever he were in his life, poor chap, when he did set out.”

“Well, let’s hear,” said Susan with a martyrised air.

“‘I, Abel Guppy,’” resumed Jenny, “‘bein’ firm in mind and body, do hereby state as I wish for to leave my sweetheart, Jenny Pitcher, if I do die in this ’ere war, all what I’ve a-got in this world. The money in the Savings Bank—’” Betty groaned and threw up her eyes to heaven; Susan involuntarily clenched her fist; Sam’s brow cleared.

“‘The money in the Savings Bank,’” repeated Jenny unctuously, “‘and any bits o’ furniture what belongs to I, more partic’lar the clock over the chimney-piece, the two chaney dogs, and the warmin’-pan—’”

“Well, I never!” interrupted Susan; “them two chaney dogs my mother bought herself off a pedlar that come to the door. I mind it so well as if it were yesterday.”

“Very like she did,” returned Jenny sharply. “And when she died hadn’t Abel’s father, what was her eldest son, the best right to ’em? And when he went to his long home they was Abel’s, and now they’m mine—and the warmin’-pan too,” she added defiantly.

“Well, of all the oudacious—” Susan was beginning, when Jenny cut her short, continuing to read in a high clear voice—

“’And half-a-dozen silver spoons, also the hearth-rug what was made out o’ my old clothes—’”

“I’m—I’m blowed if you shall get the hearthrug,” cried Susan explosively. “That’s mine whatever the rest mid be. Them clothes was only fit to put on a scarecrow, an’ I cut ’em up, and picked out the best bits, and split up a wold sack and sewed on every mortial rag myself; and I made a border out of a wold red skirt o’ mine.”

“And a handsome thing it is too, my dear,” said Betty admiringly.

“They was Abel’s clothes, though,” said Jenny; “ye can’t get out o’ that, Miss Vacher.”

Page 70

“No, but there’s one thing *you* can’t get out of, Miss Jenny, so clever as ye think yerself,” cried the outraged possessor of the hearthrug. “You be a-comed here on false pertences. Even if my nevvy *be* dead you han’t a-got no right to these ’ere things now. He wrote it plain, ’I leave ’em all *to my sweetheart* if I’m killed.’ Well, you wasn’t his sweetheart when he was killed—you was a-walkin’ out wi’ this ’ere chap.”

“Abel Guppy did mean I to have they things,” said Jenny. “I was his sweetheart at the time he wrote it, and if I left off bein’ his sweetheart ’twas because I felt he was too good to live. I knowed he wouldn’t come back—as I tell you I had a porsentiment. I were forced to take up wi’ Sam because I knowed Abel ‘ud never make any livin’ maid his bride.”

“That’s the third time!” cried Sam, ramming on his hat, and making for the door. “I’ve had about enough o’ this. I’ll look out for another maid as hasn’t got a sweetheart i’ th’ New House—you be altogether a cut above the likes of I.”

Susan obligingly opened the door for him, and in a moment he was gone, leaving Jenny staring blankly after him.

The banging of the garden-gate seemed to restore her to her senses. With a scream she threw the paper on the floor, and rushed out of the house, calling wildly on her lover. Soon the sound of the hurrying steps was lost in the distance, and the two women simultaneously turned to each other, eyes and mouth equally round with amazement.

At last Betty, slowly extending her forefinger, pointed to the will.

“I know,” said Susan, finding voice all at once. “I’ve a good mind to pop it i’ the fire.”

Betty shook her head admonishingly.

“I wouldn’t do that,” she said, with a note of reproof in her voice. “’T’ud be real dangerous. Folks could be sent to prison for meddling wi’ wills, an’ sich.”

Susan, who had grasped the document in question, dropped it as if it burnt her.

“My very spoons!” she said with a groan. “I tell ’ee, Betty, I’d a deal sooner bury ’em nor let her have ’em.”

“I d’ ’low you would,” said Mrs. Tuffin commiseratingly; “but I don’t advise ‘ee to do it, my dear—’twouldn’t be safe, an’ you’d be bound to give ’em up one time or another. I d’

‘low that maid be a-actin’ as she be to spite ye more nor anythin’ else; the more unwillin’ you be, the more she’m pleased.”

“Very like,” agreed Susan. “She knowed I never were for Abel takin’ up wi’ her, an’ al’ays said so much as I could again the match.”

“Well, if you’ll take my advice, Susan, you’ll jist disapp’int her by givin’ in straight off. If I was you I’d jist make up a bundle o’ they things what Abel left her; pack ’em all up an’ pin the will on top, an’ give ’em to carrier to take to her, an’ jist write outside, ’Good riddance o’ bad rubbish,’ or ‘What ye’ve touched ye may take,’ or some sich thing to show ye didn’t care one way or t’other. I d’ ’low that ’ud shame her.”

Page 71

“Maybe it would,” said Miss Vacher dubiously, though with a latent gleam of malice in her eye.

“Take my advise an’ do it then,” urged Mrs. Tuffin earnestly. “Make the best of a bad job an’ turn the tables on she. All the village ’ull be mad wi’ her—the tale ’ull be in every one’s mouth.”

Miss Vacher compressed her lips and meditatively rubbed her hands.

“Well, I will; but I’ll tell ‘ee summat—I’ll cut off every inch o’ that red border.”

She picked up the rug as she spoke and held it out. “That’ll spile the looks of it anyhow,” she remarked triumphantly.

The threat was carried into effect, and on the morrow poor Abel Guppy’s little household gods were duly transferred to the home of his former sweetheart. Jenny professed great indifference to Susan’s scornful message, and continued to hold her head high in spite of the storm of indignation provoked by her conduct. She claimed and carried off the departed yeoman’s Savings Bank book, and was much aggrieved on finding that the authorities would not at once permit her to avail herself of the little vested fund; inquiries must be made, they said, and in any case some time must elapse before she could be permitted to draw the money out.

This was the only real cloud on Jenny’s horizon, however, and she speedily forgot it in the midst of her wedding preparations. She and her Sam had made up their little difference, and as he was well-to-do in the world, and quite able to support a wife, there seemed to be no reason for delay.

The banns were duly called, therefore, and on one sunshiny summer’s day Jenny and Sam, followed by a little band of near relatives, walked gleefully to their new home from the church where they had been made one. Betty Tuffin, who, as a lone woman, could not in justice to herself refuse any paying job, however little she might approve of her employer, had been left to take care of the house and to assist in preparing the refreshments, As the little party approached the cottage door they were surprised to see her standing on the threshold, now portentously wagging her black-capped head, now burying her face in her apron, evidently a prey to strong emotion, though of what particular kind it was difficult to say.

The bride hastened her steps, and Betty, who had for the twentieth time taken refuge in her apron, cautiously uncovered what seemed to be a very watery eye, and remarked in muffled and quavering tones from behind its enveloping folds—

“I’m afeared you’ll be a bit took a-back when ye go indoor, my dear; best go cautious. I d’ ‘low ye’ll be *surprised*!’

“What d’ye mean?” cried Jenny in alarm. “What’s the matter?”

“Anything wrong?” inquired Sam from the rear.

But Betty was apparently entirely overcome, and could only intimate by repeated jerking of her thumb over her shoulder her desire that they should go in and see for themselves.

Page 72

A long table was spread in the centre of the living-room, and, at the moment that the bridal party entered, a tall figure, dressed in kharki, was walking hastily round it, picking up a spoon from each cup.

“Abel!” shrieked Jenny, staggering back against her husband.

“What, bain’t ye dead?” gasped the latter with a dropping jaw.

Abel added another spoon to his collection, and then looked up:—“This ’ere only makes five,” he said; “there did ought to be six. Where’s t’other?”

“Dear heart alive!” groaned Jenny’s mother. “Jist look at en. We thought en dead an’ buried, an’ here he be a-carryin’ off the spoons!”

“I bain’t dead, ye see,” returned the yeoman fiercely. “There’s more Abel Guppys nor one i’ the world, an’ the man what got shot was a chap fro’ Weymouth. If I *was* dead an’ buried, all the same d’ye think I’d leave my spoons to be set out at another man’s weddin’? Where’s the other chaney dog?”

He had already pocketed one, and now cast a vengeful glance round.

“On the dresser, Abel,” gasped Jenny faintly; “oh, my poor heart, how it do beat! To think o’ your comin’ back like that! Oh, Abel, I made sure you was killed.”

“And you’re very sorry, bain’t ye?” returned her former lover with wrathful irony, “I’ll thank ye for my bank-book, if ye please. Ye haven’t drawed the money out—that’s one good thing. They telled I all about it at the post-office yesterday. That’s my dish, too.” Extending a long arm he deftly whisked away the large old-fashioned platter which had supported the wedding-cake, dusting off the crumbs with an air of great disgust.

“I think ye mid have found summat else to put your cake on,” he said, with a withering look; “I think ye mid ha’ showed a bit more feelin’ than that.”

“I’m sure,” protested Jenny plaintively, “‘twas only out o’ respect for you, Abel, that I set out the things. ‘Twas out o’ fond memory for you. You know you did say yourself when you was a-writin’ out your will, ‘I’ll leave you all my things, Jenny, so as you’ll think o’ me,’—an’ I *did* think o’ you,” she added, beginning to sob, “I’m sure I—I—I even wanted to put a bit o’ black crape on your clock, but mother wouldn’t let me.”

“Well,” interrupted Mrs. Pitcher apologetically, “I didn’t think, ye know, it ’ud look very well to have crape about on my darter’s weddin’-day. It wouldn’t seem lucky. Or else I’m sure I wouldn’t ha’ had no objections at all—far from it, Abel.”

“But I’d ha’ had objections,” cried Sam, who had stood by swelling with wrath. “I do think my feelin’s ought to be considered so much as yon chap’s, be he alive or dead. It’s me what’s married your darter, bain’t it?”

“It be, Samuel; ‘e-es I d’ ’low it be,” returned Mrs. Pitcher, with a deprecating glance at the yeoman who was now rolling up the rug. “We all on us thought as Abel was dead, ye see.”

Page 73

“Meanin’, I suppose, as if ye knowed he was alive I shouldn’t ha’ had her,” retorted Sam explosively. “Well, I d’ ’low, it bain’t too late yet to come to a understandin’. Jenny be married to I, sure enough, but I bain’t a-goin’ to ha’ no wives what be a-hankerin’ arter other folks. She may take herself off out of this wi’out my tryin’ for to hinder her. If she can’t make up her mind to give over upsettin’ hersel’ along o’ he you may take her home-along, Mrs. Pitcher.”

A dead silence ensued within the house, but Betty’s strident tones could be heard without, uplifted in shrill discourse to curious neighbours.

“’E-es, d’ye see, he did write home so soon as he did get to Darchester, a-tellin’ of his aunt as he was a-comin’ private-like so as to surprise his sweetheart. And Susan, she did write back immediate an’ say, ‘My poor bwoy, there be a sad surprise in store for *you*.’ And then when he comed they did make it up between them to keep quiet till—”

“There’s the clock, too,” observed Abel, ending the pause at last.

“You can take the clock,” cried Jenny, simultaneously recovering speech and self-possession. “Take the clock, Abel Guppy, and take yourself off. There ben a mistake, but it be all cleared up at last.”

She stepped with dignity across the room, and slipped her arm through Sam’s, who made several strenuous but ineffectual efforts to shake her off.

“You get hold o’ he,” cried Sam; “you cut along an’ catch hold o’ he. It be he you do want.”

“No, Samuel,” said the incomparable Jenny with lofty resolution, “it bain’t he as I do want. I mid ha’ been took up wi’ some sich foolish notion afore, bein’ but a silly maid, but now I be a married ’ooman, an’ I do know how to vally a husband’s love.”

The new-made bridegroom ceased struggling and gaped at her. Jenny, gazing at her former lover more in sorrow than in anger, pointed solemnly to the clock:—

“Take down that clock, Abel Guppy,” she repeated. “I do know you now for what you be. I consider you’ve behaved most heartless an’ unfeelin’ in comin’ here to try an’ make mischief between man an’ wife. I thank the Lard,” she added piously, “as I need never ha’ no more to do with you. Walk out o’ my house, if ye please—”

“*Your* house,” interpolated Sam, a note of astonished query perceptible in his tone despite its sulkiness.

“’E-es,” said Jenny firmly. “He shall never show his face inside the door where I be missis. Take down the clock, Abel Guppy,” she repeated for the third time. “You’d best help him, Sam. He don’t seem able to reach to it.”

Encumbered as he was with newly-regained possessions, the yeoman had made but abortive attempts to detach the timepiece; and Sam, with a dawning grin on his countenance, now mounted on a chair, officiously held by one of the guests, and speedily handed it down.

After all it was the ill-used Abel Guppy who looked most foolish as he made his way to the door, loaded with his various goods, the relatives of bride and bridegroom casting scornful glances at him as he passed. Before he had proceeded twenty yards Sam ran after him with the bank-book, which the other pocketed without a word, while the bridegroom returned to the house, rubbing his hands and chuckling.

Page 74

Jenny was already seated at the head of the table and received him with a gracious smile:—

“If you’ll fetch another plate, Sam, my dear,” she remarked, “I can begin for to cut the cake.”

BLACKBIRD’S INSPIRATION

“What be lookin’ at?” inquired Mrs. Bold, emerging from her dairy, and incidentally wiping her hands on a corner of her apron. “There ye’ve a-been standin’ in a regular stud all the time I were a-swillin’ out the churn.”

Farmer Bold was standing at the open stable door, his grey-bearded chin resting on his big brown hand, his eyes staring meditatively in front of him. It was a breezy, sunny autumn day, and all the world about him was astir with life; gawky yellow-legged fowls pecked and scratched round his feet with prodigious activity, calves were bleating in the adjacent pens, while the very pigs were scuttling about their styes, squealing the while as though it were supper-time. The wind whistled blithely round the corners of the goodly cornstacks to the rear of the barton, and piped shrilly through their eaves; the monthly roses, still ablow, swung hither and thither in the fresh blast, strewing the cobblestones with their delicate petals. In all the gay, busy scene only the figure of the master himself was motionless, if one might except the old black horse which he appeared to be contemplating, the angular outlines of whose bony form might be seen dimly defined in the dusk of its stable.

Towards this animal Farmer Bold now pointed, removing his hand from his chin for the purpose. “I wur a-lookin’ at Blackbird,” he said, “poor wold chap! He was a good beast in his day, but I d’ ’low his day be fair done. Tis the last night what Blackbird ’ull spend in this ’ere stall.”

“Why,” cried Mrs. Bold quickly, “ye don’t mean to say—”

“I mean to say,” interrupted her husband, turning to her with a resolutely final air, “I mean to say as Blackbird’s sold.”

“Sold!” ejaculated the woman incredulously. “Who’d ever go for to buy Blackbird?—-wi’out it be one o’ they rag-and-bone men, or maybe for a salt cart. Well, Joe,” with gathering ire, “I didn’t think ye’d go for to give up the faithful wold fellow after all these years, to be knocked about and ill-used at the last.”

“Nay, and ye needn’t think it—ye mid know as I wouldn’t do sich a thing,” returned her lord with equal heat. “I’ve sold en”—he paused, continuing with some hesitation, as he nodded sideways over his shoulder, “I’ve a-sold en up yonder for the kennels.”

“What! To be ate up by them there nasty hounds? Joseph!”

“Come now,” cried the farmer defiantly, “ye must look at it sensible, Mary. Poor Blackbird, he be a-come to his end, same as we all must come to it soon or late. He ‘ve a-been goin’ short these two years—ye could see that for yourself—and now his poor wold back be a-givin’ out, ’tis the most merciful thing to destroy en. They’ll turn en out to-week in the field up along—beautiful grass they have there—and he’ll enjoy hisself a bit, and won’t know nothin’ about it when they finish en off.”

Page 75

“I al’ays thought as we’d keep Blackbird so long as he did live,” murmured Mrs. Bold, half convinced but still lamenting, “seein’ as we did breed en and bring en up ourselves, and he did work so faithful all his life. Poor wold Jinny! He wur her last colt, and you did al’ays use to say you’d keep en for her sake. Ah, ’tis twenty year since I run out and found en aside of her in the paddock—walkin’ about as clever as you please, and not above two hours old. Not a white hair on en—d’ye mind?—and such big, strong legs! I was all for a-callin’ en Beauty, but you said Beauty was a filly’s name. And he did use to run to paddock-gate when he wur a little un, and I wur a-goin’ to feed chicken—he’d know my very foot, and he’d come prancin’ to meet I, and put his little nose in the bucket. Dear, to be sure, I mind it just so well as if it wur yesterday!”

The farmer laughed and stroked his beard.

“‘E-es, he was a wonderful knowin’ colt,” he agreed, placidly. “There’s a deal o’ sense in beasts if ye take notice on ’em and treat ’em friendly like. Them little lambs as we did bring up to-year was so clever as Christians, wasn’t they? Ye mind the little chap we did call Cronje, how he used to run to I when he did see I a-comin’ wi’ the teapot? And Nipper—ye mind Nipper? He didn’t come on so well as the others; he was sickly-proud, so to speak, and wouldn’t suckey out o’ the teapot same as the rest. But he knowed his name so well as any o’ them, and ’ud screw his head round, and cock his ears just as a dog mid do, when I did call en. Pigs, even,” he proceeded meditatively, “there’s a deal o’ sense in pigs, if ye look for it. Charl’, ye mind Charl’, what he had soon after we was married? That there pig knowed my v’ice so well as you do. What I did use to come into the yard and did call ‘Charl’,’ he’d answer me back, ‘Umph.’ Ho! ho! I used to stand there and laugh fit to split. Ye never heard anythin’ more nat’ral. ‘Charl’,’ I’d call; ‘Umph’ he’d go. Ho! ho! ho!”

The woman did not laugh; she was screwing up her eyes in the endeavour to penetrate the darkness of the stable. “Poor wold Blackbird,” she said, “I wish it hadn’t come to this. It do seem cruel someway. There, he did never cost ’ee a penny, wi’out ’twas for shoes, and he’ve a-worked hard ever sin’ he could pull a cart—never a bit o’ vice or mischief. It do seem cruel hard as he shouldn’t end his days on the place where he was bred.”

“My dear woman,” said her husband loftily, “what good would it do the poor beast to end his days here instead of up yonder? He’s bound to end ’em anyways, and we are twenty-two shillin’ the better for lettin’ of en go to the kennels.”

“Twenty-two shillin’?” repeated his wife.

“’E-es, not so bad, be it? The pore fellow’s fair wore out, but still, d’ye see, he fetches that at the last, and ‘tis better nor puttin’ an end to en for nothin’. Ah, there be a deal o’ money in twenty-two shillin’!”

Page 76

Mrs. Bold sighed. Perhaps she knew almost better than her husband how much toil and trouble it cost to get twenty-two shillings together. Twenty pounds of butter, twenty-two dozen eggs, eighty-eight quarts of milk! What early risings, what goings to and fro, what long sittings with cramped limbs and aching back, milking cow after cow in summer heat and winter cold, how many weary hours' standing in the flagged dairy before twenty-two shillings could be scraped together! She turned away, without another word.

Later in the evening poor old Blackbird was brought out of his stall, and, after receiving the farewell caresses of master and mistress, was led away, limping, to the kennel pasture.

"Don't 'urry en," called the farmer to the lad who had charge of him. "Tis a long journey for he—two mile and more; let en take his time. He'll get there soon enough."

The next morning, just as Mrs. Bold had finished getting breakfast, her husband came to the dairy in a state of amused excitement.

"There, ye'll never think! I al'ays did say beasts was so sensible as Christians if ye took a bit of notice of 'em. I was a-goin' round stables jist now, and if I didn't find wold Blackbird in his own stall, jist same as ever. I did rub my eyes and think I must be dreamin', but there he were layin' down, quite at home. He al'ays had a trick of openin' gates, ye know, and he must jist ha' walked away i' th' night. He wur awful tired, pore beast—'twas so much as I could do to get en off again."

"Ye sent en off again!" cried Mrs. Bold indignantly. "Well, I shouldn't ha' thought ye could have found it in yer heart! The poor wold horse did come back to we, so trustin', and you to go an drive en away again to his death! Dear, men be awful hard-hearted!"

"Of all the onraisonable creeturs, you are the onraisonablest," cried the farmer, much aggrieved. "Was I to go and take the folks' money and keep the money's worth? A nice name I'd get in the country! They'd be sayin' I stole en away myself, very like. No, I did send en up so soon as I could, so as they shouldn't be s'archin' for 'en."

Mrs. Bold clapped a plate upon the table.

"Sit down," she cried imperatively. "Ye'll be ready for your own breakfast, though you wouldn't give pore Blackbird a bit."

"Who says I didn't give en a bit?" retorted Joseph. "Ye be al'ays jumpin' at notions, Mary. Blackbird had as good a feed o' carn afore he did go as ever a horse had."

“Much good it’ll do en when he’s a-goin’ to be killed,” returned his spouse inconsequently. “There, it’s no use talkin’; I must make haste wi’ my breakfast and get back to my work. It’s well for I as I be able to work a bit yet, else I suppose ye’d be sendin’ me to the knackers.”

“I never heerd tell as you was a harse,” shouted the farmer. The wit and force of the retort seemed to strike him even as he uttered it, for his indignant expression was almost immediately replaced by a good-humoured grin. “I had ye there, Mary,” he chuckled. “‘I never heerd tell as you was a harse, says I.”

Page 77

Next churning day Mrs. Bold rose before dawn, according to her custom, and the churning was already in progress before the first grey, uncertain light of the autumnal morning began to diffuse itself through the latticed milk-house windows. All at once, during a pause in the labour, she fancied she heard a curious, hesitating fumbling with the latch of the door.

“Hark!” she cried, “what’s that?”

“Tis the wind,” said one of the churners.

“Nay, look, somebody’s a-tryin’ to get in,” returned the mistress, as the latch rose in a ghostly manner, fluttered, and fell. “Go to the door, Tom,” she continued, “and see what’s wanted.”

“’Tis maybe a spirit,” said Tom, shrinking back.

“Nonsense! What would a spirit want at the dairy door? ’Tis more like a tramp. Open it at once—You go, Jane.”

“I dursen’t,” said Jane, beginning to whimper.

“Not one of ye has a grain o’ sense!” said Mrs. Bold angrily.

She went to the door herself, just as the odd rattling began for the third time, opened it cautiously, and uttered a cry.

There stood the attenuated form of poor old Blackbird, looking huge and almost spectral in the dim light, but proclaiming its identity by a low whinny.

“Rabbit me!” exclaimed Tom, “if that there wold carcase ain’t found his way here again!”

But Mrs. Bold’s arms were round the creature’s neck, and she was fairly hugging him.

“Well done!” she cried ecstatically, “well done! Ye did well to come to I, Blackbird. I’ll stand by ye, never fear! I’ll not have ye drove away again.”

Blackbird stood gazing at her with his sunken eyes, his loose nether lip dropping, his poor old bent knees bowed so that they seemed scarcely able to sustain his weight; the rusty skin, which had once been of so glossy a sable, was scratched and torn in many places.

“He must have found his way out through the hedge. Well, to think of his coming here, Missis!”

“He knowed he come to the right place,” said Mrs. Bold, with flashing eyes. “Turn that there new horse out o’ the stall and put Blackbird back, and give en a feed o’ earn, and shake down a bit o’ fresh straw. ‘Tis what ye couldn’t put up wi’, could ye, Blackbird?” she continued, addressing the horse, “to find a stranger in your place! Ye come to tell I all about it, didn’t ye?”

When the farmer came down half-an-hour later, his wife emerged from the shed in the neighbourhood of the pig-styes, where she had been ministering to the wants of two motherless little pigs. One small porker, indeed, was still tucked away under her arm as she advanced to meet her husband, and she was brandishing the teapot, from which she had been feeding it, in her disengaged hand.

“Joseph,” she said, planting herself opposite to him, and speaking with alarming solemnity, “we’ve a-been wed now farty year come Lady Day. Have I bin a good wife to ’ee, or have I not?”

Page 78

“Why, in course,” Joseph was beginning, when he suddenly broke off. “What’s the new colt standing in the cart-shed for?”

“Never you mind the new colt—attend to I! Have I been a good wife to ’ee, or have I not?”

“In course ye have—no man need ax for a better. But why—”

“Haven’t I worked early and late, and toiled and moiled, and never took a bit o’ pleasure, and never axed ’ee to lay out no money for I? Bain’t I a-bringin’ up these ’ere pigs by hand for ’ee, Joseph Bold? And a deal of worry they be. ’Twasn’t in the marriage contract, I think, as I should bottle-feed sucking-pigs—was it now, Joseph? I d’ ‘low parson never thought o’ axin’ me if I were willin’ to do that, but I’ve a-done it for your sake.”

“Well, but what be ye a-drivin’ at?” interrupted the farmer, with a kind of aggrieved bellow, for his wife’s sorrowfully-reproachful tone cut him to the quick. “What’s it all about? What be a-complainin’ of? What d’ye want, woman? What d’ye want?”

“I want a pet,” returned Mrs. Bold vehemently. “Here I’ve been a-livin’ wi’ ye all these years, and ye’ve never let me keep so much as a canary bird. There’s the Willises have gold-fish down to their place, and they be but cottagers; and Mrs. Fripp have got a parrot. A real beauty he be, what can sing songs and laugh and shout like the children, and swear—ye’d think t’was Fripp hisself, he do do it so naitral!”

Joseph Bold fairly groaned:

“Good Lard! I never did think to hear ’ee talk so voolish—a sensible body like ye did always use to seem! Dear heart alive! Gold-fish! And a poll parrot! Well, Mary, I did think as a body o’ your years could content herself wi’ live things as had a bit more sense in ’em nor that.”

“Oh, I dare say,” returned his spouse sarcastically. “Pigs and sich-like!” giving a little tap to the wriggling, squeaking creature at that moment struggling under her arm, “and chicken and ducks! Nice pets they be.”

“Upon my word, a man ’ud lose patience to hear you. *Pets*—at your time o’ life, wi’ children grown up and married. Well, if ye want pets, ha’n’t ye had enough of ’em. Don’t ye have nigh upon a dozen lambs to bring up every spring?”

“’E-es, and where be they now, Joseph? Where be the lambs as I got up afore light in the frostis and snow to attend to? Where be they? Ye know so well as I do as butcher

had ’em, every one. That’s my complaint—you do never let me keep a thing as isn’t for killin’. A body’d need a heart o’ stone to stand it. This ’ere pig—ye know right well as he’ll be bacon afore this time next year.”

[Illustration: BLACKBIRD’S INSPIRATION “Here’s my little pet,” she cried jubilantly]

“Then, in the name of furtin have your fancy, woman! Give it a name, and I’ll get it for ’ee.”

“Ye give me your word, do ye, Joseph?”

“I bain’t a man to break it,” responded the farmer shortly.

Page 79

Mrs. Bold set the little pig carefully on its feet, and sidled across the yard, eyeing her husband the while with a curious expression that was half-fearful, half-triumphant. When she reached the closed stable door she opened it, plunged into the dark recess within, and reappeared, dragging forth by a wisp of his ragged mane—poor, decrepit old Blackbird.

“Here’s my little pet,” she cried jubilantly, delight at her success overmastering all other feelings. “You’ve give me your word, Joseph, and, as ye d’say yerself, ye bain’t the one to take it back. Here’s the only pet I’ll ever ax to keep. He’ll not cost much,” she added, seeing her husband’s face redden and his eyes roll threateningly. “He can pick about in the summer, and a bit of hay in the winter’ll be all he’ll need. I’ll make it up to ’ee, see if I don’t; and I think you do owe I summat, anyhow, for workin’ so hard as I always do.”

“Oh, in course, if ye put it that way,” he returned, huffily, “I haven’t got a word to say. I al’ays thought ’twas a wife’s dooty to help her husband, but since it seems to be a favour, I’m sure I did ought to be very grateful. Thank ye kindly, ma’am! P’r’aps ye’ll be so good as to shut up that beautiful pet o’ yourn now, and give me a bit o’ breakfast, if it bain’t troublin’ ye too much.”

“Oh, go on, Joseph!” exclaimed Mrs. Bold, with heightening colour, turning Blackbird about as she spoke, and propelling him before her towards the stall. “I couldn’t do nothin’ else nor want to keep him,” she added in an aggrieved tone, “when he come to the dairy door—he come actually to the dairy door!—same as if he knowed ’twas his last chance.”

The farmer did not answer, but in spite of himself a dawning expression of interest was perceptible on his face.

“‘E-es, an’ he must ha’ broke through a hedge to get out; he be cut about terrible wi’ thorns.”

“They did padlock th’ gate when I sent en back last time,” returned Joseph gruffly, adding, in the same tone, “Ye’d better sponge they sore places a bit after breakfast, and get dust out of ’em.”

Mrs. Bold installed Blackbird in his old quarters, and hastened to the house.

The meal which ensued was at first a somewhat silent one. In spite of her satisfaction at having gained her point, Mrs. Bold felt somewhat remorseful for the tactics she had employed; and her husband stolidly munched his bread and bacon with a solemn, not to say gloomy, countenance.

All at once, however, he began to roll his head from side to side, while the colour on his already rubicund face deepened so much that his wife gazed at him in alarm, dreading the ensuing outburst. But when after long repression the explosion actually took place, it proved to be one of harmless and jovial laughter.

“What is it?” inquired Mrs. Bold, laughing delightedly too, though she knew not at what.

Page 80

“I’ve bin a-thinkin’ o’ summat. Dear heart alive, Mary, the queer notions as do seem to be a-comin’ into our heads all this week! D’ye mind my sayin’, ‘I never knowed as you was a harse’? Ha! ha! Ye couldn’t say much to that, could ‘ee? And when I think o’ you standin’ in yard jist now, wavin’ the teapot and tuckin’ the little pig under your arm! ‘Bottle-feedin’ suckin’-pigs weren’t in the marriage contract,’ says you. Ho! ho! ho! Whatever put it i’ your head to say that, I can’t think.”

“I didn’t really mean it, my dear,” said Mary penitently, though she laughed still.

“I dare say not, but I’ve bin a-thinkin’ ’tis a pity your pet bain’t a size or two smaller—he be sixteen hands if he be a inch—else maybe ye’d like to have en in here a-layin’ on the hearthrug.”

Then husband and wife laughed long and loud, and their little difference was forgotten as their eyes met.

THE GIRL HE LEFT BEHIND HIM

On one particular Sunday in August, a brilliant sunny, breezeless day, such a day as would under ordinary circumstances conduce to certain drowsiness even in the most piously disposed, the church-goers of Little Branston were preternaturally alert, if not quite so attentive as usual. For behold! Corporal Richard Baverstock, Widow Baverstock’s only son, and the father of Matilda Ann, the three-year-old darling of the village, had returned from the wars with a very brown face, a medal, two or three honourable scars, and, it was whispered, a pocketful of “dibs.”

Every one knew about Corporal Dick, the sharp boy who had been the general pet and plaything in early years, much as his own “Tilly Ann” was now; the dashing soldier, whose occasional visits to his native place in all the glories of uniform had caused on each occasion a flutter of excitement which had endured long after his own departure; the hero of romance, whose sudden appearance with a beautiful bride, wedded secretly somewhere up the country, had made more than one pretty maid’s heart grow sore within her, and caused many wiseacres to shake their heads; the disconsolate young widower whose year-old wife had been laid to rest in the churchyard yonder, immediately after the birth of their child; the boy-father, bending half wonderingly over the blue-eyed baby on his mother’s knee; the warrior, wounded “out abroad,” whose letters had been passed from hand to hand in the little place, and conned over and admired and marvelled at till old Mrs. Baverstock, when each mail came to hand, found herself raised to a pinnacle of honour to which otherwise she would never have dared to aspire—he had come home now for a brief blissful fortnight before rejoining his

regiment at the depot. Not one of the congregation there present but had heard of his return on the previous day, and of how he had almost knocked over the old mother in the vehemence of his greeting, and how he had caught up Tilly Ann and hugged her, and some said cried over her; and how he had almost within the hour walked up to the little cemetery and knelt by his wife's grave, which, the neighbours opined, "howed a wonderful deal o' feelin' in the man as 'twas a'most to be expected he'd ha chose a second by now."

Page 81

“But they d’ say, my dear, as the women out abroad be a terrible ugly lot, and most of ’em black. Tisn’t likely as Corporal Baverstock ’ud so much as look at any o’ they, arter pickin’ sich a vitty maid for his first missis.”

It was Mrs. Cousins who made this remark to Mrs. Adlam, as they paced together along the flagged path that led to the church porch; and it is not surprising that both ladies felt constrained to turn their heads when the martial tread of Soldier Dick resounded up the church a few moments later.

Jenny Meatyard nudged Maggie Fripp.

“Do ’ee see his medal?” she inquired in a whisper.

Maggie nodded. “That there korky uniform do suit en wonderful well.”

Two village mothers exchanged glances of tender approbation, for, clinging to Corporal Baverstock’s hand, and taking preposterously long steps in the endeavour to keep pace with his strides, was Tilly Ann, in her best starched white frock, and with her yellow hair curled in a greater profusion of corkscrew ringlets than her granny had ever yet achieved.

“Bain’t it a pictur’?” one pair of motherly eyes seemed to say to the other, and I think many of the good simple folk performed their devotions all the better because of the consciousness of the two happy hearts, the man’s and the little child’s, beating in their midst.

The service once over, friends and neighbours gathered round the young soldier outside the church door. Those nearest spoke to him; those less fortunate, on the outskirts of the little crowd, contented themselves with admiring comments.

“He d’ seem to have filled out, though he have been punished so terrible out yonder.”

“My dear, they did tell I as his poor leg was all one solid wownd. D’ye mind how Mrs. Baverstock did take on, pore ’ooman. And well she mid.”

“Well she mid, indeed. Ah! ’tis a comfort to see as Corporal Baverstock d’ seem able to walk so well as ever. I see Mrs. Baverstock didn’t come to church—’tis a wonder.”

“Nay, no wonder at all. It bain’t likely as the poor body could leave her Sunday dinner the very first day her son be a-comed home. She’s busy, that’s what she be.”

“Ah! to be sure. There, Lard now, look at Tilly Ann! He’ve a-got her up in his arms. Dear, to be sure, ’tis a beautiful sight, they two faces side by side. The maid doesn’t favour her daddy a bit—nay, ’tis the very pictur’ o’ the pore wife.”

“’E-es; she had that yellow hair, and them great big blue eyes. There, I’ve a-got a china cup at home what be jist the same colour. ’Tisn’t nat’ral for a maid to have eyes that blue. I wouldn’t mention it to Mrs. Baverstock, nor yet to Dick, but I shouldn’t wonder at all if Tilly Ann was to follow her mother afore very long, pore little maid.”

“Ah! they do say as when a young mother be took like that, as often as not she’ll keep on a-callin’ and a-callin’, till the pore little thing she’ve a-left behind fair withers away.”

Page 82

While this cheerful line of prognostication was being followed up beyond her ken, Tilly Ann sat bolt upright in her father's arms, looking round her with a proprietary air, and occasionally patting his cheek with a broad dimpled little palm. She was a tall, well-made child, plump and fair, with rosy cheeks and sturdy limbs that would in themselves have given the lie to any dismal croakings; it was no wonder that "daddy's" eyes perpetually rested on her with a glow of pride.

"And she were quite a little 'un when ye did last see her, weren't she, Corporal?" said some one. (In Branston the good folk were punctilious with regard to titles.) "Ye'd scarce ha' knowed her I d' 'low if ye'd met her on the road."

"Know her," said Corporal Baverstock, "I'd know her among a thousand! 'Tis what I did write to my mother. Says I, 'I'd pick her out anywheres, if 'twas only by the dimple in her chin.'"

The bystanders nodded at each other; they remembered that particular letter well, and had much appreciated the phrase in question.

"To be sure, Corporal, so ye did, so ye did. And the maid have a dimple sure enough. There, 'tis plain for all folks to see."

Tilly Ann turned up her little face, and her father kissed the cleft chin with sudden passion. Then he tossed her up in his arms and laughed.

"Many a time I've a-thought o' that dimple," he observed, in rather an unsteady voice, "and wondered if I'd ever set eyes on it again."

"And look at her curls," said a woman admiringly. "They be a-sheenin' like gold to-day. She thinks a deal o' they curls, don't 'ee, Tilly? If anybody axed her for one she'd al'ays say she was a-savin' on 'em up for daddy—didn't 'ee, Tilly?"

Tilly Ann, overcome with coyness, buried her face in her father's shoulder, and giggled, wriggling her little fat body the while, and drumming on his side with her lace-up boots.

"Hold hard there!" cried he. "Them boots of yourn be so bad as a pom-pom. Come, we must be lookin' up the wold lady. Say Ta-ta, and we'll be off."

One blue eye peeped out shyly from beneath the forest of curls, one little sunburnt hand was waved comprehensively; a smothered voice uttered the necessary "Ta-ta," with an accompaniment of chuckles and wriggles, and the soldier, clasping his burden more tightly, and nodding laughingly right and left made his way towards home.

No one, looking at Mrs. Baverstock as she stood at her doorway in her neat black stuff gown, the sleeves of which were decently drawn down to her very wrists, would have guessed at the magnitude of the culinary labours in which she had been employed. The beef was now done to a turn, the “spuds” boiled to a nicety; she had made pastry of the most solid description, which was even now simmering in the oven—I use the word “simmering” advisedly, for in the generosity of her heart she had not spared the dripping. The tea was brewed, hot and strong, the teapot, singed by long use, standing on the hob. There was a crusty loaf, a pat of butter indented in the middle with one of Dick’s regimental buttons, and a plate of cakes, hard as the nether—millstone and very crumbly, having been purchased from the distant town at the beginning of the week in expectation of this auspicious day.

Page 83

“Well, mother, this be a spread!” cried the soldier, good-humouredly, as he set the child upon her legs. “I haven’t sat down to such a meal as this since I left old England. ’Tis fit for a king.”

Mrs. Baverstock rubbed her bony hands together; and laughed deprecatingly. She was a little woman, with very bright, beady black eyes, and hair that was still coal-black in spite of her wrinkled face. Her son was like her, but taller and better looking. One had but to glance at the child to realise that she must be the image of her mother.

“Nay, now,” said the widow; “I do do my best for ‘ee, Dick, but I d’ ’low it bain’t so very grand. I’d like to do ’ee honour. There bain’t nothin’ too good for ’ee to my mind, if I could give it ’ee.”

“I tell ’ee, mother, some of the poor chaps out yonder ’ud give summat to sit down to this ‘ere dinner. Bully beef wi’ a pound or two o’ raw flour, what you haven’t got nothin’ to cook wi’—it do make a man feel a bit sick, I can tell ’ee, when it do come day arter day.”

“Dear heart alive,” groaned his mother, “a body ’ud think they mid manage a bit better! Lard, to think on’t! Tis all along o’ the poor dear Queen bein’ dead, ye mid be sure! There needs to be a woman at the head o’ things! I reckon the Government be all made up o’ men folks now, and men never has any notion o’ doin’ for theirselves. There, I did use to say to father many a time, ’If I was to leave ’ee to yourself I d’ ‘low ye’d go eatin’ any kind o’ rubbish.’ There wants to be a sensible woman or two i’ th’ Government—no woman ’ud ever think o’ sendin’ out the poor chaps’ bit o’ food raw. There bain’t a hedger or ditcher but has his bit o’ dinner put ready for en, and I reckon soldiers have got stummicks much same as other folks.”

Dick had only half attended to this speech; he had been standing by the door intently gazing up the village street, and shading his eyes with his hand.

“Why, I’m blowed!” he exclaimed. “Here’s a mate o’ mine ridin’ this way! Yes, so it be. I thought he was goin’ a-coortin’. Hullo, Billy!”

A bicycle wheeled round abruptly, and the rider alighted at the cottage door. A big young man, with the bronzed face which would have announced his recent return from the front, even had not his khaki uniform proclaimed the fact.

“I thought I’d look ’ee up,” he explained, shaking hands with his friend with a somewhat sheepish air. “You and me bein’ mates, d’ye see, and me feelin’ a bit dull over yonder.”

“Why, what’s become o’ she?” interrupted Dick, with a grin.

“Don’t talk about her! She be just like the rest—’Out o’ sight out o’ mind’—took up wi’ a civilian soon as my back were turned. I reckoned I’d come and have a look at *your* maid.”

“Yes, to be sure!” cried Dick jovially. “My sweetheart han’t a-took up wi’ anybody else—she’ve a-been faithful and true.”

“What’s that?” inquired Mrs. Baverstock, coming forward, her little black eyes looking ready to start from her head.

Page 84

“Tis a kind of a little joke what me and Billy have a-got between us about my sweetheart. There, he can tell ’ee the tale while we’re eatin’. This ’ere be my mother, Billy. This be Mr. Billy Caines—a Darset man same as myself. Him and me was reg’lar pals out there, wasn’t we, Bill?”

“I d’ ’low we was,” responded Private Caines, after ceremoniously pumping Mrs. Baverstock’s hand up and down. “We did fight side by side, and we was wounded side by side, and we was a-layin’ side by side for weeks in the field hospital, wasn’t us, Dick?”

“I reckon we had a bit too much o’ that there hospital,” responded the Corporal, drawing forward a chair for his friend. “’Twas there we did have so much talk about my sweetheart. Ha, ha, ye didn’t know as I’d a-got a sweetheart, did ye, old lady?” he inquired of his mother. “Billy ’ull tell ’ee about that,” and he winked surreptitiously at his friend.

Mrs. Baverstock was evidently in a flutter. What between this sudden arrival of six feet of khaki-clad humanity and the innuendoes which had been recently thrown out, touching a subject on which she felt strongly (the possibility of Dick’s marrying again), she actually set the pastry on the table in the place of the beef, and helped the two soldiers to a cake each instead of a piece of bread.

“Why, you be wool-gathering, that you be. You’ve a-got everything in a reg’lar caddie!” cried her son, as she paused to clack her tongue remorsefully over her mistakes. “Business first and pleasure arterwards. Up wi’ the beef! Now then, Billy, fall to! A bit better tasted nor bully, bain’t it?”

Billy groaned appreciatively, with his mouth full, and silence ensued, during which Mrs. Baverstock cut up Tilly Ann’s dinner, and presented her with a spoon.

Tilly Ann’s eyes had been fixed unwinkingly upon the new comer since his arrival, and she had now apparently classified him, for, after successfully piloting one or two spoonfuls of beef and potato to her little red mouth, she paused, drummed on the table with the handle of her spoon, and remarked conclusively:

“Another daddy!”

“Dear, to be sure! Hark to the child,” said granny, while the two men laughed uproariously.

“The little maid’s sharp, I can tell ’ee,” announced Dick; “she do know the difference between soldier and civilian a’ready. Never see’d no soldier but I afore, and now, when another do come, says she to herself, ‘This must be another daddy.’ Ho! ho!”

“She’ve a-got more sense nor many a wolder maid,” returned Private Caines gloomily; “she do know what’s what—I d’ ‘low she wouldn’t ha’ gone a-takin’ up wi’ a (qualified) civilian when you weren’t to the fore. She be a bonny little maid, too,” he added reflectively, eyeing the chubby pink and white face. “Yes, you’ve a-got good taste, as you did tell I out yonder.”

“Come, don’t ’ee spoil the tale,” cried the Corporal, laughing; “begin at the right end. My mother here do want to hear about my sweetheart.”

Page 85

“I don’t want to hear no sich thing,” retorted the old woman, querulously, but anxiously, too. “I do know ’ee better nor to think you’d have any sich nonsensical notions; you as be a widow man, and have a-buried sich a lovin’ wife, what have a-left ’ee the darlingest little maid to keep. Us do want no step-mothers; us do want all the love, the wold mother and the little maid.”

Dick’s face twitched, and his eyes clouded, but before he could answer, Private Billy Caines, who was not endowed with remarkably acute perceptions, began his narrative in a loud and merry voice.

“Him and me was knocked over the same day—I shouldn’t wonder but what it was the same shell. I couldn’t tell ’ee for sure about that, for I were hit all to flinders, and for a bit they thought I was done for. But when I did get a bit better, and did begin to look about, I’m danged if the first thing I did see weren’t poor old Dick’s long white face, lyin’ there so solemn, wi’ his girt hollow black eyes, a-starin’ and a-starin’ straight i’ front of en. I did use to watch en, and he did always look the same—sorrowful and anxious, and one day I did call out to en, soft like, ‘What be thinkin’ on, man? The us’al thing, I s’pose?’ He did scraggle his head a bit round on the pillow and squint back at me. ‘What mid that be?’ says he. ‘Why,’ says I, ’the girl I left behind me!’ ‘Be that what you be a-thinkin’ on?’ says he. ‘O’ course,’ says I; ‘what else?’ ‘What else, indeed?’ says he, and he did sigh same as if he had a bellows inside of en.”

“Did he actually say he was a-thinkin’ about soom maid?” interrupted Mrs. Baverstock wrathfully.

“Bide a bit,” retorted Private Caines, wagging his head portentously; “I be a-tellin’ the tale so quick as I can. Well, I did get tired o’ watchin’ en layin’ there, starin’ and sighin’, so I did begin to tell en about somebody *I* did think a deal on then, but have a-changed my mind about now; and he did listen and laugh a bit, but I could see he were a-thinkin’ about his own sweetheart all the time. So says I at last, ‘I d’ ‘low she be a vitty maid?’ ‘Who?’ says he, scraggling round again. ‘The girl ye left behind ye,’ says I. ‘Ah, to be sure,’ says he. ‘Yes, she be a reg’lar pictur.’ ’Well, you mid tell us a bit about her,’ says I; ’I’ve a-told ’ee all about my maid. Blue eyes, I s’pose?’ Seein’ as his own be so black as sloes, I reckoned ’twould come naitral to en to take up wi’ a fair maid. ‘Yes,’ says he, ’so blue as the sky at home on a June day!’ I made a good shot, I told en. ‘A good bit o’ colour, I d’ ‘low!’ (Him bein’ a sallow man, d’ye see.) ‘A pair o’ cheeks like roses,’ he says; ’and a little neck as white—as the snow—nay, that’s too cold—’tis more like the white of a white flower, bless her!’”

Mrs. Baverstock threw herself back in her chair and snorted.

“This here be a pretty kind o’ story to tell your mother the very first day as you do come home,” she said, in trembling tones. “And the poor, innocent child a-sittin’ there a-listenin’ to every word.”

Page 86

“Nay, now, ma’am, you must hear me to the end,” cried Caines, bursting into a guffaw; while Dick, looking somewhat conscience-stricken, patted his mother’s hand and besought her in a loud whisper not to take on.

“Lard bless ‘ee, that weren’t all!” exclaimed Billy. “You should ha’ heerd the chap a-ravin’ about her little hands, and her darlin’ little feet, and I don’t know what all. ‘And what colour mid her hair be?’ I axed him arter a bit, when he’d a-told me everythink else he could call to mind. ‘I s’pose her hair be fair?’ ‘I s’pose so,’ says he, lookin’ a bit queer. ‘Why, don’t ye know?’ says I. ’D’ye mean to say ye’ve forgot the colour?’ ‘Why,’ says he, ’to tell ’ee the truth, mate, she hadn’t much hair o’ any kind when last I did see her.’ ‘Bless us!’ says I. ‘What be talkin’ on? Ye haven’t been and took up wi’ a bald wold maid?’ ‘She bain’t so very old,’ says he, and he did pull blanket up o’er his mouth so as I shouldn’t see en laughin’!”

Here the hero of the tale startled his mother by suddenly exploding, and she turned upon him indignantly.

“I do really think as we’ve a-had enough o’ this here nonsense. I can’t make head or tail on’t. You and your friend do seem to be a-keepin’ up a regular charm, and I can’t make out no sense in it.”

“I be very nigh done now, missis,” cried Caines jubilantly; “there be but a little bit more. I did sit and stare at en when he did say his sweetheart hadn’t no hair, and at last I did ax en the question straight out, ‘How old mid she be when you did last see her?’ ’About two months,’ says he. Ho, ho, ho! ‘About two months!’ Yes, I’ve a-been away from England a good bit, an’ when I left her she hadn’t a hair on her head, nor yet a tooth in her mouth.’ And the two of us did laugh and laugh till we did very nigh bust our bandages.”

“’Twas the little maid I did mean,” explained Dick, as his mother still stared gapingly from one to the other. “’Twas my little maid as I was a-thinkin’ on when I did lie on that there wold stretcher what I did think I should never leave again. I did think o’ she and wonder what ‘ud become o’ she if doctor couldn’t make a job o’ me. Come here, Tilly. You be daddy’s little sweetheart, bain’t ye?”

The child ran to him, and climbed upon his knee, and he passed his hand proudly through her mass of yellow curls.

“See here, mate; plenty o’ hair here now.”

He gathered up the thick locks half absently, twisting them clumsily into a kind of knot, and, throwing back his head, surveyed her pensively for a moment; then he kissed her just at the nape of the neck, and let the curls drop again with a sigh.

Mrs. Baverstock's beady eyes became momentarily dim; she did not possess by nature a very large amount of intuition, but love is a wonderful sharpener of wits.

"Dear, yes," she said. "She be the very pictur' of her mother." Then, suddenly bursting out laughing and clapping her hands together, "So that were the girl ye left behind ye!"

Page 87

[Illustration: THE GIRL HE LEFT BEHIND HIM ‘So that were the girl ye left behind ye’]

ELLENEY

Mrs. McNally’s house was situated at the extreme end of the village, and looked not upon the street, but right out into the glen, so that when Elleney opened her attic window in the morning her blue eyes feasted on a wilderness of trees, exquisite at this season with an infinite variety of tints; for the tender bloom of an Irish spring is only surpassed in beauty by the glories of an Irish autumn. The undulating masses that would in October glow with a myriad fires were now clad in the colours of the opal, delicate pinks and blues and greys of yet unopened buds forming a background to the pure vigorous green of larch or chestnut in full leaf, while here and there a group of wild cherry-trees—trees which in a few months would be clothed in the hues of the sunset—-caught the morning light now on raiment as snowy as the summit of the Jungfrau.

Elleney gazed, and rubbed big eyes yet heavy with slumber, and gazed again; then she heaved a deep sigh, half of rapture, half of regret.

“It’s beautiful, entirely,” she said. “An’ that big black hill at the back o’ the trees is the grandest ever I seen. But I’d sooner be lookin’ out at the little green hills at our own place, with me poor father—the Lord ha’ mercy on his soul!—walkin’ about on them.”

She passed her hand across her eyes now for another reason, and then sighed again, but presently took herself to task.

“Sure, I’ve no call at all to be frettin’; I have a right to know better, so I have. Me poor dada is gone where he’s out of his throubles, please God; an’ amn’t I too well off myself here in this grand place, with me a’nt an’ everywan so kind to me? Ye ought to be ashamed o’ yourself, Elleney, to go cryin’ an’ frettin’ when it’s down on your knees ye should be, thankin’ God. Hurry up now, an’ on with your clothes an’ get the breakfast! Sunday mornin’ an’ all, an’ the girls down an’ workin’ about, I’ll engage.”

These remonstrances, which were made aloud with exceptional severity of aspect, but in the sweetest, softest little voice in the world, appeared to have the desired effect. The eyes were dried, the sobs checked, and soon Elleney emerged from her garret, and came clattering down the corkscrew stairs in her unyielding little best boots, clad all in her Sunday finery, every sunshiny hair in its place, and her blooming face a vision of wonder and delight to any chance beholder.

One such beholder encountered her in the narrow passage downstairs, and respectfully flattened himself against the wall to let her pass.

“It’s a fine mornin’, Miss Elleney,” said the young man.

Elleney started, stared, and then broke into a laugh.

“It’s you, is it, Pat Rooney? I didn’t know ye, ye’re so grand this mornin’. You do be generally all over flour—I never see you without lookin’ out for flour.”

Page 88

“An’ I never see you, Miss Elleney,” responded Pat Rooney gallantly, “without bein’ put in mind of another kind o’ flower. Sure, you look the very same as a rose to-day.”

“Not at all,” laughed Elleney, blushing, but quite frank and unconcerned; “I wouldn’t ask to be thought aiqual to anything so grand as that. A daisy maybe, or—”

“Elleney!” called a shrill voice from some distant region. “*Elleney!* We are all famished entirely. Girl alive, do ye forget it’s your week for the breakfast? I never heard the like! We’ve been waitin’ this half-hour.”

“Laws,” ejaculated Elleney under her breath, and with a conscience-stricken face. “I didn’t forget; but sure I didn’t know what o’clock it was, an’ there’s the eggs to boil an’ all. Me cousin Juliana ‘ull be murderin’ me. I’m just bringin’ it, Ju,” she called back apprehensively. “And goodness only knows if the kettle ’ull be boilin’, itself,” she added in a distracted undertone, “an’ I’m afther forgetting my big aperon upstairs, an’ if I go an’ black my best dress me a’nt ‘ull be the death o’ me.”

“Aisy now, don’t be tormentin’ yourself that way,” cried Pat soothingly. “Sure I’ll just go along wid ye into the kitchen, an’ if I don’t have that kettle bilin’ in next to no time my name’s not Pat Rooney. It’s me that’s used to fires—ye’ll see how I’ll blow up yours for ye, miss. There now, wasn’t it by the greatest good luck I looked in this mornin’ to pick up my pipe that I left down below in the bakehouse? Cheer up, Miss Elleney—we’ll not be keepin’ them long waitin’ for their breakfasts now.”

Even while speaking the young baker had preceded the girl into the kitchen, possessed himself of the bellows, and blown up the fire; he now deftly dropped an entire basketful of eggs into a saucepan, and, with a large loaf in one hand and a knife in the other, began with almost incredible speed to cut off thick rounds.

“I suppose ye have the cloth laid?” he inquired presently.

“Me cousin Henerietta does that; I only has the breakfast itself to get, an’ there’s not much trouble in that, on’y I’m such a slowcoach, an’ someway—I don’t know how it was —my wits went wool-gatherin’ this mornin’.”

“Well, I’ll tell ye what, miss; if ye’ll wet the tay an’ pop the pot down on the hob, the eggs ‘ull be done, an’ by the time ye have them brought in the bread ’ull be toasted illigant. Herself won’t know ye, the way ye’ll have got up the breakfast so quick.”

“I’m very thankful to ye, Pat,” said Elleney gratefully. “I’m sure I don’t know what in the world I’d have done without ye. But it’s too bad to be givin’ ye all that trouble.”

“Not at all, miss; no trouble at all. Sure I wouldn’t have it on me conscience for you to be roastin’ that lovely face off o’ yourself at this terrible hot fire. The egg-cups is there on the shelf behind ye—I can see them from here. There now, sure ye have it all grand —wait till I open the door for ye. Now I’ll have the loveliest lot o’ toast ready for ye when ye come back. That thray’s too heavy for ye entirely—it’s a poor case altogether that I haven’t got another pair o’ hands.”

Page 89

Elleney's gay little laugh trilled out again, and she shot a glance of confiding gratitude from under her thick dark lashes in the direction of the young baker which set the honest fellow's heart dancing, though he well knew how little such innocent warmth meant.

"God bless her," he murmured as he returned to his toasting fork; "if a dog done anything for her she'd look at it the same. If she wasn't the mistress's niece itself, ye might whistle for her, Pat, me boy."

Meanwhile Elleney had gone staggering along the passage with her heavy tray, and now bumped it against the parlour door as an intimation that she would like some one to open it.

This unspoken request was acceded to so suddenly that she almost fell forward into the room.

"I was waitin' on the eggs," she explained hurriedly, as she recovered her balance and tottered forward with her burden; "but here they are for yous now, and the tea is wet this good bit, an' the toast is very near ready."

The room was full of women; no less than eight of them sat expectantly round the empty board. Besides Mrs. McNally herself and her four daughters, three nieces had been added to her family on the death of their mother, Mrs. McNally's only sister.

"Sure they're all the same as me own," the good woman was wont to say, looking round affectionately at the girls. "There's times when I have to be thinkin' which is which—-upon me honour, there is." And thereupon she would roll her broad shoulders, and wink with both eyes together after her own good-natured fashion; and no one who lived in the house with her could doubt that she spoke the truth.

Elleney had only recently been added to the group; she spoke of the head of the house as "me a'nt," but she was in truth no relation to the kindly soul who had taken compassion on her destitute condition, being a niece of the late Mr. McNally's first wife. Perhaps no other woman in the world would thus have admitted her to a circle already somewhat inconveniently large; but, as Mrs. McNally said, "One more or less didn't make much differ, an' sure the Lord 'ud be apt to make it up to her, an' Elleney was a useful little girl, a great hand at her needle, an' with a wonderful turn for business, God bless her."

Mrs. McNally invariably alluded to the odd little house where her many avocations were carried on as her "establishment," and spoke habitually of "the business." It would have been hard to define the precise nature of this business. There was a bakery attached to

it, over which Pat Rooney presided, driving round the country each afternoon with the results of his labours. Juliana and Henrietta McNally sold groceries at one counter, and Matilda and Maria sold calico and flannel and boots at another. Hams and stockings hung in parallel lines from the ceiling, and there was a mysterious little railed-off chamber at the back of the house, reached by a swing door, on which the word “Bar” was set

Page 90

forth in gold letters, with a printed legend underneath announcing that Diana McNally was licensed to sell wines and spirits to be consumed on the premises. Here Bridget and Mary Nolan held sway. They were “stale girls” in the opinion of the neighbours, and therefore, as their aunt felt, the most suited for this post. Maggie, their youngest sister, migrated between shop and bar, and spent much of her time in rolling up “ha’porths o’ twist” in scraps of newspaper. Elleney, who was “tasty,” and possessed of a wonderful light hand, turned her talent for millinery to account, and soon Mrs. McNally was able to add trimmed hats and ready-made dresses to the other departments of her flourishing concern. Predisposed as she was by nature to like any helpless young creature, she had rapidly grown to appreciate the girl’s talents, and was now genuinely fond of her, though it must be owned that her daughters occasionably grumbled, and that the real nieces were undisguisedly jealous.

Bridget looked up now, with a sniff, as Elleney began with great haste to hand the eggs about the table.

“You’ve been long enough over it, anyhow,” she remarked. “Mary and me was wonderin’ whether ‘twas milkin’ the cow ye were or bakin’ the bread.”

“An’ she hasn’t brought the toast yet,” grumbled Mary, drawing up her chair.

“It’s very near done,” returned Elleney eagerly. “Pat Rooney said he’d have it ready by the time I come back.”

“Pat Rooney!” exclaimed the eight voices, in varying tones of amazement and disapproval; even Mrs. McNally’s sounding forth a deep note of wondering concern.

“Pat Rooney, child! What brings him into the house at this time o’ th’ mornin’? What brings him here at all to-day indeed?”

“He come to fetch his pipe,” explained Elleney, scarlet with confusion; “and when he seen me so run, an’ so put about because I was a bit behind, he offered to stay an’ help me. It’s him that’s makin’ the toast.”

Juliana McNally, a frosty-faced person, no longer in her first youth, looked round with a scandalised face.

“Did ye ever hear the like o’ that?” she exclaimed. “Pat Rooney! The impident fellow! If I was you, m’mah, I’d walk him out o’ the kitchen this very minute. Ye had no call to let him in at all, Elleney. Not one of us ‘ud ever dream o’ such a thing, would we, Henny?”

“Indeed we would *not*,” returned Henny or Henrietta as she was indifferently called in the family. “Cockin’ him up that way. He had a right to know better, an’ not go forgettin’ himself and his place altogether.”

“Aye, indeed,” chimed in Bridget. “Set him up! Him and his ould cart.”

“Then if it was nothin’ but the cart that ailed him, Bridget,” returned Juliana severely, “there wouldn’t be much to complain of. I’ll trouble ye not to be turnin’ up your nose at the beautiful new cart me mother sent for all the way to Dublin. Ye paid pounds and pounds for that same cart, didn’t ye, m’mah?”

Page 91

“To be sure I did,” responded Mrs. McNally promptly. “There, now, don’t be upsettin’ yourselves, girls. Elleney didn’t know any better, she’s that innicent, poor little girl. She won’t do it again, I’ll engage—will ye, Elleney? Ye see, me dear,” she added in a confidential undertone, “we do have to be very particular in an establishment like this. ‘Twouldn’t do for me at all to go lettin’ a boy like Pat Rooney forget himself. He’s a very decent boy, poor fellow, an’ his mother—the Lord ha’ mercy on her!—was a most respectable poor woman. But he must be kept in his place, me child, an’ ye see—”

“A-ah, m’mah, in the name of goodnsss sit down and pour out the tea,” interrupted Anna Maria impatiently. “I’m dyin’ for me cup. An’ sure ye haven’t brought us anythin’ at all to eat yet, Elleney. Off with you now, an’ bring that same toast whoever made it. The poor child’s frightened out of her wits. Sure what harm if ye did ask Pat Rooney to help ye, itself—ye can soon get shut of him again. Ju, for mercy’s sake take that crabby ould face off o’ ye. ’Pon me word ’tis enough to curdle the milk.”

Anna Maria’s own face was of the round good-humoured order. “She took after the mother,” the neighbours said, and had certainly inherited a large share of kindliness and jollity.

“Faith! Nanny’s right,” cried Mrs. McNally, relaxing. “Go fetch the toast, Elleney, and give Mr. Pat Rooney his marchin’ orders at the same time.”

“What am I to say?” inquired Elleney, her eyes round with alarm above cheeks that were still crimson.

“Bid him get out of that,” returned her aunt, laughing.

Elleney took up her tray, and went away with a lagging step. The kitchen door was wide open, and in the aperture stood Pat, flushed with his exertions, and holding triumphantly aloft an immense dish of beautifully browned toast.

“There now,” he cried jubilantly, “I’ll throuble them to put their teeth through the whole o’ that in a hurry. Isn’t that a fine lot? But I know they does be great aiters within there.”

“I’m very thankful to ye, Pat,” said Elleney, with a downcast face.

“Sure I’m not meanin’ to show disrespect,” resumed he, quick to note her expression, but mistaking its cause. “It’s a powerful big family your a’nt has, first and last, and why wouldn’t they ait? I’ll tell ye what, Miss Elleney, I’ll just stop here in the chimbley corner, an’ if they does be wantin’ any more toast I’ll have it made for them afore you can turn round.”

“Oh no, Pat,” cried Elleney in alarm. “That wouldn’t do at all. Me a’nt bid me tell ye—-me a’nt said—”

“Well, what did she say, miss, dear?” inquired Pat, as she faltered.

“She wasn’t best pleased,” stammered the girl. “She thought I done wrong lettin’ you help me; she bid me give ye marchin’ orders”—catching at what seemed to her the least offensive manner of conveying her aunt’s behest.

Page 92

“Well, I can soon march,” said Pat, in a slightly offended tone, and turning even a deeper red than before. “I’ll be off out o’ this in a minute.”

“Sure ye’re not angry with me, Pat?” said Elleney timidly, as she followed him to the door. “I’m very grateful for all ye done for me.”

“To be sure you are,” said Rooney, without turning his head, and in another moment the house door slammed behind him.

Elleney returned somewhat mournfully to the parlour, there to find the whole family in a state of violent excitement.

Mrs. McNally had just received a letter, which she was clutching fast with both fat hands; while the seven girls were simultaneously endeavouring to read its contents over her broad shoulders.

“If yez ’ull sit down like good children,” she exclaimed, as Elleney entered, “I’ll read it all out—every word. An’ yez ’ull all know as soon as meself. But ye have me distracted entirely, tormentin’ me the way ye’re doin’ now. Musha! did anybody ever see such a scrawl as the man writes?”

“Sure, I can see it plain enough from here,” cried Juliana, and with a sudden deft movement she twitched the document out of her mother’s hands. “I’ll read it, m’mah, in half the time you do be thinkin’ about it.”

“Very well, me dear, very well,” agreed Mrs. McNally resignedly. “Ye have the best right, afther all. It concerns you more nor me.”

Juliana smoothed out the paper, and began to read in a high-pitched monotonous voice, and without any regard to punctuation, of which, indeed, in all probability, the letter was devoid.

“’Dear Mrs. McNally,—I write these few lines hoping you are quite well as I am at present thank God it’s a long time since we come across each other but I haven’t forgot the old times and I am sure yourself is the same I did be hearin’ a while ago about the fine family of daughters you have God bless them and how well you prospered in business dear Mrs. McNally I have one son a fine young man that I do be anxious to settle in life—’

“Look at that now!” put in Mrs. McNally jocularly. “Didn’t I say the letter was more for you than for me, girls?”

“Whisht! can’t you whisht?” put in Henrietta eagerly. “Go on, Ju!”

“‘Settle in life,’ resumed Ju. ‘The farm is doin’ finely for me thanks be to God though I’m not able to stock it as well as I’d like these bad times.’ He’s lookin’ out for a bit o’ money, ye see, m’mah?”

“To be sure he is,” responded her mother comfortably. “Trust Tim Brennan to be lookin’ out for that. An’ why wouldn’t he, the poor ould fellow? Dear knows, it’s hard set the most o’ the farmers is to live at all. He’s a cute ould schemer, Tim is, though.”

“‘There’s not one o’ the girls in these parts I’d let him take up with at all,’ went on the reader, ’but it come to me mind that if you was willin’ we might make up a match between himself an’ one o’ your fine young daughters—’

Page 93

“Yous ’ull have all the luck, I suppose?” put in Maggie Nolan enviously.

“Not at all. What’s that he says here about nieces, Ju?” returned Mrs. McNally, leaning over her daughter’s shoulder, and pointing with her plump forefinger.

“‘Or maybe one of them three nieces I was hearin’ ye have livin’ with ye I knew your poor sister Bridget R.I.P. as well as I know yourself an’ I know all she done for her family.’”

“The sharpness o’ that!” interrupted Henrietta. “The ould fellow knows me A’nt Bridget had a nice little fortun’, an’ I’ll engage he made sure the three of yous has a share in the business.”

“Young nieces,” soliloquised Matilda, looking pensively at Bridget and Mary.

“Young daughters, too, if ye please,” returned Bridget with spirit, and her glance fell upon Juliana.

“Well, go on, Ju, finish it,” said Mrs. McNally, laughing immoderately. “You can all be pulling caps for him afterwards.”

“‘Me son,’ read Juliana, ‘has business in Dublin this next week an’ if you’ve no objections he could run out on an early train some mornin’ an’ pay his respects to yourself an’ the girls an’ he can be tellin’ ye all about our place an’ his prospects in life he’s the only son I have an’ its a good farm an’ a comfortable house an’ many a girl would think she was doin’ well for herself so hopin’ you’ll think well of the idea I will say no more this time yours ancettery, TIMOTHY BRENNAN. P.S.—My son Brian is six foot high an’ has a beautiful head of hair he is very—’ What in the name o’ fortun’ is that word, m’mah?”

“Hearty, is it?” said Mrs. McNally, craning her short neck. “No—happy, maybe—no, that’s not it. *Healthy*, that’s it! ‘He is very healthy.’”

“Laws!” said Henrietta, “that’s a quare thing to be sayin’. Who cares whether he’s healthy or not?”

“A-ah, me dear,” returned her mother sagely, “when ye get to my age ye’ll know it makes a great deal o’ differ—especially to a farmer. The poor d’da! Rest his soul!—well, well, we won’t be talkin’ o’ them times, but he was a great sufferer; an’ if it was a farmer he was the house wouldn’t have held him. It’s a terrible thing for a poor farmer to be tryin’ to go about his place, an’ him not gettin’ his health. I’m glad this young fellow is healthy.”

“Six foot!” commented Matilda, who was inclined to be sentimental.

“A beautiful head of hair,” exclaimed Anna Maria, with a giggle. “Troth, if it’s me he takes a fancy to I’ll be combin’ it for him.”

“Well,” said Juliana indignantly, “I think ye’re takin’ too much on yourself, Nanny, to go pickin’ him up that way. There’s others has a better right to be considered first.”

“You’re the oldest, of course,” said Anna Maria meekly.

“There’s others older nor her, though,” burst out Bridget.

“The oldest daughter has the first claim,” cried Juliana, with heightened colour.

Page 94

“To be sure, to be sure,” said Mrs. McNally nervously. She was very much in awe of her firstborn, who was indeed possessed of a considerable amount of determination. “The young man, of course, ’ull make his own choice, but I must say I think it ’ud be only becoming if it was Ju.”

Juliana glanced triumphantly round on the row of crestfallen faces, and a sudden silence fell, during which Elleney, who had stood listening with deep interest, suddenly remembered the now sodden toast and handed it dutifully round.

Maggie Nolan’s eyes met hers in wrathful protest as she helped herself.

“Did ye ever see sich a girl as Ju?” she whispered.

“A regular grab-all. Of course if me a’nt goes favourin’ her, the poor fellow ’ull have to take her. But I pity him, aye do I.”

“Sure maybe he won’t,” whispered Elleney back, consolingly. “He’ll be apt to be pickin’ wan o’ the young ones—I shouldn’t wonder if it was yourself, Maggie.”

“If it wasn’t for the money I dare say you’d have as good a chance as the rest of us,” said Maggie, mollified by this tribute; “but of course the father wouldn’t hear of any girl without a fortun’.”

By an odd freak of fate, however, it was Elleney who first had speech with Brian Brennan when he came to seek a wife in Mrs. McNally’s house. Elleney, indeed, was not in the house when his eyes first fell upon her; she was kneeling on the doorstep, scrubbing it with might and main. He had driven out from Dublin instead of coming by train, and arrived in consequence earlier than was expected. Elleney wore the pink cotton frock in which she went about her work of a morning; her sleeves were rolled up, and her skirt pinned back. Her face was flushed with a lovely colour, and the breeze lifted loose strands of her nut-brown hair, as she squatted back on her heels in answer to the stranger’s salutation.

“Is Mrs. McNally within? I think she’s expecting me.”

“Oh,” said Elleney, looking up with those big astonished eyes of hers, “is it Mr. Brennan?”

“It’s that same,” responded Brian cheerfully.

Elleney jumped up, knocking over her pail in her agitation, and wiped her little damp hands on her apron.

“Me a’nt is in the shop,” she said hurriedly. “If ye’ll walk inside I’ll call her in a minute.”

“A-ha!” said Mr. Brian, “you’re one o’ the nieces, are ye? Are the rest anyways like ye?”

“They wouldn’t take it as a compliment if ye were to say so,” replied Elleney. “This way, sir.”

The big young man followed her into the parlour. He was a very big young man, and he had a beautiful head of hair, black and curly; and he looked extremely well fed and pleased with the world in general.

“Bless me, child, what a show ye are!” exclaimed Mrs. McNally, when Elleney breathlessly summoned her. “Look at your sleeves, and your skirt tucked up an’ all. I declare I’m ashamed of my life—”

Page 95

“How could I know it was him?” protested Elleney.

“To be sure, to be sure, none of us expected him; an’ any way it doesn’t matter about you. Here, pull down your sleeves, dear, and take my place for a bit. Where’s Ju?”

“She’s above, doin’ her hair, and Henny’s sewin’ the bows on her dress.”

“Well, well, I’ll call them. You’ll have to keep the shop goin’ altogether, Elleney, this day. All the girls is wild to have a chance, an’ I know ye won’t mind doin’ a bit extra.”

“I wonder which it will be,” meditated Elleney. “If I was him I’d take Nanny.”

But Mr. Brian seemed quite unmoved by Nanny’s rollicking charms. He was, indeed, to some extent struck by the appearance of Juliana, who, with her hair done up into what her mother called a “shin-on”—a fashion much affected when she was a young woman—and wearing a silk dress with flounces innumerable of the terra-cotta hue beloved, for some occult reason, of her kind, entered the room with an air of stately magnificence. The young visitor was very respectful to Juliana, and spoke in particularly genteel tones when addressing her. But his eyes wandered perpetually towards the door, and an acute observer might have detected a certain lengthening of visage at each fresh arrival on the scene.

When the seven specimens of maidenhood, from among whom he was expected to make his choice, were at length seated in various constrained attitudes about the room, a dead silence fell, broken only by an occasional nervous remark from Mrs. McNally, and a monosyllabic response from the wooer. The relief was general when the “decent body,” engaged to help for the day, opened the door with a very black hand, kicked it still further back with a gaping shoe, and finally entered the room bearing a large tray.

A repast, which the lady aforesaid subsequently described as “sumpchus,” soon adorned the board, and Mrs. McNally, with a deprecating giggle, advised Brian to sit next the partner he liked best.

He hesitated, and cast a baffled glance round the room.

“Sure the whole of the family isn’t here, is it?” he inquired.

“How many more would you want?” returned Juliana, with a playfulness strongly tinged with asperity.

“Didn’t I see another young lady an’ I comin’ in?” he persisted.

“Who in the name of wonder did he see, m’mah?” whispered Henrietta, while the others looked blank.

“I b’lieve ’twas Elleney let him in,” said Mrs. McNally. “The poor fellow, he’s that well-mannered he thinks bad o’ sittin’ down without her. We’re all here that can be here at present, Mr. Brian,” she remarked aloud. “Little Elleney that ye seen awhile ago is mindin’ the shop for me. We’ll keep a bit hot for her till I go to take her place.”

“Oh! that indeed?” said Brian rather blankly. “Isn’t it clever of her to be able to mind the shop, and she so young? I s’pose she’s the youngest of them?”

Page 96

“Well, there isn’t much to choose between her and Maggie there,” returned his hostess; “and, indeed, I may say the same o’ my daughter Anna Maria. There is but a year between the three, one way or the other. Well, since you’re so bashful, Mr. Brian, I’d best choose a place for ye. Will ye sit there on me right, between Bridget and Juliana? There does be safety in numbers, they say, so ye needn’t be afeard.”

“Afeard is it?” responded Brian, with simulated jocularity, though his countenance still wore an expression of dismay. “Troth! it ’ud be a poor lookout if I was that easy frightened. ‘Faint heart,’ ye know.”

But, though Mr. Brennan was very gallant and witty, the entertainment was felt by every one to be somewhat flat, and the relief was general when the young man proposed to go outside and smoke a bit of a pipe. Mrs. McNally, however, considered it her duty to protest.

“Sure, we’re not that particular,” she observed, with her jolly laugh. “Don’t be goin’ out in the cold, Mr. Brian.”

“Why, what sort of a fellow would I be at all if I could forget myself that way,” he returned, rising with alacrity. “Would ye have me pizenin’ the young ladies? I hope I know me manners better.”

“There’s no denyin’ he has elegant manners,” commented his hostess, as the door closed behind him. “I never wish to see a nicer young man. Well, girls, what do ye think of him!”

“The poor fellow was shy, m’mah,” said Juliana. “He kept blushin’ every time I looked at him.”

“A-ah, g’ long!” exclaimed Bridget, with startling warmth. “Not a blush on him, then! Sure, it was his natural colour; he has a beautiful complexion.”

“His eyes was rovin’ from one to the other,” cried Anna Maria, giggling; “I was near dyin’ with laughin’. You could see as plain as anything he was axin’ himself all the time, “Will I have this one,’ or ‘Will I have that one?’”

“A-ah, not at all,” cried Juliana, reddening. “I didn’t see a sign of his eyes rovin’. Anybody with a grain of sense ’ud know his mind was pretty well made up.”

“Listen to that, now!” laughed Nanny, who was certainly good-tempered. “You’re out there, Ju. No; but I’ll tell you the way it was with him. Says he to himself, looking at you, ’That one is the eldest and a fine girl altogether, but her nose is too long.’ An’ then

he'd look round at Bridget, 'She's got a nice bit o' money,' he'd say, 'but she's a bit too old for me.' An' then he'd look at me, 'A nice healthy lump of a girl,' he'd say, 'but too many freckles.' An' then Maggie maybe 'ud have a turn—"

"Och, don't be goin' on with such nonsense, child," interrupted her mother, quick to observe certain tokens of an impending storm. "Don't let him find yez quarrellin' an' fightin' when he does be comin' back. Wait till I tell yez all he's afther tellin' me about his own place. I questioned him a bit afore yez come down."

Page 97

The girls crowded eagerly round her, and she repeated with unction the description of the various glories which awaited the future Mrs. Brian Brennan.

Every one had forgotten Elleney and her little bit of dinner; every one, that is, except the new-comer, who, after casting a nervous glance at the parlour window on finding himself outside the house, had made straightway for the almost deserted shop.

Customers were not many at that hour of the day, and Elleney had only sold a pound of bacon and a couple of bootlaces since her aunt's departure. She was sorting ribbons with a somewhat melancholy face when Brian passed through the glass door and made his way to the counter.

"Is that where ye have yourself hidden?" he inquired gaily. "They thought to keep ye shut up out o' me sight, but I was a match for them as cute as they were. 'Twas a shame for them not to let you come in to dinner."

"Sure somebody had to mind the shop," returned Elleney. Then her little pink and white face dimpled all over with smiles. "Have ye chose yet, Mr. Brian?" said she.

"Bedad, I think I have," quoth Brian, gazing at her admiringly.

Elleney clapped her hands. "Oh dear, is it Juliana?"

"It's not Juliana, then," said he. "Is that the big one with the top-knot? Sure, what sort of taste d'ye think I have?"

"It wouldn't be Bridget!" cried she, laughing till every little white tooth was visible.

"That's a bad shot—I'm afeard ye're no hand at guessin'."

"I wished it was Nanny," said Elleney earnestly; "she's the best-hearted girl in the world."

"You wished it was her, do ye? Well, I'm sorry I can't gratify ye. My choice was made before I ever set eyes on e'er a one of them."

"Then ye'd no call to come here at all," interrupted Elleney indignantly.

"Whisht! Don't be bitin' the nose off me that way. Ye little schemer, ye know very well it's yerself that carries all before ye. Sure, who'd have eyes for any one else when you were to the fore?"

“Och, Mr. Brian, it’s a shame for ye!” cried Elleney, with flashing eyes. “Ye’ve no right to come givin’ me impidence that way. I’ll call me a’nt.”

“An’ what would ye do that for? It’s the truth I’m tellin’ ye, darlint. The very first minute I seen ye on the doorstep the heart leapt out o’ me breast. You’re my choice, mavourneen, though I don’t so much as know your name yet.”

Elleney gazed at him timidly. He was a pleasant-looking young fellow, and his eyes were very kind. She turned quite pale because of the rapid beating of her heart. What a wonderful thing it was that the prize over whom all her rich cousins had been disputing should have fallen to her share—to her, poor little penniless Elleney.

“It’s too good of you entirely,” she was beginning in a tremulous voice; “but I don’t think you ought to go disappintin’ your father and me a’nt.”

Page 98

But before she could proceed further in her little speech the narrow door which gave access to the house was thrown open and Mary Nolan appeared upon the scene.

“Elleney, you’re to—” she was beginning, when she suddenly stopped, and, to use her own expression, “let a yell” that brought her aunt and cousins in tumult to the scene.

“I couldn’t for the life o’ me help it,” she explained as they crowded round her. “When I had the door opened who did I see but himself”—designating Brian—“with his impident arm round Elleney’s waist—the bould little scut!”

“Sure, I didn’t ax him to put it there,” protested Elleney, beginning to cry; “I didn’t rightly know what he was doin’.”

“Ladies,” said the suitor, “don’t disthress yourselves. There wasn’t a ha’porth of harm in it—me arm was in the right place. I come here by my father’s wish an’ with your consent, ma’am, to choose one o’ your family for my wife. Me clargy wouldn’t let me marry the whole of yez, so I have to be content with one, an’ I’m after choosin’ this one.”

Juliana laughed shrilly and ironically, and Henrietta clapped her hands together; the rest stood round with stony faces, except Nanny, who cast a dubious and compassionate glance at Elleney.

“Lord save us!” ejaculated Mrs. McNally, when she had recovered her wits, “I never thought o’ such a thing. I had a right to have told ye—it’s a mistake. Me poor young man, come away with me an’ I’ll tell ye.”

“No mistake at all, ma’am,” Brian was beginning, with a bright backward glance at Elleney; but Mrs. McNally clutched him by the arm, looking so much disturbed the while, that the words died on his lips, and he suffered himself to be drawn along the passage and into the parlour. The others also melted away with many scornful murmurs and withering glances, all except Nanny, who hurled herself round the counter and caught Elleney in her arms.

[Illustration: ELLENEY “With his impident arm round Elleney’s waist”]

“Ye poor misfortunate innicent!” she exclaimed. “Why didn’t ye tell him ye weren’t rightly one o’ the family?”

“He didn’t give me time,” faltered Elleney; adding with more spirit, “Besides, what matter if it’s me he likes the best?”

“Bless us an’ save us!” groaned Nanny; “sure how can ye get married when ye haven’t so much as a one pound note o’ your own?”

“Do you think he didn’t know?” gasped Elleney, looking very blank.

“Not a know,” responded Nanny, with decision. “My mother had a right to have told him, but some way not one of us dreamed of him thinkin’ of you. Sure, girl alive, if *he* was willin’ itself, his father ’ud never agree to his havin’ ye.”

“I s’pose not,” said Elleney; “but ye don’t know all he’s afther sayin’ to me, Nanny.”

“Och, divil doubt him!” exclaimed Nanny, with a vexed laugh. “Sure, that’s the way they all does be goin’ on. If ye had more sense, Elleney, me dear, ye’d know how to be up to them. Whisht!—here’s m’mah!”

Page 99

Poor Mrs. McNally's heavy foot was now heard hastening along the passage, and in another minute she entered—alone, her kind face was all puckered up with concern, and at first sight of it Elleney knew exactly how matters stood. She disengaged herself from Nanny and went quietly up to her aunt.

"I hope you explained to him that I didn't rightly understand what he was sayin'," she observed with a certain childish dignity that took the others by surprise. "It was all a mistake, of course, but there's no great harm done."

"Not a bit of harm at all, me dear," groaned Mrs. McNally. "Not a bit of harm in the world—only for the disappointment."

"No disappointment," returned Elleney; her eyes were steady, though that red under-lip of hers would quiver; "no disappointment, a'nt, I hope. He'll be sure to pick out one of the girls, won't he?"

"I b'lieve so," answered Mrs. McNally, propping herself against the counter. "He's afther tellin' me his father 'ud be the death of him if—"

"Sure that's all right," interrupted her niece. "Nanny, you ought to go and see to him."

"Do, Nanny," said the mother. "He was askin' for you."

"Then he may ask away," retorted Nanny. "Do ye remember the story o' the Connaught woman who said 'Purse, will ye have him?' when the fellow made up to her for her money. My purse says 'No.' Let him try Juliana. Is that the bar bell ringing?"

"Aye, it is; ye'd best be off an' see what's wanted. Bridget and Mary is so taken up with that young fellow I declare they don't know whether they're on their heads or their heels."

"Aye, indeed," cried Anna Maria with her jolly laugh. "I seen them prancin' round him like a couple o' goats, as old as they are."

She vanished, and Mrs. McNally also went away.

Some time later Pat Rooney entered the shop, bearing a large tray of newly-baked loaves. His face wore a solemn, not to say sulky, expression, and he looked neither to right nor to left. Before he had finished piling up the loaves in their allotted corner, however, a suspicious sound attracted his attention, and he turned reluctantly round. A small figure was crouching in the darkest angle of the "dress department," with its apron over its head.

“Is it cryin’ ye are?” said Pat sternly.

For all answer Elleney sobbed afresh.

The young man drew nearer, and Elleney tilted up one elbow as a hint to him to keep his distance.

“Bedad, ye have no right to be cryin’,” remarked Pat in a withering tone. “It was the other way wid ye altogether when I looked in through the door a while ago, on my way back from me dinner. If I hadn’t seen it wid me own two eyes,” he added with scornful severity, “I wouldn’t have believed it was you that was in it at all.”

Elleney jerked down her apron, and looked up with eyes that blazed beneath their swollen lids.

Page 100

“How dar’ ye speak to me that way?” she cried.

Pat snorted: “To be sure I’ve no right to say a word at all,” he returned, with wrathful irony. “A poor fellow like meself has no call to have any feelin’s—but ye might have knocked me down with a feather when I seen that strange chap with his arm about your waist.”

“Oh Pat!” gasped Elleney, and overcome with shame and woe, she burst into fresh tears, and buried her face in the unresponsive folds of a linsey-woolsey petticoat which dangled from a peg beside her.

Pat immediately melted.

“Amn’t I the terrible ould ruffian to go upsettin’ ye that way!” he groaned remorsefully. “There now, Miss Elleney, don’t mind me. I’m not meself to-day. I’m a regular ould gomeril. Sure it had to come sooner or later. It’s meself knew very well I’d have to stan’ by and see ye carried off some fine day by whoever was lucky enough to get ye. Some fellows has all the luck in this world, and maybe they’re no better nor others that hasn’t any luck at all.”

But Elleney scarcely heeded the latter part of this speech; it seemed to her she could never lift up her head again. Pat knew—Pat had seen!

“Oh dear,” she sobbed inarticulately, after a pause, “I think I’ll die with the shame of it. I don’t know how I come to let him do it at all, but I didn’t rightly know—I didn’t think—-an’—an’ he said he was so fond of me an’ ’twas me he wanted for his wife.”

“Faith,” retorted Pat, “it’s himself’s the gentleman doesn’t let the grass grow under his feet—an’ why would he? Well, alanna,” he continued in an altered tone, “don’t be frettin’ yourself anyway. Bedad, I wouldn’t blame—”

“Ah, but I blame myself,” interrupted Elleney, wringing her poor little hands. “I’ll—I’ll never look up again afther the disgrace he’s afther puttin’ on me. Sure ’twas all a mistake—he thought I was one of the family, an’ when me a’nt tould him the way it is with me, he just tossed me away the same as an ould shoe. I b’lieve he’s makin’ up to Juliana now.”

Pat emitted a kind of roar, but, before he could ventilate his feelings further, the door communicating with the house was quickly opened and Mr. Brian Brennan walked in.

“Are ye there, darlint?” he inquired, in a tone of melancholy tenderness; “I’m just come to tell ye the poor case I’m in—”

“Then ye’ll be in a poorer case in something less than no time if ye don’t behave yourself, me brave young gentleman!” cried a choked voice in his ear, and almost before he could realise what was taking place, Brian Brennan found his six-foot length laid low upon the dusty shop floor, while his beautiful head of hair rolled aimlessly about amid a collection of boots and tin buckets. Pat Rooney was sitting on his chest, his knees pinioning his arms, and clutching each of his broad shoulders with a vigorous hand. He was not half the size of the prostrate giant, but love and fury lent him unnatural strength. His flour-bedecked face worked convulsively, his eyes gleamed under their powdered lashes.

Page 101

Elleney uttered a stifled scream, and then stood transfixed with horror.

“Ye passed your word to Miss Elleney a while ago that it was her ye’d have for your wife,” said Pat firmly. “Are ye goin’ to stick to your promise or are ye not?”

“Get up out o’ that, ye ruffian,” spluttered Brian. “What business is it of yours anyway?”

“Ruffian yourself!” said Pat. And he heaved up Mr. Brennan’s shoulders a little way, and then loosed his hold suddenly, so that the fine curly head bumped once more against the tin pails. “Will ye gi’ me a straight answer, or will ye not?”

“I’ll pay ye out for this when I get upon my legs!” growled Brian. “As for that young lady, she knows very well I can’t—”

“Ye can’t what?” cried Pat, rolling a threatening eye at him.

“I can’t keep my word,” said Mr. Brennan, with as much dignity as was compatible with his position.

“Ye mean ye won’t, I s’pose,” remarked Pat, with ominous calm.

“Well, then, I won’t!” shouted Brian, heaving himself up at the same time with a futile attempt to rid himself of his adversary.

“Ah!” retorted Pat, tightening his grasp on the powerless shoulders, and repeating his previous manoeuvre with such success that his victim saw a multitude of stars. “Ye won’t, won’t ye? No; but ye will!—I tell ye, ye will! Ye will, me fine gentleman!”

With each reiteration of the phrase the unfortunate Brian’s head received fresh damage, and Pat, who was warming to his work, had just announced that he was going to give Mr. Brian the finest thrashing he ever had in his life, when Elleney, who had hitherto been petrified with alarm and amazement, rushed to the rescue.

“In the name o’ goodness, Pat Rooney,” she cried, in a voice that trembled as much with anger as with fear, “get up this minute! It’s outrageous—altogether outrageous!”

“Never fear, Miss Elleney, asthore!” cried Pat triumphantly, baring his arms the while for action. “Run away out o’ this while I tache him manners! The dirty spalpeen! He’ll not have it all his own way, anyhow. I’ll give him a trimmin’!”

“I forbid ye, Pat, to do any such thing!” cried Elleney, almost with a shriek. “I declare I’m ashamed o’ my life! Who gave you leave to go mixin’ up my name?—makin’ so little of

me? Oh dear! oh dear!" and the poor child began to sob again. "What have I done to be disgraced an' tormented that way!"

Her blue eyes were drowned in tears, her pretty cheeks blanched.

Pat sat back on his prostrate foe, and stared up at her with astonished concern. Elleney sobbed louder than before, and Brian, raising his voice, uttered a forcible expression of opinion.

"Bless us an' save us!" exclaimed a voice in the passage, and the door, being thrown wide open, revealed the portly form and scandalised face of no less a person than Mrs. McNally herself.

"Who is it that's cursin' an swearin' that way?" she began, but broke off abruptly as she realised the scene within.

Page 102

“Oh, a’nt, me heart’s broke entirely!” cried Elleney, running to her, and hiding her face on her ample shoulder.

Pat cleared his throat diffidently, insensibly relaxing his grip the while, so that, with a slight effort, Brian was enabled to roll him on to the floor, and to rise, looking very sheepish.

“Was it fightin’ the two of yez was?” said Mrs. McNally severely. “Sure, that’s a disgrace. Look at your coat all over dust, Mr. Brennan, and the big lump on your forehead risin’ up the size of an egg!”

Brian squinted over his shoulder to ascertain the condition of his coat, but being unable to carry out the rest of Mrs. McNally’s injunctions and survey the lump on his own forehead, he passed his hand over it instead, and turned towards Pat with an expression of virtuous indignation.

“That fellow there was near bein’ the death of me,” he exclaimed.

“Musha! what is it all about at all?” queried Mrs. McNally. “Elleney, quit cryin’ an’ tell me what happened ye? What was that impident fellow Pat doin’ rollin’ Mr. Brennan on the floor?”

Elleney shook her head, and wept, and nearly throttled her aunt, but entered on no explanation.

Quick steps were now heard in the passage, and Anna Maria burst in.

“What in the world is Elleney cryin’ for?” she exclaimed; “an’ goodness gracious! look at Mr. Brennan, the show he is! Is it up the chimney ye were? For the matter of that Pat isn’t much better. What’s all this, m’mah?”

“I’m sure I couldn’t tell ye, me dear,” returned her mother. “I can’t get a word o’ sense out of any of them. Brian Brennan here says that Pat is afther bein’ the death of him.”

“Ah, then now,” cried Anna Maria sarcastically, “isn’t he very delicate, the poor fellow, to be so near made an end of by a little fellow half his size!”

“I was took by surprise,” explained Mr. Brian, with dignity, “or I could easy have settled him with one finger.”

“Well, but what call had ye to go doin’ it, Pat?” insisted Anna Maria. “’Twasn’t your place to go knocking a visitor down, I think.”

“I’m very sorry, miss, if ye think I’m afther takin’ a liberty,” returned Pat firmly; “but I’d knock any man down who went to insult Miss Elleney.”

Elleney dropped her arms from her aunt’s neck and whisked round, her blue eyes blazing through her tears.

“I’ll thank ye not to be mixin’ yerself up with my business at all, Pat Rooney. Nobody asked you to meddle.”

“Was it Mr. Brennan ye were cryin’ about, me poor child?” said Mrs. McNally, in a compassionate but distinctly audible whisper.

Brian shot a melting glance towards her.

“Upon me word,” he was beginning plaintively, when Elleney interrupted him with a little shriek of exasperation, and a stamp of her foot.

“Oh dear, oh dear, everything is contrairy this day! I’d have ye to know, Mr. Brennan, that I’d be long sorry to cry for you—if ye was to go down on your two knees I’d never have ye! I know the kind o’ young man ye are now, an’ I’ll not fret after ye. I couldn’t help cryin’ at first at the disrespectful way ye were afther treatin’ me, but I wouldn’t have anything to say to ye now for the whole world.”

Page 103

“Well done!” cried Pat approvingly, while Anna Maria giggled.

“Maybe there’s others that thinks different,” said Brian in a nettled tone.

“Oh yes,” put in Anna Maria quickly, “her elders and betters—was that what you were goin’ to say? Juliana’s to be had, Mr. Brian. She’d be a mother to ye.”

“Upon me word, Nanny,” said Mrs. McNally, “it doesn’t become ye to be talkin’ that way of your elder sister.”

“Sure, what harm?” responded Nanny blithely. “All I said was she’d be a mother to him. Sure, what could be better than that?”

Brian, with all his faults, was gifted with a sense of humour, and looked at Anna Maria with a twinkle in his eye.

“Bedad,” he said, “I’ve that much respect for Miss Juliana I’d be afraid o’ me life to ask her to put up with me.”

“Well, there’s Bridget then,” said Nanny. “Bridget’s a fine girl, an’ she’s got a fine fortun’, an’ the whole of us knows that’s what *you’re* lookin’ afther, Mr. Brian.”

“I wouldn’t say that altogether,” said Brian, stammering a little. “Yous all know the way it is with me. ‘Tis me father that’s makin’ the match for me, and I have to choose one of the family. No one can feel more sorry nor I do for the unfort’nate mistake I’m afther makin’; I went altogether too quick, and I was very much to blame. I’m sure I ax Miss Elleney’s pardon.”

Elleney made a little inarticulate rejoinder, and turned away. Pat looked daggers at his whilom victim, and Mrs. McNally, folding her arms, looked sternly round.

“The less said about some things the better,” she remarked. “Mr. Brian, I’ll trouble ye to go into the parlour—ye’d best go with him too, Nanny; all the girls are there.”

“Will ye step up to the show-room?” said Nanny, with a giggle.

“Troth,” returned Brian, who was now in some measure recovering his self-possession, “I think the best o’ the stock is what I’m afther seein’ in the shop.”

He followed her out of the room, and a slight scuffle was presently heard in the passage. Mrs. McNally solemnly closed the door, and came back to Pat and Elleney, who stood looking equally downcast and confused.

“I’d like to know, Pat Rooney,” she said, gazing at the young man sternly, “what talk at all this is between you and me niece? What business is it o’ yours to interfere? I don’t understand it at all, Elleney—I’m very much put about—”

“It’s no fault of Miss Elleney’s, ma’am,” said Pat quickly. “She’d nothin’ to say to it at all. I forgot meself altogether. When I seen that fellow makin’ little of a chance that I’d give the two eyes out o’ my head for—”

“O Pat, whisht for goodness sake!” interrupted Elleney. “Ye oughtn’t to be talkin’ like that.”

“Sure I know that very well, Miss Elleney, darlint—I know I might just as well be cryin’ for the moon. But the murder’s out now, an’ ’pon me word I’m glad of it. I couldn’t stop here the way I am—I’d go mad altogether. I’ll throuble ye to look out for another boy, Mrs. McNally, ma’am—I wish to leave in a week’s time.”

Page 104

Mrs. McNally gasped.

“Isn’t it the great fool you are, Pat Rooney, to go give up your good place for a stupid notion like this? Ye know Miss Elleney ’ud never demean herself to you.”

“Ay, ma’am, I know she looks on me as the dirt under her feet.”

“Then stop where ye are,” said Mrs. McNally, comfortably. “You’re a very good boy when you don’t let your wits go wool-gatherin’. As for my niece, she’s no notion of encouragin’ any nonsense—have ye, Elleney?”

Elleney’s long lashes were downcast, and she nervously twisted her apron.

“Sure ye haven’t, dear?” said her aunt persuasively. “Tell the poor foolish fellow that ye haven’t, an’ then he’ll be puttin’ it altogether out of his head.”

Elleney raised her eyes and looked at Pat, and then dropped them again.

“He’s the only one in the wide world that cares for me,” she said, with a quivering lip.

“Bless us and save us!” gasped Mrs. McNally. “If that’s the way it is, Pat, ye’d best be off with yourself.”

Pat turned as red as a cherry, and then as white as his own flour.

“Miss Elleney, dear,” he whispered, “d’ye know what ye’re sayin’? D’ye know I’m such a great big fool that I’m beginning to think the most outrageous nonsense. I’ll be beginnin’ to think soon, me jewel, that ye might some day be gettin’ a bit fond o’ me, an’ maybe say Yes when I ax ye a question. Sure ye didn’t think of that, alanna?”

“Will ye whisht, ye impident fellow?” cried Mrs. McNally angrily. “Of course she thought o’ no such thing.”

Elleney turned her sweet eyes deprecatingly towards her aunt, and murmured very faintly—

“I don’t know—I—I think I did.”

* * * * *

Half-an-hour afterwards Mrs. McNally entered the parlour with a dubious, almost timid, expression on her good-natured face. Most of her family was gathered round the hearth, talking in muffled tones, and with gloomy countenances. Behind the window-

curtain Brian Brennan and Anna Maria were tittering together. Mrs. McNally jerked her thumb inquiringly over her shoulder, and raised her eyebrows.

“Is that the way it is?” she whispered.

“You’d better ask them,” returned Juliana, with her nose in the air.

Bridget sniffed audibly.

“She reg’larly thrun herself at his head,” said Mary spitefully.

“Did I indeed?” said Nanny, emerging from behind the window-curtain. “Brian here could tell yous a different story. He’s been beggin’ an’ prayin’ this half-hour, an’ I haven’t give him an answer yet.”

“Ah, but you will!” said Brian, with an ingratiating smile.

“If I do then it ‘ull be for the sake of servin’ you out. Ye never heard the like of the life I’ll be leadin’ ye. Ye’ll only be sorry once, an’ that’ll be for ever.”

“I’ll risk that,” said Brian gallantly.

“Well, well, well,” said Mrs. McNally, clapping her hands; “so it’s to be you, Nanny! ‘Pon me word it rains weddin’s this evenin’. I don’t know whether I’m on me head or me heels. There’s Elleney, now—nothin’ll serve her but to go takin’ up with Pat Rooney.”

Page 105

“Pat Rooney!” exclaimed Anna Maria, while the rest of the family echoed the name in varying tones of shrill disapproval.

“Aye, indeed,” said Mrs. McNally, dropping into a chair.

“Pat Rooney. Her mind’s made up, it seems, and ’pon me word, though I thought she’d have looked higher, I can’t altogether blame the girl. Sure what sort of a husband can she expect, and her without a penny? An old widower maybe, or maybe a fellow with one leg. Pat’s gettin’ good wages, an’ the two of them were talkin’ o’ takin’ that little thatched cabin just out of the town—”

“A cabin!” said Juliana, and began to turn up her eyes, and to make a strange clucking noise in her throat.

“For goodness’ sake, Ju, don’t be goin’ off in highsterics,” cried Nanny quickly. “Sure what matter if ’tis a cabin itself! I’ll engage she’ll keep it as clean as a new pin—and she’s a great hand at her needle, so she is. Sure she’ll be able to do dressmakin’ for the quality.”

“An’ of course,” said Mrs. McNally, casting a deprecating glance round at the irate faces, “we mustn’t forget she doesn’t rightly belong to the family. Tis no disgrace to us at all, an’ really an’ truly, girls, I’m almost glad to think she’s comfortably settled.”

“To be sure,” said Bridget, “she’s no relation at all to any of us. A little girl that me a’nt took in out of charity. Why wouldn’t she marry the baker—”

“My blessin’ to her!” said Mary sourly.

Juliana left off clucking, and smiled sarcastically. “She isn’t breakin’ her heart after you, Mr. Brian, at any rate,” she remarked. “She wasn’t long in getting over her disappointment.”

“I must say I didn’t think she’d make so little of herself,” he returned, drawing himself up.

“How d’ye like that, Nanny?” said Juliana spitefully. “I declare Mr. Brian’s quite upset.”

“Ah, the poor fellow, is he?” said Anna Maria, whose good-humour was imperturbable. “I declare I’ll have to get married to him now if it’s only to comfort him.”

And thereupon she burst into a hearty laugh, in which Brian Brennan joined.

IN ST. PATRICK'S WARD

It was intensely, suffocatingly hot, though the windows on either side of the long room were wide open; the patients lay languidly watching the flies on the ceiling, the sunshine streaming over the ochre-tinted wall, the flickering light of the little lamp which burned night and day beneath the large coloured statue of St. Patrick in the centre of the ward. It was too hot even to talk. Granny M'Gee—who, though not exactly ill, was old and delicate enough to be permitted to remain permanently in the Union Infirmary instead of being relegated to the workhouse proper—dozed in her wicker chair with her empty pipe between her wrinkled fingers. Once, as she loved to relate, she had burnt her lovely fringe with that same pipe—"bad luck to it!"

Page 106

but she invariably hastened to add that her heart ‘ud be broke out an’ out if it wasn’t for the taste o’ baccy. Her neighbour opposite was equally fond of snuff, and was usually to be heard lamenting how she had r’ared a fine fam’ly o’ boys an’ girls, and how notwithstanding she had ne’er a wan to buy her a ha’porth in her ould age. Now, however, for a wonder she was silent, and even the woman nearest the door found it too hot to brandish her distorted wrists, according to her custom when she wished to excite compassion or to plead for alms. There would be no visitors this morning; not the most compassionate of “the ladies,” who came to read to and otherwise cheer the poor sufferers of St. Patrick’s ward, would venture there on such a day.

The buzzing of the flies aforesaid, the occasional moans of the more feeble patients, the hurried breathing of a poor girl in the last stage of consumption were the only sounds to be heard, except for the quiet footsteps and gentle voice of Sister Louise. There was something refreshing in the very sight of this tall slight figure, in its blue-grey habit and dazzling white “cornette,” from beneath which the dark eyes looked forth with sweet and almost childish directness. Sister Louise was not indeed much more than a child in years, and there were still certain inflections in her voice, an elasticity in her movements, a something about her very hands, with their little pink palms and dimpled knuckles, that betrayed the fact. But those babyish hands had done good service since Sister Louise had left the novitiate in the Rue du Bac two years before; that young voice had a marvellous power of its own, and could exhort and reprove as well as soothe and console, and when the blue-robed figure was seen flitting up and down the ward smiles appeared on wan and sorrowful faces, and querulous murmurs were hushed. Even to-day the patients nodded to her languidly as she passed, observing with transitory cheerfulness that they were kilt with the hate, or that it was terrible weather entirely. One crone raised herself sufficiently to remark that it was a fine thing for the counthry, glory be to God! which patriotic sentiment won a smile from Sister Louise, but failed to awaken much enthusiasm in any one else.

The Sister of Charity paused before a bed in which a little, very thin old woman was coiled up with eyes half closed. Mrs. Brady was the latest arrival at St. Patrick’s ward, having indeed only “come in” on the preceding day, and Sister Louise thought she would very likely need a little cheering.

“How are you to-day, Mrs. Brady!” she asked, bending over her.

“Why then indeed, ma’am—is it ma’am or Mother I ought to call ye?”

“’Sister’—we are all Sisters here, though some of the people call Sister Superior ‘Reverend Mother.’”

“Ah, that indeed?” said Mrs. Brady, raising herself a little in the bed and speaking with great dignity, “Ye see yous are not the sort o’ nuns I’m used to, so you’ll excuse me if I don’t altogether spake the way I ought. Our nuns down in the Queen’s County has black veils ye know, ma’am—Sisther I mane—an’ not that kind of a white bonnet that you have on your head.”

Page 107

“Well, do you know our patients here get quite fond of our white wings as they call them?” returned Sister Louise, smiling. “But you haven’t told me how you are, yet. Better, I hope, and pretty comfortable.”

A tear suddenly rolled down Mrs. Brady’s cheek, but she preserved her lofty manner.

“Ah yes, thank ye, Sisther, as comfortable as I could expect in a place like this. Of course I niver thought it’s here’ I’d be, but it’s on’y for a short time, thanks be to God! My little boy’ll be comin’ home from America soon to take me out of it.”

“Why, that’s good news!” cried the Sister cheerfully. “We must make you quite well and strong—that is as strong as we can”—with a compassionate glance, “by the time he comes. When do you expect him?”

“Any day now, ma’am—Sisther, I mane—aye, indeed, I may say any day an’ every day, an’ I’m afeard his heart’ll be broke findin’ me in this place. But no matther!”

Here she shook her head darkly, as though she could say much on that subject, but refrained out of consideration for Sister Louise.

“Well, we must do all we can for you meanwhile,” said the latter gently. “Have you made acquaintance with your neighbours yet? Poor Mrs. M’Evoy here is worse off than you, for she can’t lift her head just now. Tell Mrs. Brady how it was you hurt your back, Mrs. M’Evoy.”

“Bedad, Sisther, ye know yerself it was into the canal I fell wid a can o’ milk,” said the old woman addressed, squinting fearfully in her efforts to catch a glimpse of the new patient. “The Bishop says the last time he come round, ‘I s’pose,’ he says, ‘ye were goin’ to put wather in the milk.’ ‘No,’ says I, ’there was wather enough in it before.’”

Here Mrs. M’Evoy leered gleefully up at the Sister, and one or two feeble chuckles were heard from the neighbouring beds; but Mrs. Brady assumed an attitude which can only be described as one implying a mental drawing away of skirts, and preserved an impenetrable gravity. Evidently she had never associated with “the like” of Mrs. M’Evoy in the circles in which she had hitherto moved.

“And there’s Kate Mahony on the other side,” pursued Sister Louise, without appearing to notice Mrs. Brady’s demeanour. “She has been lying here for seventeen years; haven’t you, Kate?”

“Aye, Sisther,” said Kate, a thin-faced sweet-looking woman of about forty, looking up brightly.

“Poor Kate!” said the Sister in a caressing tone. “You must get Kate to tell you her story some time, Mrs. Brady. She has seen better days like you.”

“Oh, that indeed?” said Mrs. Brady, distantly but politely, and with a dawning interest; “I s’pose you are from the country then, like meself.”

“Ah no, ma’am,” returned Kate. “I may say I was never three miles away from town. I went into service when I was on’y a slip of a little girl, an’ lived with the wan lady till the rheumatic fever took me an’ made me what I am now. You’re not from this town, I s’pose, ma’am.”

Page 108

“Indeed, I’d be long sorry to come from such a dirty place—beggin’ your pardon for sayin’ it. No, indeed, I am from the Queen’s County, near Mar’boro’. We had the loveliest little farm there ye could see, me an’ me poor husband, the Lord ha’ mercy on his soul! Aye, indeed, it’s little we ever thought—but no matther! Glory be to goodness! my little boy’ll be comin’ back from America soon to take me out o’ this.”

“Sure it’s well for ye,” said Kate, “that has a fine son o’ your own to work for ye. Look at me without a crature in the wide world belongin’ to me! An’ how long is your son in America, ma’am?”

“Goin’ on two year now,” said Mrs. Brady, with a sigh.

“He’ll be apt to be writin’ to ye often, I s’pose, ma’am.”

“Why then, indeed, not so often. The poor fellow, he was niver much of a hand at the pen. He’s movin’ about, ye see, gettin’ work here an’ there.”

Sister Louise had moved on, seeing that the pair were likely to make friends; and before ten minutes had elapsed each was in possession of the other’s history. Kate’s, indeed, was simple enough; her seventeen years in the infirmary being preceded by a quiet life in a very uninteresting neighbourhood; but she “came of decent people,” being connected with “the rale ould O’Rorkes,” and her father had been “in business”; two circumstances which impressed Mrs. Brady very much, and caused her to unbend towards “Miss Mahony,” as she now respectfully called her new acquaintance. The latter was loud in expressions of admiration and sympathy as Mrs. Brady described the splendours of the past; the servant-man and the servant-maid, who, according to her, once formed portion of her establishment; the four beautiful milch cows which her husband kept, besides sheep, and a horse an’ car, and “bastes” innumerable; the three little boys they buried, and then Barney—Barney, the jewel, who was now in Amerika.

“The finest little fella ye’d see between this an’ County Cork! Over six fut, he is, an’ wid a pair o’ shoulders on him that ye’d think ’ud hardly get in through that door beyant.”

“Lonneys!” said Kate admiringly.

“Aye, indeed, an’ ye ought to see the beautiful black curly head of him, an’ eyes like sloes, an’ cheeks—why I declare”—half raising herself and speaking with great animation, “he’s the very moral o’ St. Patrick over there! God forgive me for sayin’ such a thing, but raly if I was to drop down dead this minute I couldn’t but think it! Now I assure ye, Miss Mahony, he’s the very image of that blessed statye, ’pon me word!”

Miss Mahony looked appreciatively at the representation of the patron of Ireland, which was remarkable no less for vigour of outline and colouring than for conveying an impression of exceeding cheerfulness, as both the saint himself and the serpent which was wriggling from beneath his feet were smiling in the most affable manner conceivable.

“Mustn’t he be the fine boy!” she ejaculated, after a pause. “I’d love to see him—but I’ll niver get a chanst o’ that, I s’pose. Will he be comin’ here to see ye, ma’am?”

Page 109

“He’ll be comin’ to take me out of it,” returned the mother. “He doesn’t raly know I’m in it at all. I’ll tell ye now the way it is. When the poor father died—the light o’ heaven to him—an’ bad times come, and we had to give up our own beautiful little place, Barney brought me to town an’ put me with Mrs. Byrne, a very nice respectable woman that was married to a second cousin o’ my poor husband’s, an’ I was to stop with her till he came back from America with his fortune made. Well,” pursued Mrs. Brady, drawing in her breath with a sucking sound, which denoted that she had come to an interesting part of her narrative, “well, he kep’ sendin’ me money, ye know, a pound or maybe thirty shillin’ at a time—whenever he could, the poor boy, an’ I was able to work the sewin’-machine a little, an’ so we made out between us till I took this terrible bad turn. Well, of course troubles niver comes single, an’ the last letther I got from my poor little fella had only fifteen shillin’ in it, an’ he towld me he had the bad luck altogether, but, says he,’My dear mother, ye must on’y howld out the best way ye can. There’s no work to be got in this place at all’ (New York I think it was). ‘But I am goin’ out West,’ says he, ’to a place where I’m towld there’s fortunes made in no time, so I’ll be over wid ye soon,’ he says, ‘wid a power o’ money, an’ I’m sure Mary Byrne’ll be a good friend to ye till then. The worst of it is,’ he says, ’it’s a terrible wild outlandish place, and I can’t be promisin’ ye many letthers, for God knows if there’ll be a post-office in it at all,’ says he; ‘but I’ll be thinkin’ of ye often, an’ ye must keep up your heart,’ he says. Well,” sucking up her breath again, “poor Mrs. Byrne done all she could for me, but of course when it got to be weeks an’ months that I was on my back not able to do a hand’s turn for meself, an’ no money comin’ an’ no sign o’ Barney, what could she do, the crature? One day Dr. Isaacs says to her, ‘Mrs. Byrne,’ says he, ’why don’t ye send poor Mrs. Brady to the Infirmary?’ ’What Infirmary, sir?’ says she. ‘The Union Infirmary,’ says he; ’it’s the on’y place she’s fit for except the Incurables in Dublin,’ says he, ‘an’ I’m afraid there’s no chance for there.’ ‘Oh, docther, don’t mention it!’ says poor Mrs. Byrne—she was telling me about it aftherwards. ’Is it the Union? I wouldn’t name it,’ she says, ’to a decent respectable woman like Mrs. Brady. She’s a cousin by marriage o’ me own,’ she says; ‘I wouldn’t *name* it to her, I assure ye.’ ’Just as you please,’ says Docther Isaacs. ’It ’ud be the truest kindness you could do her all the same, for she’d get betther care and nourishment than you could give her.’ Well, poor Mrs. Byrne kep’ turnin’ it over in her mind, but she raly couldn’t bring herself to mention it, nor wouldn’t, on’y she was druv to it at the end, the crature, with me bein’ ill so long, an’ the rent comin’ so heavy on her an’ all. So we settled it between the two of us wan day, an’ she passed me her

Page 110

word to bring me Barney's letther—if e'er a wan comes—the very minute she gets it, an' if he comes himself she says she won't let on where I am, all at wanst, but she'll tell him gradual. Sometimes I do be very unaisy in me mind, Miss Mahony, I assure ye, wondherin' what he'll say when he hears. I'm afeared he'll be ready to kill me for bringin' such a disgrace on him."

"Sure, what could ye do?" said Kate, a little tartly, for naturally enough as "an inmate" of many years' standing, she did not quite like her new friend's insistence on this point. "Troth, it's aisy talkin', but it's not so aisy to starve. An' afther all, there's many a one that's worse off nor us here, I can tell ye, especially since the Sisthers come, God bless them, with their holy ways. How'd ye like to be beyant at the —— Union, where the nurses gobbles up all the nourishment that's ordhered for the poor misfortunate cratures that's in it, an leaves thim sthretched from mornin' till night without doin' a hand's turn for them. Aye, an' 'ud go near to kill them if they dar'd let on to the Docther. Sure, don't I know well how it was before the Sisthers was here—we have different times now I can tell ye. Why, that very statye o' St. Pathrick that ye were talkin' of a while ago, wasn't it them brought it? An' there's St. Joseph over in the ward fornenst this, an' St. Elizabeth an' the Holy Mother above. See that now. Isn't it a comfort to be lookin' at them holy things, and to see the blessed Sisthers come walkin' in in the mornin' wid a heavenly smile for every one, an' their holy eyes lookin' into every hole an' corner an' spyin' out what's wrong?"

"Aye, indeed," assented Mrs. Brady, a little faintly though, for however grateful she might be, and comfortable in the main, there was a bitterness in the thought of her "come down" that nothing could alleviate.

She and her neighbour were excellent friends all the same, and she soon shared Kate's enthusiasm for "the Sisthers," finding comfort moreover in the discovery that Sister Louise understood and sympathised with her feelings, and was willing to receive endless confidences on the subject of the "little boy," and to discuss the probability of his speedy advent with almost as much eagerness as herself.

But all too soon it became evident that unless Barney made great haste another than he would take Mrs. Brady "out of" the workhouse. Grim death was approaching with rapid strides, and one day the priest found her so weak that he told her he would come on the morrow to hear her confession and to give her the last Sacraments.

Not one word did the old woman utter in reply. She lay there with her eyes closed and her poor old face puckered up, unheeding all Kate Mahony's attempts at consolation.

These, though well meant, were slightly inconsistent, as she now assured her friend that indeed it was well for her, and asked who wouldn’t be glad to be out o’ that; and in the next moment informed her that maybe when she was anointed she might find herself cured out an’ out, as many a wan had before her, an’ wasn’t it well known that them that the priest laid his holy hands on, as likely as not took a good turn immaydiate?

Page 111

Later on Sister Louise bent over Mrs. Brady with gentle reassuring words.

“God knows best, you know,” she said, at the end of her little homily; “you will say ‘His will be done,’ won’t you?”

“Sure Sisther, how can I?” whispered Mrs. Brady, opening her troubled eyes; her face almost awful to look on in its grey pallor. “How can I say ‘His will be done’ if I’m to die in the workhouse? An’ me poor little boy comin’ as fast as he can across the say to take me out of it, an’ me breakin’ my heart prayin’ that I might live to see the day! An’ when he comes back he’ll find the parish has me buried. Ah, Sisther, how am I to resign meself at all? In the name o’ God how *am* I to resign meself?”

The tears began to trickle down her face, and Sister Louise cried a little too for sympathy, and stroked Mrs. Brady’s hand, and coaxed, and cajoled, and soothed and preached to the very best of her ability; and at the end left her patient quiet but apparently unconvinced.

It was with some trepidation that she approached her on the morrow. Mrs. Brady’s attitude was so unusual that she felt anxious and alarmed. As a rule the Irish poor die calmly and peacefully, happy in their faith and resignation; but this poor woman stood on the brink of eternity with a heart full of bitterness, and a rebellious will.

Mrs. Brady’s first words, however, reassured her.

“Sisther, I’m willin’ now to say ‘His will be done.’”

“Thank God for that,” cried Sister Louise fervently.

“Aye. Well, wait till I tell ye. In the night when I was lying awake I took to lookin’ at St. Pathrick beyant, wid the little lamp flickerin’ an’ flickerin’ an’ shinin’ on his face, an’ I thought o’ Barney, an’ that I’d niver see him agin, an’ I burst out cryin’. ’Oh, St Pathrick!’ says I, ’how’ll I ever be able to make up my mind to it at all?’ An’ St. Pathrick looked back at me rale wicked. An’ ‘Oh,’ says I again, ‘God forgive me, but sure how can I help it?’ An’ there was St. Pathrick still wid the cross look on him p’intin’ to the shamrock in his hand, as much as to say ’There is but the wan God in three divine Persons an’ Him ye must obey.’ So then I took to baitin’ me breast an’ sayin’ ‘The will o’ God be done!’ an’ if ye’ll believe me, Sisther, the next time I took heart to look at St. Pathrick there he was smilin’ for all the world the moral o’ poor Barney. So says I, ’afther that!’ Well, Sisther, the will o’ God be done! He knows best, Sisther alanna, doesn’t He? But,” with a weak sob, “my poor little boy’s heart ‘ill be broke out an’ out when he finds I’m afther dyin’ in the workhouse!”

“We must pray for him,” said the Sister softly; “you must pray for him and offer up the sacrifice that God asks of you, for him. Try not to fret so much. Barney would not like you to fret. He would grieve terribly if he saw you like this.”

“Heth he would,” said Mrs. Brady, sobbing again.

Page 112

“Of course he would. But if he heard you were brave and cheerful over it all, it would not be half so bad for him.”

Mrs. Brady lay very quiet after this, and seemed to reflect.

When the priest came presently to administer the Sacraments of the dying to her, she roused herself and received them with much devotion, and presently beckoned Sister Louise to approach.

“Sisther, when Barney comes axin’ for me, will ye give him me bades an’ the little medal that’s round me neck, an’ tell him I left him me blessin’—will ye, dear?”

“Indeed I will.”

“God bless ye! An’ tell him,” speaking with animation and in rather louder tones. “Tell him I didn’t fret at all, an’ died quite contint an’ happy an’—an’ thankful to be in this blessed place, where I got every comfort. Will ye tell him that, Sisther alanna?”

The Sister bowed her head: this time she could not speak.

* * * * *

It was nearly two months afterwards that Sister Louise was summoned to the parlour to see “Mr. Brady,” who had recently arrived from America, and to whom his cousin, Mrs. Byrne, had broken the news of his mother’s death.

Sister Louise smiled and sighed as she looked at this big, strapping, prosperous-looking young fellow, and remembered his mother’s description of him. The black eyes and curly hair and rosy cheeks were all there, certainly, but otherwise the likeness to “St. Patrick” was not so very marked.

“Mr. Brady wants to hear all about his poor mother, Sister,” said the Sister Superior. “This is Sister Louise, Mr. Brady, who attended your poor mother to the last.”

Mr. Brady, who seemed a taciturn youth, rolled his black eyes towards the new comer and waited for her to proceed.

Very simply did Sister Louise tell her little story, dwelling on such of his mother’s sayings, during her last illness, as she thought might interest and comfort him.

“There are her beads, and the little medal, which she always wore. She left them to you with her blessing.”

Barney thrust out one huge brown hand and took the little packet, swallowing down what appeared to be a very large lump in his throat.

“She told me,” pursued the Sister in rather tremulous tones, “to tell you that she did not fret at all at the last, and died content and happy. She did, indeed, and she told me to say that she was thankful to be here—”

But Barney interrupted her with a sudden incredulous gesture and a big sob, “Ah, whisht, Sisther!” he said.

THE FLITTING OF THE OLD FOLKS

“Maggie! Maggie! Glory be to goodness! where in the world has that child gone off with herself to? *Maggie*! Sure I’ve been roarin’ an’ bawlin’ for ye this half-hour. Run up this minute to Mr. Brophy’s—they’re afther gettin’ a letther from America, an’ they can’t get any one to read it for them, the cratur’s. Hurry now, that’s a good little girl; I’m goin’ up myself along wid ye. Poor Mrs. Brophy’ll be nearly out of her mind.”

Page 113

Mrs. Kinsella caught up her baby as she spoke, gave a hasty look round to make sure that Micky and Nanny were not crawling into the fire, enjoined Mary, her “second eldest” little girl, to “have an eye to them” during her absence, and, hustling her firstborn before her, hastily left the cabin.

“What is it at all?” asked Peggy Murphy, her next-door neighbour, thrusting her head over the half-door. “What in the world has happened? Is it goin’ up to Brophys’ ye are? I hope herself’s not sick or anything.”

“Not at all; but Dan looked in on his way from town, an’ says he, ‘I’ve a letther in my pocket that the postmisthress is afther givin’ me, an’ it’s from America,’ he says, ’but I’m sure I couldn’t tell ye who wrote it,’ says he. ‘I wisht,’ he says, ‘ye’d send up wan o’ yer little girls to read it to us,’ says he, ’for neither herself nor me is much hand at makin’ out writin’.’ An’ here I’m afther sarchin’ high an’ low for Maggie, an’ where was she? Up in a tree, if ye plaze. Me heart’s scalded with that child. She’ll break her neck on me before she’s done.”

Maggie jerked her flaxen locks backwards with a slightly defiant air, and inquired of her parent if she was comin’ on out o’ that. Mrs. Kinsella in return curtly desired her to be off with herself, an’ not be standin’ there givin’ her impidence, an’ Mrs. Brophy maybe killin’ herself wonderin’ what could be in the letther at all.

Thus adjured, Maggie led the way up a steep and stony path, followed by her mother, Mrs. Murphy, and sundry other of the neighbours, all agog with excitement and curiosity.

Half-way up the rocky hillside they came upon the Brophys’ abode, a one-storied cabin, with a cabbage garden, a potato plot, and a scanty patch of wheat climbing up the mountain at the rear.

Dan himself stood in the doorway, eagerly on the lookout for them; while a querulous voice from within warned them that “herself” had reached the limit of her patience.

Entering they descried her—a tiny old woman, bent almost double with age and rheumatism, leaning forward in her elbow-chair with the letter on her knee.

Maggie was hustled to the front and the packet placed in her hand. She turned it over and over, and finally broke the seal.

“It’s from America,” she said.

“Bedad, alanna, I knew that before,” returned old Dan, who was bending over her, his weather-beaten face betraying the utmost mystification.

“Sure all of us knew that,” murmured the bystanders.

“Well, give the child time to see what’s in it,” urged Mrs. Kinsella. “Father Taylor himself couldn’t tell yez what’s in a letther before he had it opened.”

“Who’s it from, Maggie asthore? Tell us that much,” cried Mrs. Brophy with shrill eagerness.

Maggie drew the letter from the envelope and slowly unfolded it. An enclosure fell out. Several hands were outstretched to catch it, and Mrs. Kinsella succeeded.

Page 114

“What in the name o’ goodness is this?” she asked. “There’s print on this. I hope to heaven it’s not a summons, or a notice to quit, or anything that way.”

“Not at all, not at all,” cried Peggy Murphy, “that’s an ordher for money. I knew the looks of it the minute I set eyes on it—the very same as wan that Mrs. O’More sent me from Dublin, the price of a pair o’ chickens she sent for, afther she went up. Bedad, you’re in luck, Dan. How much is it for, now, Maggie?”

“Ah! good gracious! don’t be axin’ the child them things. Sure how in the world could she tell, an’ it afther bein’ written in America?—God bless us! let her have a look at the letther anyhow.”

“‘My dear uncle and aunt,’” began Maggie, slowly spelling out.

[Illustration: THE FLITTING OF THE OLD FOLKS “My dear Uncle and Aunt,” began Maggie]

Mrs. Brophy uttered a shrill scream, and clapped her hands together. “It’s from Larry! Lord bless an’ save us! it’s Larry himself, him that I thought in his grave this fifteen year! God bless us, it’s dramin’ I am—it can’t be true! Dan, d’ye hear that? Good gracious, what’s the man thinkin’ of, stan’in’ there, lookin’ about him, the same as if he never heard a thing at all. *Dan*” (with an impatient tug at his sleeve), “d’ye hear what I’m tellin’ you? Larry isn’t dead at all, an’ he’s afther writin’ to us from America.”

“Well, to be sure,” cried Mrs. Kinsella. “Your sister’s son, wasn’t he, ma’am? La’rence Kearney. A fine young fellow he was, too. He went an’ listed on yez, didn’t he?”

“Aye, an’ she was near breakin’ her heart when he done it,” chimed in Peggy Murphy; “sure, I remember it well.”

Several other bystanders remembered it too, and expressed their sympathy by divers nods and groans; old Dan at last impatiently throwing out his hands for silence.

“Whisht! whisht! we can’t be sure whether himself’s in it at all yet. Let the poor little girl be gettin’ on wid the letther, can’t yez? Sure maybe it isn’t Larry at all.”

“Listen to the man, an’ him the only nephew that ever we had,” began “herself” shrilly; but Maggie’s childish pipe, proceeding with the reading, drowned the rest of her remonstrance.

“‘I hope you are quite well, as this leaves me at present. You will be very much astonished to get this letter, but when we meet, as I trust we soon shall, I hope to have

the pleasure of explainin' to you all that has befell me since I left yous an' my happy home to join her Majesty's corpse!'"

"What's that?" cried Dan in alarm. "Corpse! Didn't I tell yez he was dead?"

"Sure how could he be dead," put in Mrs. Brophy, "when it was himself that wrote the letther? There isn't anythin' about a corpse in it, Maggie asthore, is there?"

"'C-o-r-p-s,' spelled out Maggie, "corpse; yes, there it is, as plain as print."

"Sure he manes 'rig'ment,' "shouted out some well-informed person from the background. "'Corpse'—that's what they do be callin' the army."

Page 115

“Oh, that indeed?” resumed Dan, much relieved. “Go on, Maggie.”

“‘I am now, however, at the end of my rovin’s,’” read the child, “‘an’ you’ll be glad to hear that I am just afther gettin’ married to a very nice young lady, with a good bit o’ money of her own. I have also contrived to save a tol’rable sum, an’ am now lookin’ forward to a life of contentment an’ prosperity in the company of my bride.’”

“That’s Larry,” exclaimed Mrs. Brophy with conviction. “That’s himself—the very turn of him. He always had that fashion, ye know, of pickin’ out them grand words. I could tell ’twas him the very minit she began, God bless him.”

“’My fond memory, however, turns to them that in the days of my childhood was the same as a father an’ a mother to me. I made sure that yous must both be under the daisy-quilt, an’ me first thought was to send some money to the reverend gentleman, whoever he may be, that’s parish priest in Clonkeen now, an’ ax him to put up a rale handsome monument over your remains; but by the greatest good fortune I came across poor Bill Kinsella not long sence, an’ he tould me yous were to the fore, an’ not a sign o’ dyin’ on yous yet.’”

“Look at that now,” cried Mrs. Kinsella, with shrill glee; “sure that’s me own first cousin’s son that went over beyant a couple of years ago. Well, now to think—”

“Ah, for goodness’ sake, let’s hear the end of the letther,” cried Dan and his wife together, both violently excited.

“‘Me an’ me wife both feels,’ went on Maggie, ’that we couldn’t rest happy unless we made sure that yous ended your days in peace and comfort. This is a big house and a comfortable place, with room an’ to spare for the two of yous, and you’ll get the warmest of welcomes from nephew and niece. So I am sendin’ you the price of your journey, with maybe a few dollars over, for fear you should come short, an’ I hope you’ll come out by the next boat, for there isn’t much time to spare, an’ you’ll be gettin’ too old for travellin’. I will say no more this time, my dear uncle and aunt, but *cead mille failthe* from your affectionate La’rence Kearney.”

“Sure it isn’t across the say he wants us to go,” cried Dan in dismay; “is it to America?”

“God bless him!” exclaimed the wife, with fervour; “it’s him that always had the good heart. To think of him plannin’ an’ contrivin’ everythin’ that way, even to the monyement.”

“I wonder,” said Dan regretfully, “what sort of a monyement at all he’d have put over us? ’Pon me word it ’ud have looked elegant beyant.”

“Would ye have goold letthers on it, ma’am?” put in Peggy Murphy admiringly. “I seen wan at Kilpedder wan time that I went up when a cousin o’ me own was buried, an’ it was the loveliest ye ever seen. There was goold letthers, an’ a crass on the top, an’ at the four corners of it there was a kind of an ornamentation the same as a little skull—-’pon me word, the natest thing ye could see! No bigger nor me fist, ye know; but all set out elegant with little weeshy-dawshy teeth, all as perfect as ye could imagine. It was some rale grand ould gentleman that was afther puttin’ it up for his wife. I wondher if yez ’ud have had wan made anything that shape.”

Page 116

Dan looked pensive, and rubbed his hands slowly together, tantalised perhaps by the magnificence of the vision; but “herself” shook her head with a proud little smile.

“There’s no knowin’ what we’d have had,” she observed. “Larry said he’d have axed Father Taylor to choose us the best, an’ I b’lieve his reverence has very good taste.”

“‘Deed an’ he has, ma’am. But will yez be goin’ off wid yourselves to America out o’ this?”

“Aye will we,” responded Mrs. Brophy, with spirit. “Bedad, if Dan an’ me is ever to see the world it’s time we started.”

“It’s very far off,” said poor old Dan nervously; “it’s a terrible long way to be goin’, alanna. If it wasn’t for Larry expectin’ us over beyant—”

“What would ye do, then?” interrupted his energetic little wife fiercely. “Stop at home, perishin’ wid the cold an’ hunger, an’ the rain droppin’ down on us while we’re atin’ our bit o’ dinner; me that bad wid the rheumatiz I can hardly move hand or fut, an’ yourself taken wid them wakenesses so that it’s all ye can do to lift the potaties.”

“Dear knows, it’s himself that ought to leppin’ mad wid j’y,” cried one of the neighbours. “To get such a chance! Isn’t it in the greatest good luck ye are, Dan, to be goin’ off to that beautiful place, where ye’ll be livin’ in the heighth o’ comfort an’ need never do another hand’s turn for yourselves? Troth, I wish it was me that had the offer of it.”

Many murmurs of approval greeted this sally; every one being convinced that Dan was indeed in luck’s way, while his wife wrathfully opined that he didn’t know when he was well off.

Poor old Dan hastened to assure them that he was “over-j’yed.”

“I suppose,” he added, looking round deprecatingly, “they’ll tell me down at the railway station the way we’ll have to go; or maybe Father Taylor ‘ud know. The say is miles an’ miles away—I question if they’d give us a ticket for the say down beyant at Clonkeen.”

“Sure, yez’ll have to go to Dublin first,” interposed the well-informed person who had before volunteered useful explanations.

“Dublin!” said Dan, sitting down on the edge of his favourite little “creepy” stool. “Well, well, to think o’ that! I never thought to be goin’ to Dublin, an’ I suppose America is twicet as far.”

“Aye, an’ ten times as far,” cried Peggy Murphy.

Dan looked appealingly round as though seeking contradiction, but could not summon up enough courage to speak. He sat still, rubbing his hands, and smiling a rather vacant smile; and by-and-by, having exhausted their queries and conjectures, the visitors left the cabin, and the old couple were alone.

They stared at each other for a moment or two in silence, Mary Brophy fingering the letter which she could not read.

“That’s grand news?” she remarked presently, with a querulous interrogative note in her voice.

“Grand entirely,” repeated her husband submissively, rubbing the patched knees of his corduroy trousers for a change.

Page 117

“We’ll have to be gettin’ ready to be off soon, I suppose?” pursued Mary, still in a tone of vexed inquiry.

“Aye,” said Dan, continuing to rub his knees.

“Ye ought to be out o’ yer wits wid delight,” asserted Mrs. Brophy angrily.

“So I am,” said Dan, with a ghastly attempt at cheerfulness.

“Ah, go ‘long out o’ that!” cried Mary. “Ye have me moithered, sittin’ there starin’ the two eyes out o’ yer head. Go out an’ give the hens a bit to ate.”

“Sure we haven’t had our own suppers yet,” returned Dan, slowly rising; “time enough to give the cratur’s what’s left.”

“Listen to the man! ‘Pon me word, ye’d never desarve a bit o’ good look, Dan Brophy, ye’ve that little sense. What call have we to go pinchin’ an’ scrapin’ now, will ye tell me? Us that’s goin’ to spend the rest of our days in peace an’ comfort. Sure, Larry’ll let us want for nothin’ while we live.”

“Aye, indeed,” returned her husband; “I was forgettin’ that.”

He went out obediently, and presently his voice was heard dolorously “chuck-chucking” to the hens. When he re-entered he sat down on the stool again, with the same puzzled air which had formerly irritated his wife.

“I wonder,” he said, “how in the world we’ll be managin’. Will I go down to the station beyant, an’ give them that money ordher, an’ tell them Larry bid them give us tickets to America for it, or will I have to take it to the post-office first? Mrs. Murphy said it was a post-office ordher, but sure they wouldn’t be givin’ us tickets for America at the post-office.”

“Ah, what a gom ye are!” said Mary. It was her favourite and wholly untranslatable term of opprobrium.

“Afther that,” as Dan invariably said, “there was no use in talkin’ to Mary.” He suspected that on this occasion she was feeling a little puzzled herself, but wisely resolved to postpone the discussion till she should be in a better humour.

Next morning, when the old man rose and went out of the house, as usual, to fetch a pailful of water from the stream which ran at the foot of the hill, he cast lingering glances about him. It would be a queer thing, he thought, to look out in the morning on any

other view than this familiar one, which had greeted his waking eyes in his far away childhood, and on which he had expected to look his last only when the day came whereon he should close them for ever. On the other side of the rugged brown shoulder of that hill was the little chapel, under the shadow of which he had hoped one day to be laid to rest. Pausing, pail in hand, he began to wonder to himself where he would have had the monument which, if he and Mary had already departed, was, by Larry's request, to have surmounted their remains. There was an empty space to the right of the gate—it would have looked well there—real handsome, Dan opined. With his mind full of this thought he returned to Mary, and immediately imparted it to her.

Page 118

“Alanna, we wouldn’t have known ourselves, we’d have been so grand,” he added. “Goold letthers, no less. I don’t know that I’d altogether fancy them little skulls, though. They would have been altogether too mournful. I’d sooner have R.I.P. at all the corners—wouldn’t you?”

“Maybe I would an’ maybe I wouldn’t,” said Mary. “We needn’t be botherin’ our heads about it. Larry’ll be apt to be puttin’ up a tombstone over us when we do go.”

“Sure what good will that do us over there where nobody knows us?” murmured Dan discontentedly. “If it was here where all the neighbours ‘ud be lookin’ at it, it ’ud be somethin’-like. But what signifies what kind of an ould gully-hole they throw us into over beyant—there’ll be nobody to pass a remark about us, or to put up a prayer for us afther we’re gone, only Larry and his wife; an’ I question if she’s the lady to be throublin’ her head over the like of us.”

Mrs. Brophy was quite taken aback at this harangue, but soon recovered herself sufficiently to rate Dan as soundly as she considered he deserved; then, with many muttered comments on his ingratitude, she proceeded to crawl over to the hearth to prepare breakfast.

“Woman alive!” ejaculated Dan presently, “sure it’s not tay ye’re wettin’ this mornin’, an’ only a sign of it left in the bag. Ye’ll be callin’ out for yer cup on Sunday, an’ there’ll not be a grain left for ye.”

“Good gracious, won’t the two of us be out of it before Sunday?” returned Mary tartly. “Upon me word, a body ’ud lose patience wid ye altogether. I’m sick an’ tired tellin’ ye that we’ve no call to be savin’ up the way we used to be doin’. Sit down there, an’ don’t *saucer* yer tay, but drink it like a Christian out o’ the cup. An’ for goodness’ sake, Dan, don’t be blowin’ it that way. I declare I’ll be ashamed of me life if that’s the way ye’re goin’ to go on forenenst Mrs. Larry.”

“Would ye have me scald the throat out o’ meself?” retorted Dan indignantly. “I wish to goodness that letther o’ Larry’s was at the bottom of the say. Ye’re that contrairy sence, I dunno whatever to do wid ye. Bedad, if that’s the way wid ye I’ll not stir a fut out o’ this. Mind that!”

Mrs. Brophy, though much incensed, nevertheless deemed it prudent to make no reply; and presently Dan, pushing back his stool, got up and went out. Mary sat cogitating for some minutes alone; her reflections were not altogether of the pleasantest order, and she was relieved when, by-and-by, Mrs. Kinsella’s voice hailed her from the doorway.

“How’s yourself this morning?” inquired the visitor pleasantly. “Did you think it was dramin’ ye were when ye woke up? I suppose the two o’ yez’ll soon be out o’ this now. I was thinkin’”—leaning her arms affably on the half-door—“any ould things, ye know, that wouldn’t be worth yer while to bring along wid yous ’ud come in very handy for me down below. Of course I wouldn’t

Page 119

name it if ye were likely to be takin' everythin' wid ye; but goin' all that way, an' lavin' nobody afther ye—it's a terrible long fam'ly I have altogether, ma'am—I declare I have the work of the world wid them. Terence—nothin' 'ud serve him but to go makin' a drum out o' the on'y pot we have, an' he's afther knocking a great big hole in it. So if ye weren't goin' to take your big ould pot away wid ye, ma'am, I thought I'd just mention it."

Mrs. Brophy's withered little face flushed.

"It's yerself that 'ud be welcome, I'm sure," she replied stiffly, "but that same pot Dan an' me bought when we got married, an' I don't think I could have the heart to part wid it."

"Ah, that indeed, ma'am? Well, of course, when ye have a fancy for it that way, it's best for ye to take it wid ye. But I question if Mrs. Larry 'ud like the looks of it comin' into her grand kitchen. Sure Bill tould me, that time he came back from America, there wasn't such a thing as a pot to be seen over there at all. But plaze yerself, ma'am, of coorse."

Mrs. Brophy looked startled and perturbed.

"Not such a thing as a pot in it," she repeated. "God bless us! it must be a quare place. Well, Mrs. Kinsella, ma'am, if I do lave the pot behind I'll make sure that yourself has it."

"Thank ye, ma'am," responded Mrs. Kinsella, with alacrity. "Any ould thing at all that ye wouldn't be wantin' 'ud come in handy for me. Ye wouldn't be takin' that ould chair, now, or the dresser; that 'ud be altogether too big an' too heavy to put in a boat, but I'd be thankful for it at my place."

Mary looked round at her little household gods with a sudden pang; then she glanced rather sharply back at Mrs. Kinsella.

"There's time enough to be thinkin' o' them things," she observed. "Himself an' me hasn't made up our minds at all when we're goin', or what we'll be doin' wid our bits o' things."

"Well, I must be off wid meself anyhow," returned the visitor, easily changing the subject. "Ye'll be havin' his reverence in wid yez some time this mornin'. I'm afther meetin' him goin' up the road to poor Pat Daly's, an' when I told him the news he near broke his heart laughin' at the notion of the two o' yez goin' off travellin' at this time o' day. 'But I'm sorry, too,' he says, 'I'm very sorry,' he says. 'Upon my word,' says he, 'the place won't know itself without poor Dan an' Mary. An' so they're goin' to live over there,' says he, 'or rather to die over there,' says he, 'an' there'll be some strange priest

lookin' afther them at the last,' he says. 'Well, well, I always thought it 'ud be me that 'ud have the buryin' o' Dan an' Mary.'—An' off wid him then up the hill to Dalys', but he'll be apt to be lookin' in on his way back."

"He will, to be sure," agreed Mary, in rather doleful tones.

Page 120

When Mrs. Kinsella had departed she sat cowering over the fire without heeding her unfinished cup of tea. The priest's words just quoted had touched her in a vulnerable point. True for his reverence. It wasn't living much longer they'd be over there, and when they came to die it would be a lonesome sort of thing to have a strange priest coming to see them instead of their own Father Taylor, who had been their friend, guide, and adviser for more than forty years! Mrs. Brophy's heart misgave her; his reverence would be apt to think bad of their going off that way, and him so good to them. Then Mrs. Kinsella's remarks rankled in her memory—"an ould pot" that Mrs. Larry would despise in her elegant kitchen; the cool scrutiny with which she had surveyed all poor Mary's treasured belongings was hard to be borne. The dresser; like enough there would not be room for the dresser in the boat—Mary had no notion as to the size of the vessel that was to convey her and her belongings to America—and what about the bed then? The bed, a valuable heirloom which had stood in its own particular corner of the cabin for nearly a century, which had been Mary's mother's bed, the pride and joy of Mary's heart, and the envy of the neighbours. What in the world was to be done with this priceless treasure? Good-natured as she was she felt that she could not bring herself to allow it to become the property of Mrs. Kinsella or any of the neighbours. Who would respect it as she did? At the bare thought of heedless "gossoons" or "slips of girls" tumbling in and out of the receptacle which she herself had always approached so reverently, Mary shivered.

"Cock them up, indeed!" she murmured wrathfully.

Then an idea struck her, an idea which became a fixed resolution when presently Father Taylor's kindly face nodded at her over the half-door. She would offer his reverence the bed; it would be honoured by such a rise in the world as a transfer to the priest's house; and at the same time Mary felt that this precious legacy would in some measure repay her good pastor for his long and affectionate care. She had hardly patience to listen to Father Taylor's greeting, or to answer his good-natured rallying queries anent their unexpected good fortune. When she did speak it was rather in a tone of lamentation than of rejoicing:—

"Aye, indeed, yer reverence, it's what we nayther of us looked for, an' it's a terrible change altogether. I'm wondering what in the world I'll do wid my bits o' things—my little sticks o' furniture, ye know, sir. Biddy Kinsella was up here a little while ago lookin' out for me pot—it's an elegant pot, an' I'm loth to part with it—but she says Bill tould her there's no such thing as a pot to be seen out there. So I'll have to lave it with her. But the bed, Father Taylor, it's the bed that's throublin' me the most. It's a beautiful bed, your reverence."

The priest glanced towards that valuable article of furniture, and responded heartily and admiringly:—

Page 121

“It is, indeed, a wonderful bed.”

“Sure there isn’t its like in the place,” resumed Mary. “It was me mother’s bed, so it was —she looked very well when she was laid out on it,” she added thoughtfully. “Very well, indeed, she looked! I always thought that Dan an’ meself ’ud be waked in that bed, too. Well, well, the Lord knows best, doesn’t he, yer reverence? But I’d think very bad of lettin’ that bed out o’ this to go anywhere on’y to yer reverence’s house.”

“Bless me!” cried Father Taylor, unable to restrain a surprised laugh; but he quickly composed his features.

“Aye, indeed, yer reverence, I’d be proud if ye’d let me make ye a present of it,” said poor old Mary, trying to straighten her little bent back, and peering at him with anxious eyes. “Sure it’s altogether too proud Dan an’ meself ‘ud be, an’ ye wouldn’t believe the beautiful nights’ rests we do be gettin’ out o’ that bed.”

“I’m quite sure you do,” responded the priest warmly; “but upon my word, Mary, do you know I’m afraid the Bishop mightn’t like it.”

Mrs. Brophy was appalled at the magnitude of the idea. Father Taylor continued in a very solemn voice, but with a twinkle in his eye:—

“You see, Mary, we poor priests are not allowed luxuries, and if his lordship were to arrive unexpectedly and walk into my room and see that grand bed in the corner he might think it very queer.”

“Would he now?” said Mary, in awestruck tones.

“You wouldn’t like to get me into trouble, Mary, I’m sure,” pursued Father Taylor. “The Bishop might think I was getting beyond myself altogether.”

Mrs. Brophy heaved a deep sigh; she was depressed, but magnanimous. It would ill become her, she observed, to be gettin’ his reverence into trouble, and who’d think his lordship was that wicked? Holy man! She would say no more; and Father Taylor was devoutly thankful for her forbearance. He would have done anything rather than hurt her feelings, but the mere sight of that ancient, venerable, and much-begrimed four-poster made him shudder; while he scarcely ventured to contemplate the attitude likely to be assumed by his housekeeper—of whom he stood in some little awe—if the question were mooted of adding this piece of furniture to her well-polished and carefully-dusted stock.

Wishing to change the subject, he remarked that Mary's beautiful cup of tea had been scarcely tasted. "Why, I thought every drop was precious," he added, laughing; "but I suppose you will not be counting the grains now as you used to do."

"I don't seem to fancy it this mornin' the way I used to do sometimes," responded Mrs. Brophy plaintively.

"Ah," said the priest, half-sadly, "you will have plenty of everything over there, Mary, but I doubt if you will relish anything as much as what you and Dan used to buy out of the price of your chickens. Nothing is so sweet as what we earn for ourselves, woman dear. I fancy the potatoes grown in your little bit of ground, and boiled in your own black pot, taste sweeter, somehow, than all the fine dinners that Mrs. Larry will be giving you."

Page 122

“Thrue for ye, yer reverence,” put in Dan, suddenly appearing in the doorway. “‘Pon me word, I wish that ould letther an’ all that was in it had stopped where it was, before it came upsettin’ us that way. I’d sooner stop where I am, so I would—I would so—there now ye have it!” turning defiantly to his wife. “Sure it’ll be the death of the two of us lavin’ the ould place, an’ thravellin’ off across the say among strangers. An’ what good will it do us, as I do be sayin’ to herself here, for Larry to be puttin’ up a monyement for us over beyant there, where there’s ne’er a one at all that knows us?”

“To be sure, I was forgetting the monument,” said Father Taylor, laughing again. “I was to have the choosing of it, too, wasn’t I? Let me look at the letter again, Mary. Yes, here it is. ’The reverend gentleman, whoever he is, that’s parish priest in Clonkeen now’—It’s the very same reverend gentleman that used to give Master Larry many a good box on the ear long ago when he was a little rascally lad; but I suppose he thought I was dead and buried by this time—he wants to have us all underground. Well, well, it’s a pity I’m not to have the choosing of that monument—I’d have picked out the finest that money could buy.”

He intended this as a joke, and Dan and Mary uttered a somewhat melancholy, but complimentary laugh; then they looked at each other wistfully, as though regretting that they were not in a position to enable their pastor to gratify his artistic tastes.

Dan presently confided his troubles and difficulties anent the changing of the order, and was desired by the priest to call in the afternoon, when he would himself go with him to the post-office. Then Father Taylor withdrew, feeling a little sad at the thought of losing two such old parishioners, and a little impatient with the over-affectionate nephew, who had so late in the day insisted on their uprootal.

“How much more sensible it would have been,” he said to himself, “how much more truly kind, if Larry, instead of transplanting the poor old couple in their old age, had sent them a small sum of money every month to enable them to end their days in comfort at home.” But there was apparently nothing for it now but to take what steps he could to help them over the difficulties of their flitting.

About five o’clock Dan duly made his appearance, wearing a much more jubilant aspect than when his pastor had taken leave of him. With a comical and somewhat sheepish grin he produced the “ordher” in a crumpled condition from his tattered pocket, and handed it over to the priest, remarking, as he did so, that “it was a quare thing to think what a power o’ money did be in a little or’nary thing like that.”

“Yes, indeed,” said Father Taylor, with a sigh, “that little bit of paper will carry you and Mary all the way over the sea, and across a State as big as Ireland.”

Page 123

“Would it now?” inquired Dan, eyeing it curiously. “Well now, to tell you the truth, yer reverence, herself an’ me has been havin’ a bit of a chat. She thinks bad, the cratur’, of lavin’ the bed, an’ the ould pot, an’ all our little sticks o’ things behind, ye know, sir, an’ I do be thinkin’ I’d never get my health at all out of ould Ireland; an’ any way the two of us is too ould to be thravellin’ off that way. An’ so herself says to me—she says:—’Dan,’ says she, ’I think the best way would be for ye to step down to his reverence’s,’ says she, ‘an’ give him the ordher,’ she says, ‘an’ ax him,’ says she, ’if he’ll just write a line to poor Larry, an’ let him know that we haven’t the heart nor the strength to be lavin’ our own little place. An’ bid him,’ says she, “ax Larry if it ’ud be all the same to him if his reverence was to keep the money for us agin we want it.’”

“To be sure, to be sure,” cried Father Taylor, delighted. “You show your good sense, Dan, and so does Mary. I’ll just go with you now, and change the order; and I’ll let Larry know that I’ll keep the money for you, and pay it out little by little as long as it lasts.”

“Not at all, not at *all*,” interrupted Dan, hastily and indignantly. “Bedad, it isn’t that we want yer reverence to do for us. Sure the raison I’m afther givin’ ye the ordher is for you to keep it safe, the way we’ll have it for the monyement.”

“THE SPIDER AND THE GOUT”

Old Pat Clancy lived in a small cabin immediately beneath the Rock of Donoughmor, and looked upon the ruined castle on the top as his especial property, the legends concerning them being treasured by him as jealously as though they were traditions of his own ancestors. A proud man was Pat when piloting the occasional strangers who wished to inspect the keep up the steep and slippery path which led to the ancient portcullis, and conducting them thence to the banqueting-hall, sparing the luckless pilgrim, in fact, no corner of the edifice or its surroundings, and pausing only on the mossy slope to the rear, where, his charge having duly admired “the view over three counties,” he would proudly point out the precise spots where Fin-ma-coul had “wrastled” with and overthrown another “monsthrous joynt” of name unknown, the traces of the encounter being yet visible in the short turf.

“Ne’er a blade o’ grass at all ’ud grow on them,” Pat would cry, pointing triumphantly to the irregular hollows in the soil supposed to be the traces of the giant’s mighty feet. These, by the way, occasionally varied oddly in extent; during the summertime, when most visitors were to be expected, being noticeably large, and much deeper than at other seasons.

Page 124

Poor Pat's devotion to his beloved ruins was the cause of his undoing. One spring morning, when a late frost had made the grass unusually slippery, just as he was expounding to an interested audience how the Danes used to shoot "arrers through them little slits of windies in the wall beyant," his foot slipped, and after rolling for a little distance down the steep incline, he went over the precipitous side of the crag, and fell some twenty feet on to the stones below. Many bones were broken, and as surgical aid was difficult to obtain, and but of poor quality when at last secured, most of them were badly set, and the poor old fellow remained to the end of his days a cripple. How he and his wife and their last remaining child, a son born to them when Pat was already old, managed thenceforth to eke out a living would have been a marvel to their neighbours, if similar problems of existence had not been so common in the countryside. There was the pig, of course, and a few chickens, and "herself" did a day's work now and then in the fields, and escorted the visitors over the ruins, well primed and prompted by Patrick as to the "laygends and tragedies" (traditions) of those sacred precincts; and little Mike minded the sheep, and frightened crows and picked turnips for their landlord, "ould Pether Rorke beyant at Monavoe," but "Goodness knows," as the neighbours would say, shaking their heads at each other, "it was not much of a livin' the poor child 'ud make out of him—the ould villain! Didn't he let his own flesh and blood go cold and hungry—'twasn't to be expected he'd do more nor he could help for a stranger. Aye indeed, he was a great ould villain! To think of him with lashin's and lavin's of everything an' money untold laid by, an' his only son's widdy livin' down there with a half-witted lodger in a little black hole of a place that was not fit for a pig, let alone a Christian, an' the beautiful little cratur', his grandchild, Roseen, runnin' about barefut, with her dotey little hands an' feet black an' blue wid the cowld—sure what sort of a heart had the man at all?"

Old Pat was sitting alone one summer's afternoon, "herself" having gone up to Donoughmor with some Quality, and Mike not having yet returned from work, when little Roseen Rorke poked her sunny face in at the door.

"Is that yourself?" said Pat pleasantly. He was fond of the child, as was every one in the neighbourhood, and being a fellow-sufferer from the hard-heartedness of her grandfather, who was, as has been said, his landlord, was perhaps the most violent of her champions.

Roseen's blue eyes, peering through her tangled sheaf of golden-brown curls, took a hasty and discontented survey of the small kitchen.

"Isn't Mike here?" she inquired.

“He’s not, asthore, an’ won’t be home this hour most likely; but come in out o’ the scorching sun, an’ sit down on the little creepy stool. Herself will be in in a few minutes, an’ maybe she’ll give ye a bit o’ griddle cake.”

Page 125

Roseen unfastened the half-door and came in, her little bare brown feet making no sound on the mud floor. She was a pretty child for all her sunburnt face and scanty unkempt attire. Poor Widow Rorke has long ceased to take pride in the fact that her husband had been the son of the richest farmer in all the countryside, and did not care to keep up appearances, all her energies being devoted to the struggle for daily bread; nevertheless, the short red flannel frock was as becoming to Roseen as any more elegant garment could have been, and when she approached the hearth and sat down on the three-legged stool by Pat's side, he breathed a blessing on her pretty face that was as admiring as it was fervent.

Crossing one shapely sunburnt leg over the other, and gazing pensively at the smouldering turf sods, she heaved a deep sigh.

"They're afther goin' out an' lavin' me," she lamented.

"Did they, asthore? Sure they had a right to have taken ye along wid them. Where are they gone to at all, alanna?"

"Me mother's after goin' to the town to buy a bit o' bread, an' Judy's streeled off with herself, goodness knows where, wid her ould pipe in her pocket. Dear knows when she'll be back; an' she bid me stop at home an' mind the fire, but I come away out o' that as soon as her back was turned."

The bright eyes glanced defiantly at the old man and then suddenly clouded over; the corners of the little mouth began to droop, and the small bare shoulders to heave.

"They'd no call to go lavin' me all by meself."

"Troth they hadn't, mavourneen," agreed Pat, clackling his tongue sympathetically. "It was too hard on ye, altogether, but sure you won't cry now, there's a good little girl; crying never done any one a ha'porth o' good yit. Look at me here wid all my ould bones broke; I might cry the two eyes out o' my head an' never a wan at all ud' get mended for me."

Roseen sat up blinking. "Did it hurt ye much, Misther Clancy, when your bones was broke on ye?"

"Is it hurt, bedad! Ye'd hear me bawlin' up at the crass roads. Sure I thought it was killed I was! My ancistor couldn't have shouted louder when he had the Earl Strongbow's spear stuck in him. Will I tell ye about that, alanna, to pass the time till herself comes in?"

Roseen shook her head discontentedly.

“I know that story,” she said. “I wisht ye’d tell me about the Spider an’ the Gout though, Misther Clancy. Ah do, an’ I’ll sit here listenin’ as quiet as a mouse.”

Pat rubbed his unshaven chin with the lean fingers of his one serviceable hand, the bristles of his week-old beard making a rasping sound the while, and glanced down sideways at the eager little petitioner.

“Is it the Spider an’ the Gout?” he said, knitting his brows with affected reluctance. “Sure I am sick an’ tired tellin’ ye that. No, but I’ll tell ye ’The little man and the little woman that lived in the vinegar bottle.’ ... Wanst upon a time, there was a weeshy-dawshy little man—’”

Page 126

“Ah no, Misther Clancy, I don’t care for that,” interrupted Roseen, jumping up and clapping her hands to her ears. “It’s a horrible ould story. They’d have been drownded,” she added seriously.

Pat chuckled. “Well, sit down, an’ don’t offer to say a word unless you hear me goin’ out. Sure maybe I disremember it altogether.”

Roseen sat down obediently and fixed her eyes on the old man’s face.

[Illustration: THE SPIDER AND THE GOUT “Wanst upon a time,” began Dan]

“Wanst upon a time,” began Dan, with a twinkle in his eye, “the pigs were swine.” Roseen gave an impatient wriggle. “Well, well, it’s too bad to be tormentin’ ye that way. I’ll begin right now.—Well, very well then. There was wan time the Spider an’ the Gout was thravellin’ together, goin’ to seek their fortun’s. Well, they come to the crass roads. ‘Lookit here,’ says the Spider, ‘it’s time for you an’ me to be partin’ company,’ says he; ‘I’m goin’ up along here to the right,’ says he, ’to that great big house on the hill. A very rich man lives there,’ says he, ‘an’ I think the quarthers ’ull suit me. You can go down that little boreen to the left,’ he says; ’there’s a little cabin there that belongs to some poor fellow or other. The door is cracked,’ says the Spider, ‘and the windy is broke. Ye can slip in aisy,’ he says, ‘an’ creep into the poor fellow’s toe before he knows where he is.’—’Is that so?’ says the Gout. ‘Oh, that indeed!’ says he; ’it’ll suit me very well,’ says he, ‘if that’s the way it is. An’ I’ll tell you what we’ll do,’ says the Gout, ‘you an’ me’ll meet here this time to-morrow night an’ tell each other how we’re gettin’ on,’ says he.”

Pat paused, rubbing his knotted fingers up and down the ragged knees of his corduroys. Roseen heaved a deep sigh, and folded one dimpled hand over the other, her eyes meanwhile fixed unwinkingly on the face of the narrator. The interest of the tale was now growing absorbing.

“Well, the Spider went off wid himself up to the rich man’s house, an’ what do ye think the poor fellow found when he got there?”

Roseen was perfectly aware of the state of affairs which the Spider discovered, knowing as she did every word of the story by heart, but deemed it her duty to shake her head slightly and raise her eyebrows in a manner which denoted that she was absolutely at fault.

“Well,” pursued Pat, “every door in the whole place was shut up, an’ every windy was bolted an’ barred, an’ though the poor Spider ran this way an’ that way, an’ round the house an’ round the house, not a hole nor a crack could he find; an’ there he had to stop outside in the wind an’ the rain.”

Roseen's face betokened extreme compassion for the Spider. Pat went on, drawing in his breath with a sucking sound.

Page 127

“Well then, very well then; next mornin’ the sarvants was sweepin’ and clanin’ an’ dustin’, here an’ there an’ everywhere, the way they do in the houses of Quality. One o’ them left the hall door open an’ in creeps the little Spider, an’ away wid him acrass the hall, an’ never stops till he gets to the great big parlour. Up the wall wid him then as fast as he could leg it, an’ there if he doesn’t go and make his web in a corner of a great big gould pictur’ frame. Well, there he sat, the poor fellow, but ne’er a fly at all come next or nigh him, an’ by-an’-by in walks the housemaid wid her great big broom, an’ if she didn’t —”

“You are afther forgettin’!” interrupted Roseen, quickly seizing the opportunity of using her tongue, and proceeding with as close an imitation of Pat’s manner as she could muster. “In walks the housemaid. ‘Och,’ says she, ’what brings you here at all, ye dirty little spalpeen!’”

“To be sure,” said Pat, “I was near forgettin’ that altogether. ‘Och,’ says she (in shrill tones of horror supposed to proceed from the startled housemaid), ’what brings you here at all, ye dirty little spalpeen? You infarnal little sckamer,’ says she.”

Roseen gave a delighted little cackle, this being an addition on Pat’s part and charming her by its vigour and originality.

“‘You infarnal little sckamer, what brings you here at all?’ And she whips out her duster an’ hot the poor Spider such a crack that his web was destroyed on him altogether, an’ it was on’y by the greatest good luck he was able to creep out of her way behind the corner of the frame, or she’d have had him killed as well. Well, the poor fellow, there he sat the whole livelong day, niver so much as offerin’ to spin another web; an’ sure if he had it ’ud have been no use, for there wasn’t the sign of a fly at all. When evenin’ come the masther of the house had company, an’ there was atin’ an’ drinkin’ an’ the best of everything but the poor little Spider was lookin’ on, very near perishin’ wid hunger an’ fright. Well, at the long and the last, when he thought there was nobody lookin’, he crept down the wall an’ folleyed wan o’ the sarvants out o’ the room, an’ by good luck, the hall door was open, so the poor fellow made off wid himself as fast as he could. Down the road wid him till he come to where the Gout was sittin’ waitin’ for him at the crass roads. ‘Is that yourself?’ says the Spider. ‘How did you get on?’ says he. ‘Och,’ says the poor Gout”—and here Pat assumed a tone of extreme weakness and exhaustion—“’it’s near killed I am altogether; I never put in such a time in me life.’ ‘Well, for that matther,’ says the Spider, ’I might say the same; but what happened to ye at all? Tell me all about it in the name of goodness,’ says he.

Page 128

"'Well,' says the Gout, 'I went off down the boreen the same as ye told me, an' I come to the little cabin beyant; the door was open an' in I walked, but o—o—oh! Wh—o—o—-oh!' (Pat indulged in a prolonged shiver, while Roseen chuckled and clapped her hands.) 'The cowld of that place was near bein' the death o' me! Sure the wind blew into it,' says he, 'an' the rain was comin' through the roof, an' there wasn't as much fire on the hearth as 'ud warm a fly itself. Well, the poor man come in afther a bit,' says the Gout, 'an' I slipped in through a crack in his owld wore-out brogue, an' into his toe. "Och, Mary," says the poor man to his wife, "I have a terrible bad pain in me toe! What'll I do in the world?" says he; "I'll never be able to stir a fut to-morrow." "Whisht, sure it's maybe a bit of a cramp ye've got. Wait a bit," she says, "an' I'll fetch ye a sup o' the wather I'm afther bilin' the pitaties in, maybe that'll do ye good," she says. 'Well,' says the Gout, 'if the fellow didn't go an' put his fut, *an' me in it*, into an owld rusty bucket full of pitaty-wather! I thought he'd have destroyed me altogether. An' such a night as I passed, wid scarcely a blanket at all on the bed! An' nothin' 'ud sarve the man but to get up before light, an' go thrampin' off through the mud an' rain till I was nearly perished. There he was draggin' me up an' down at the tail of a plough, wid the wet soakin' in through the holes in his brogues, till I couldn't stand it any more, an' I come away wid meself, an' I've been waitin' for ye this two hours.' 'Ho then, indeed,' says the Spider, 'I'd have been glad enough to be out of it before this; I never was so put about in me life as I was up there,' says he. 'Sure they had all their windies shut up,' says he, 'and the doors too, an' ne'er a sign of a fly at all in it when I did get in,' he says; 'an' the whole place that clane, an' sarvants running about, till I couldn't so much as find a corner to spin my web,' says he. 'Och, dear,' says the Gout, 'that's a poor case entirely; what sort of a place was it at all, an' what were they doin' in it?'

"'Ah, 'twas a great big place—altogether too big for my taste; an' they had roarin' fires in the grates. I was near killed wid the hate.'

"'That indeed!' says the Gout, pricking up his ears." Roseen listened solemnly, not in the least astonished to be told that the personage in question was possessed of ears; she supposed "a Gout" to be a living thing, an insect probably, of a more noxious kind than a spider.

"'Fires!' says the Gout; 'an' was they atin' an' drinkin' at all?' says he.

"'Atin' an' drinkin'!' says the Spider. 'Bedad, they're afther spendin' hours at it, an' were in the thick of it when I come away. If ye were to see the j'ints that was in it, ye wouldn't believe your own eyes; an' chickens an' turkeys,' he says, 'was nothin' at all to them, and they was swalleyin' down pigeons an' partridges an' them sorts o' little birds, the same as if they wasn't worth counting.'

Page 129

"'Oh, oh!' says the Gout, smacking his lips, 'an' did ye chanst to see any dhrinkin' at all?' 'Goodness gracious!' says the Spider, 'sure there was rivers of wine goin' down every man's throat!'

"'That'll do,' says the Gout. 'I'll bid ye good evening,' he says, 'an' I'll be off wid meself up there; an' I'll tell ye what,' says he, 'I'll be in no hurry to lave it!' he says, winking acrass at the other, 'an' you thry the cabin,' he says, lookin' back over his shoulder; 'maybe it'll suit ye betther nor me.' Well, the poor Spider ran off as fast as he could, an' when he come to the poor man's housheen, in he walked, widout a bit o' throuble at all, an' sure there was plenty of flies there waitin' for him. They used to come buzzing in an' out through the broken windies all day long.

"'Och, bedad! I am in luck,' says the Spider to himself, 'if on'y the ould woman 'ull let me stop in it an' not be thryin' to desthroy me wid her duster, the way the girl up beyant at the Coort did.' But sure, the poor ould woman had other things to be thinkin' of nor to be goin' afther Spiders. She left him alone in peace an' comfort, an' the poor fellow thought he was in heaven, afther all he had to put up wid at the other place. Well, there he lived till he died, an' he got so fat wid all the flies he was afther killin' that it was an *apple-complex* that carried him off at the end!

"Well, Misther Gout went marching up the hill at a fine rate, an' when he come to the rich man's house, who should he see, by the greatest good luck, but the masther himself, standin' on the steps o' the hall door, sayin' good-bye to the company. He lay quiet till the last of the illigant carr'ages had drove off, an' the master stepped inside again.

"'I think I'll have a smoke,' says he—here Pat assumed an aristocratic air and spoke in refined and mincing tones—'before I go to bed. William,' says he to one of the futmen, 'bring me me slippers.' Well, the gentleman sat down in a grand soft armchair, an' the futman brought his slippers—an' if the Gout didn't take the opportunity an' pop into his big toe!"

Roseen jumped up from her stool with a chuckle of anticipation. Pat proceeded to give utterance to a series of hollow and extraordinary groans, and to writhe in a manner intended to convey the extreme agony of the rich man. Roseen fairly danced about, imitating Pat's moanings to the best of her ability. "Ou-ou-ou-ough! Ugh!" "'By this an' by that,' says the gentleman, 'tare an' ages!' says he, 'thunder an' turf!' he says, 'what in the world is the matter wid me big toe?'

“Well, the misthress comes runnin’ down in a great state. ‘My dear,’ she says (here Pat affected an extremely *Englified* falsetto), ’I am afeard you are very sick,’ says she; ’ye’d best have a sup of port wine,’ says she.

“‘Ou-ou-ough!’ says the masther, ’maybe it would do me good. Fetch it there, quick,’ he says to the sarvants, ‘or I’ll be the death o’ some of yez!’

Page 130

“Well, they brought him port wine, an’ they brought him whisky, an’ they brought a beautiful velvet cushion an’ put it under the gentleman’s fut; an’ the Gout winks to himself, an’ says he, ’Troth, I’ll not be in a hurry to quit out o’ this. Sure it’s in clover altogether I am,’ he says.

“Well, there ye have the story now, alanna, an’ here’s herself comin’ down the hill an’ Mike afther her.”

But Roseen was too much excited to heed the last announcement. “Was it this way, the way the rich man was groanin’?” she asked, once more imitating Pat’s extraordinary utterances. The old man nodded, and Roseen stood still meditatively scratching one little brown leg with the curved-in toes of the other. “I wisht,” she observed presently, in a pensive tone, “that a Gout ’ud get into me gran’father’s big toe; it ’ud sarve him right!”

Pat was rubbing his hands and chuckling to himself over this remark when his wife entered, hot and weary after her peregrinations over the ruins.

“Sixpence is all they’re afther givin’ me,” she observed plaintively. “Dear knows, it’s hard set we are to live these times at all.”

“Is it sixpence, woman alive!” cried Pat; “I wonder they had the face to offer it to ye. Well, well, I was looking for a shillin’ now, or maybe two. Here, cut the child a bit o’ griddle cake; she’s been keepin’ me company this long while, haven’t ye, Roseen? An’ it’s starvin’ she is out-an’-out.”

“Come here, alanna,” said Mrs. Clancy, taking down the flat loaf from the shelf in the corner; “wait till I put a pinch o’ sugar on it. I’m sorry I haven’t butther for ye, but there isn’t a bit in the house at all. There now.”

“Thank you, ma’am,” said Roseen, extending an eager hand.

“Ye’re welcome, darlint. Here, Mike, ye’d like a bit too, wouldn’t ye?”

“Aye,” said Mike, drawing near likewise.

He was a sturdy little fellow of about eleven, with an open sunburnt face, hair bleached almost lint-white by the sun, and twinkling blue eyes like his father’s. The mother passed her thin knotted hand lovingly over his tangled head and smilingly bade him “be off out o’ that with Roseen.”

The two little figures darted out in the sunlight, and soon were to be seen bounding like deer up the steep golden-green slope that led to the “Rock.”

“What do ye think the little one there is afther sayin’ to me?” asked Pat, shading his eyes with his hand as he peered after them. “‘I wisht,’ says she, ’a Gout ‘ud get into me gran’father’s fut,’ says she; ’it ‘ud sarve him right,’ she says. I was afther tellin’ her the ‘Story of the Spider an’ the Gout,’ ye know.”

“Did she now?” cried Mrs. Clancy, sinking down on the stool which Roseen had vacated and clapping her hands together. “Well now, that bates all! But she’s the ’cutest little thing—I never seen her aiqual.”

“‘I wisht,’ quoted Dan meditatively, ’a Gout ’ud get into me gran’father’s big toe an’ stay there,’ says she. Ha, ha; bedad I wisht it would too, the ould naygur.”

Page 131

Meanwhile the children pattered up the hill and spoke no word until they reached the summit. Sitting down under the great portcullis, they munched their bread and sugar amicably together, Mike's eyes pensively gazing in front of him the while, and Roseen's roving hither and thither with quick, eager glances. Suddenly she tilted her head backward, gazing at a narrow horizontal slit in the masonry high over their heads. "That's where they used to throw the bilin' lead down in ould ancient times when anybody wanted to come fightin' them."

Mike gazed upwards likewise, still slowly munching, but said nothing.

"When you an' me grows up an' gets married to each other, the way we always said we would," pursued Roseen, "this 'ud be a gran' place to live."

Mike's face brightened, and he nodded enthusiastically. "It would so," he agreed.

"There's lots o' beau'ful rooms that we could live in," resumed Roseen, "an' we'd make a fire in that great big enormous stone hearth beyant, an' we'd ate off o' that big stone table, an' when anybody 'ud offer to come annoyin' us, we'd just melt a bit o' lead an' throw it down on them."

Mike looked astonished and perturbed. "Sure it 'ud burn the flesh off o' their bones. I wouldn't like to be doin' that, Roseen."

"If they was rale bad people," said Roseen persuasively; "rale wicked, crule people, the same as me gran'father beyant, it 'ud sarve them right,—or we might throw down a sup of bilin' wather," she added as a concession.

Mike appeared unconvinced.

"I don't think ye have a right to be talkin' that way of your gran'father," he said reprovingly; "an' he isn't that bad. He never offered to lay a finger on me as long as I am in it, barring the time I let the sheep into the hay-field."

"He's a crule ould villain!" returned Roseen conclusively. "Look at all he done on me mother. Come on now," with a sudden change of tone, "whistle a tune an' we'll have a dance."

Mike looked lovingly at the last fragments of his griddle cake, the enjoyment of which he had been anxious to prolong as much as possible, and then after a little sigh, crammed them into his mouth and led the way to the giant's wrestling ground.

“Wait a bit,” he cried, as Roseen took hold of the folds of her ragged skirt daintily in the finger and thumb of each hand, and looked expectantly towards him, “I’m just goin’ to thramp a bit in the joynt’s steps.”

“What are ye doin’ that for at all?” asked Roseen, knitting her brows.

“Sure me father bid me never go past this way widout stampin’ them down a bit to keep them from gettin’ smaller,” answered Mike, hammering diligently with his bare heel at the corners of the “futprints” of the mighty Fin-ma-coul.

Page 132

The operation at last concluded, he rejoined the little girl on a small grassy plateau surrounded by low growing Irish gorse. The heather, mingling with these furze bushes, was just beginning to bloom, and here and there a tall foxglove towered above the undulating irregular mass of purple and gold. Taking her place in the centre of her ball-room, Roseen again looped up her skirt and pointed her shapely little foot. Mike began to whistle a jig tune, his sturdy brown legs twinkling the while in time to the measure. Now and then his piping grew faint, and was interrupted by gasps for breath, whereupon Roseen, still vigorously footing it, would take up the tune after a fashion of her own, her voice imitating as nearly as might be the sound of a fiddle. Overhead a lark was soaring, and his trill, wafted down to them, mingled with their quaint human music; far away over that brown and purple stretch of bog the plovers were circling, their faint melancholy call sounding every now and then. The sun would soon set, the air was already turning a little chilly, and the dew was falling. The shadow of the ruined tower fell obliquely across the golden-green carpet of their ball-room; but the children danced on, Roseen's curls shaken into a light feathery nimbus round her brow, a beautiful colour in her cheeks, and her little white teeth parted in a smile of delight; while Mike pranced and capered, as though old Peter's stick had never fallen about his shoulders, and there were no holes in the roof at home.

ROSEEN

Peter Rorke stood on the threshold of Monavoe, his big comfortable house, looking round him with the proud air of the proprietor. It is commonly said that the Devil is not so black as he is painted, and in the case of Peter Rorke the proverb would seem to be justified. In appearance and manner there was nothing about the man to bear out his evil reputation. A close observer would indeed detect, in his long narrow face, and particularly in the neighbourhood of his rather small closely-set eyes, certain lines and wrinkles which conveyed an impression of meanness—the one sin which, as some one very truly observes, is apparently found least possible to forgive, particularly, one might add, by Irish folk. But, on the whole, Peter Rorke was not an ill-looking old fellow, and now as he stood basking in the autumn sunlight, while his eyes wandered from one to the other of his possessions, his face wore quite a pleasant expression. In truth, it would have been difficult, even for the most humble of mortals, not to feel a certain exhilaration on gazing at the evidences of prosperity at Monavoe. The house, to begin with, was solid and comfortable, the barns and granaries were full to overflowing; yonder were stables for the six fine cart-horses now toiling at various corners of Peter's domain; adjoining them the cow-houses, where Peter could not only accommodate twelve milch-cows, but fatten in

Page 133

the winter an equal number of “stall-feds”; in the “haggard” to the rear were the innumerable golden stacks and hay-ricks which were, of all his possessions, those most valued by the Master of Monavoe. No one in the country was so clever in selecting time and weather for cutting and carting; no one so cunning in ascertaining the most opportune moments for selling, or so far-seeing with regard to prices. At this very moment Peter Rorke was gazing at an immense rick of “prime old hay” which he had had the prudence to keep back while all his neighbours were selling. His wisdom now appeared; there had been an unexpected failure in the hay crop that season, the prices had gone up accordingly, and Peter looked forward to receiving more than double the sum that his produce was actually worth.

Rousing himself at length from what, to one of his temperament, had been a reverie of long duration, he turned round and called loudly to some one whom he supposed to be within: “Rose, Rose! Are ye there, girl?”

There was no answer, and after a moment’s pause he called again impatiently. A very old woman with a white sun-bonnet tilted over her brow came slowly from the back premises. “Where is my granddaughter, Judy?” he asked, with a frown. Judy was no favourite of his.

“She isn’t here at all,” she observed; and then jerking her thumb over her shoulder in the direction of some outhouses, “she went acrass to the dairy a while ago.”

Peter Rorke grunted, and, without another glance at the old woman, began to walk at a rapid pace in the direction she had indicated. As he drew near the partly open door of the dairy, the sound of a girl’s voice could be heard merrily lilting a tune; and when Peter entered the owner of the voice turned round, abruptly ceasing her song and gazing at him with a startled look. This was Roseen, a tall and comely lassie of seventeen, in whose pretty, saucy face, however, and clear blue eyes, there still remained much of the child. Her mother had died when she was about fifteen, and, to the astonishment of every one who knew him, Peter Rorke had announced his intention of adopting his grandchild. He had never had any objections to the girl herself, he declared loftily; she was well enough in every way, and his own son’s child; he could never put up with the mother, it was true—a common little servant girl that his son had no right to have been speaking to, much less to be goin’ an’ gettin’ married to. Peter would never bring himself to recognise him at all after he had demeaned himself that way, and as long as the wife lived he couldn’t be expected to take any notice of the child; but now that she was dead an’ gone to her own place, wherever that might be, he wasn’t goin’ to let his granddaughter go out to sarvice. She was Miss Rorke, and her

place was at Monavoe, where all the Rorkes had lived and died for more generations than any one cared to count.

Page 134

When, however, he had, with a good deal of pompous benevolence, driven up on his outside-car to fetch Miss Rorke from the tumbled-down cabin which had been hitherto the only home she had known, that young lady, instead of being properly grateful, and impressed by her relative's condescension, had displayed a spirit of independence, and indeed stubbornness, which the worthy old gentleman found as bewildering as mortifying. He had never taken any notice of them before, she had averred; he had let her father starve, and her mother work herself to death. Roseen was not going to be beholden to him now—she'd earn her own bread, so she would, an' if he thought shame of his grandchild goin' to sarvice, she was glad of it, so she was, an' she'd make sure an' tell every one the way he was afther thratin' them. Peter had rubbed his lantern-jaw and glanced askance at the determined little maiden who stood facing him, her blue eyes flashing through her tears, and every line of face and figure betokening resolution. First, he had been puzzled, then angry, finally he had had recourse to entreaty, feeling in his heart that he could never look the neighbours in the face again if the story got about that this chit had "got the better of him that way." At length Roseen had suffered herself to be softened, and agreed, after much persuasion, to a compromise. She would condescend to take up her abode under her grandfather's roof on the condition that Judy came too. Judy was one of these appendages so frequently to be seen in Irish cabins, there being, apparently, scarcely any householder so poor that he or she cannot afford to shelter some one poorer still. While there is a roof over their heads, a potato to put into their mouths, the Irish peasants will share with one another. Ever since Roseen could remember, Judy had been an inmate of their home; she had helped in the small household labours, tended Mrs. Rorke after her own fashion when she had been sick, scolded and adored Roseen from babyhood to youth. There was not much else poor Judy could do, except smoke her pipe when, by some lucky chance, a "bit o' baccy" came in her way: she was not only old and lame, but half-witted, very nearly "innocent." What Peter's feelings had been may be guessed when invited to receive this strange-looking old creature into his house; but Roseen had been firm, and he had finally consented.

Whether there had been some dormant family affection in that withered heart of his, which had sprung to life now that poor Mrs. Rorke no longer stood between him and his own flesh and blood, or whether the girl's obstinacy had aroused in him a corresponding desire to carry his point, or whether, as some of the neighbours ill-naturedly said, he thought if the fine little colleen was to go to sarvice at all, she might as well come to him for no wages as to be airnin' from somebody else, remains a mystery; but it is certain that in spite of the unpleasant condition imposed

Page 135

by Roseen, Peter felt a curious glow of pride and pleasure when he assisted Roseen to alight at the door of Monavoe. Since then he had certainly grown fond of her, and was moreover proud of her good looks and winsome ways. He had sent her to a boarding-school, a grand convent establishment for young ladies, where the good nuns had done their best to impart to her all that was deemed essential for Mr. Rorke's granddaughter to learn. Roseen knew already how to read, and could write after a fashion of her own; she now learnt arithmetic, and could, indeed, keep her butter accounts by dint of much counting on slim sunburnt fingers and puckering of her pretty white forehead; but alas! all attempts to attain more elegant accomplishments remained fruitless—Roseen was a thorough little dunce. Much to the relief of all parties, she returned to Monavoe at the end of twelve months, and thereupon devoted her energies to the more homely acquirements in which she had since become an adept. She could do anything with those deft fingers of hers: her butter was proverbial, her bread excellent, she could trim a hat and hem a duster with equal speed and nicety, and as for clear-starching and getting up fine things, she was the wonder of the rustic matrons for ten miles round.

Roseen had been making butter when her grandfather entered, and, turning round, displayed a face rosy with her exertions, and arms bare to the elbow.

"So here ye are," remarked Peter, his grim face relaxing as much as was possible to it; "I've been lookin' for ye everywhere. Do ye know what I am after doin' for you this fine mornin'?"

"What?" asked Roseen, a little apprehensively, while the colour deepened in her cheeks. Peter leaned against the long stone shelf that ran round the dairy wall, and smiled before replying: "I am after makin' the finest match for you that's to be had in all the country side."

The flush mounted to Roseen's very temples and then died away; she paused a moment to steady her voice before venturing on a query. "I seen Mr. Quinn goin' down the road a little while ago—is it him?"

"Ah, you little rogue! you were on the lookout, were ye?" cried Peter jocosely. "Well, you are right; it is him. You are the rale lucky girl, Roseen! You'll be the richest woman in the town-land."

Roseen glanced down, apparently wrestling with some inward emotion, and presently observed in a small, strangled voice: "Sure, he is twenty year older nor me."

“What matter?” said Peter; “he’ll be all the better able to take care o’ you. It’s better to marry a man with sense, nor to go takin’ up with some young whipper-snapper that would be thinkin’ of nothin’ but spendin’ money and carryin’ on with nonsense.”

“He’s an ould widower,” cried Roseen, wrinkling up her little nose with an expression of disgust.

“Well,” said Peter, “an’ a good thing too; you’ll come in for all the beautiful dresses and jewels and things the first Mrs. Quinn left behind.”

Page 136

“I am not goin’ to take her lavin’s, then,” retorted Roseen with spirit. “Neither her jew’lry, her dresses, nor her husband will I have, so there! That’s my answer, an’ you may tell him so. He may go make up his match with somebody else for me.” With a whisk of her skirts and a stamp of her foot, she returned to her butter.

“Come, come!” said Peter, knitting his brows. “Come, come, come!” he repeated, in warning tones; “this won’t do, miss.”

Roseen tossed her head, and gave her roll of butter two or three little pats.

“If I bid you take Mr. Quinn, you’ll have to take him,” said Peter angrily.

“I won’t, then,” retorted Roseen, and she finished off one little roll and fell to preparing another.

“You owe everything in this wide world to me, I would have you remember,” cried Peter, stammering in his wrath; “if I was to turn you out o’ doors this minute, ye wouldn’t have a place to go to.”

“I would soon find a place,” said Roseen. “I told ye that before I come here.”

Peter, finding the threat of no avail, changed his tactics, and assumed a wheedling tone.

“Listen, Roseen, like a good sensible girl. Sure, ye know very well it’s me that holds the place of father an’ mother to you now, an’ it’s my duty to see you are settled an’ provided for. Well, now, ye might sarch the world over an’ not find such a good man as Mr. Quinn, an’ a real gentleman, too, mind you. Sure, it’s jumping with joy you ought to be. An’ lookit here, Roseen, you are all the descendants I have, an’ if you do as I bid you, I’ll make me will after ye are married to Mr. Quinn, an’ leave the two ‘o you this place an’ everything in the wide world that I have. There now!”

This tempting prospect was too much for Roseen. She whisked round again so rapidly that she overturned a pan of cream; her cheeks were flaming, her eyes flashing with anger.

“I’ll be thankin’ ye not to talk to me that way, grandfather,” she cried. “I declare it’s enough to vex a saint! I won’t have Mr. Quinn, an’ wouldn’t if he gave me a carpet of gould to walk upon. That’s me answer, an’ he needn’t be waitin’ for me, for I won’t have him.”

Peter Rorke shook his head sorrowfully.

“Ye’ll be bringin’ me white hairs with sorrow to the grave, the same as your father,” he remarked, oblivious of the fact that the poor fellow in question had only succeeded in laying low his own curly black ones. “I declare me heart’s broke. Ye had a right to have a bit more consideration for me, Roseen, after all I done for ye. Did I ever give ye a cross word, now, since you come here?”

Roseen opened her eyes a little blankly, stricken with sudden remorse. It was true her grandfather had ever treated her kindly since she had come to Monavoe, and indeed, after a certain queer fashion, the two had grown to be rather fond of each other.

“Haven’t I always given you everything you wanted?” pursued Peter, in a querulous tone; “everything in reason, anyhow. Look at the beautiful blue tabinet dress I gave you —sure there isn’t the like in the place—and the new hat ye have, an’ kid gloves an’ all! Sure, I never deny you anything! An’ you up an’ give me them disrespectful answers, an’ refuse to do the only thing I ever axed ye!”

Page 137

Tears were actually twinkling in the old man's narrow eyes, so much aggrieved did he feel himself to be. Roseen began to cry too. "It's me that has me heart broke," she sobbed. "How can I go marryin' Mr. Quinn wid his ugly red face, an' him an ould widower an' cross-eyed into the bargain? Sure, if it was anything else now—" A burst of woe interrupted her utterance.

"Me child," said Peter impressively, "I know more what's for your good nor you do yourself; but don't distress yourself too much, alanna: Mr. Quinn says he does not mind waitin' as long as you like, so we'll say no more about it for a while."

"O—o—o—oh!" groaned Roseen.

Peter prevented further lamentations by assuring her, with various affectionate pats on the arm, that he knew she would never go annoyin' her poor ould grandfather, but they'd say no more about it, for a bit anyhow. He withdrew, leaving Roseen still sobbing amid the fragments of a broken milk-pan, and perhaps the ruins of a castle in the air.

Presently, however, she dried her eyes, and, being a methodical person, set to work to repair the disorder around her. When the broken crockery was removed, the cream wiped up, and the remaining butter rolled into shape, she went out, closing the dairy door after her and, giving a hasty glance to right and to left, made her way swiftly across the "haggard" and down a grassy lane beyond, to a large field, where a man was to be seen leisurely assembling together a troop of cows.

Roseen ran quickly across the grass towards him, stopping as soon as she perceived that he had caught sight of her, and beckoning to him mysteriously.

"Come here, Mike!" she cried softly, as he hastened towards her, "I've something to be tellin' ye."

Mike quickened his pace. He was a tall young fellow, but slender, with an honest, good-humoured face. Without being handsome, there was something attractive about him—-an alertness, a vigour in the well-knit limbs, a candour and kindliness in the expression of the open face, a tenderness, moreover, in the blue eyes as they rested on Roseen—-which would seem to account for the fact that these former playfellows were now lovers.

Roseen looked piteously at him, as he halted beside her, gazing with alarm at the trace of tears which still remained on her face.

"Me grandfather wants me to get married to Mr. Quinn," she announced briefly.

“God bless us!” ejaculated Mike, his cheeks growing pale beneath their tan. “What did ye say, alanna?”

“I said I wouldn’t,” answered Roseen.

“That’s me brave girl! I declare ye’re afther givin’ me such a fright, I don’t know whether I am on me head or on me heels. Was he goin’ to murther ye for that?”

“He was at first,” replied the girl, “and then he began sayin’—Oh dear, oh dear, me heart’s broke!” She was sobbing now violently.

“Sure, what matther what he says?” cried Mike, much concerned. “Ye have no call to be frettin’ that way; let him say what he likes, bad luck to him! Sure, ye won’t be havin’ Mr. Quinn, Roseen, will ye?”

Page 138

“N—no,” said Roseen. “Me grandfather says I’m bringin’ his white hairs with sorrow to the grave.”

“Ah, the ould gomeril!” retorted Mike unsympathetically. “Bedad, what hairs he has isn’t white at all, but red as carrots! Don’t ye be listenin’, Roseen, asthore. Sure, ye wouldn’t marry ugly Mr. Quinn?” he repeated anxiously.

“I would not,” replied Roseen; “but I don’t like me grandfather to be talkin’ that way. An’—an’ his hair isn’t that red, Mike,” she added reprovingly; “ye have no call to be sayin’ it is.”

“If I never said worse nor you have said yourself often an’ often!” retorted the lad. “Many’s the time I heard ye at it.”

“That was before I had sense,” replied Roseen, a trifle loftily; “ye have no call to be castin’ that up at me now. Me an’ me grandfather has never fell out since I come here.”

“Oh, that indeed,” said Mike sarcastically; “ye’re gettin’ altogether too good an’ too grand. Hothen indeed, I may as well make up my mind to it—ye’ll be Mrs. Quinn before the year is out. Sure, what chanst has a poor fellow the same as meself, wid the ould wans at home to support as well as meself, when there’s such a fine match as Mr. Quinn to the fore! Och bedad! when ye’re sittin’ along wid him on your side-car, ye’ll never offer to throw so much as a look at poor Mike.”

At this affecting picture Roseen wept more than ever, and brokenly assured the honest fellow that not for all the Mister Quinns in the world would she ever forget him, and that she would wait for him till she was grey, she would, an’ marry nobody else, no matter what might happen.

Thus reassured, Mike could not do less than apologise for his intemperate language, and a reconciliation was in the act of taking place when Mr. Peter Rorke chanced to look over the hedge. It was past milking-time, and he had come to see why his cows had not been driven in as usual. Leaning on his stick and trembling with rage, he apostrophised the young pair in no measured terms.

“Now I understand, miss,” he added, after relieving his mind by a burst of eloquence, “now I understand why you thought so bad of Mr. Quinn’s kind offer. It was this young schamer ye had in your mind—him that ye should think no more of nor the dirt under your feet.”

“Well then, grandfather,” cried Roseen hotly, “I may as well tell ye straight out that I won’t stand here an’ hear Michael Clancy abused. He’s all the husband ever I’ll have, an’ ye may make up your mind to that.”

Peter spluttered with fury and brandished his stick. It was perhaps well for the girl that the hedge divided them.

“Get in wid ye into the house this minute out o’ me sight,” he screamed. “Him your husband! A dirty little beggar’s brat that I picked up out o’ the gutter for charity!”

“Charity yourself,” interrupted Mike, squaring his shoulders. “I’ve done more work for ye nor ever ye paid me for—now! And the Clancys is as good as the Rorkes, an’ an oulder family, though we are down in the world, along wid bad luck an’ misfortun’.”

Page 139

“The Clancys is an ould ancient family,” chimed in Roseen. Her grandfather turned to her, almost beside himself with exasperation.

“Get in wid ye to the house this instant, as I bid ye, miss; or it’ll be the worse for ye. Be off, now, before I come over the hedge to you.”

“If you dar’ lay a finger,” began Mike; but Roseen interrupted him with a little defiant laugh.

“Sure, I am not afeard of him, Mike. I am more afeard of his hurting himself nor me; but I’m goin’ now, anyway, an’ I am glad ye know the truth, grandfather, so that ye needn’t be botherin’ me about Mr. Quinn.”

She went away, moving slowly and carrying her curly head very high.

Peter watched her till she was out of sight and hearing, and then turned to Mike.

“Now then,” he cried, “we’ll have this matter settled. You’ll go out o’ this, me lad, an’ so will your father an’ mother. They’re owin’ me a year’s rent an’ more.”

“Didn’t I tell ye I would work it off, little by little?” said Mike, who had suddenly become very pale. “It was me poor mother bein’ sick last year that thrun us back, an’ you said ye would have patience wid us.”

“Then ye had a right to behave better,” returned Rorke. “How dar’ ye go make up to my granddaughter, you young villain? I’d have ye to know that Miss Rorke is not for the likes of you.”

All poor Mike’s pride and valour seemed to have deserted him since Peter’s threat.

“Sure, Roseen an’ me was always fond of one another,” he said pleadingly. “I couldn’t remember a time when we wasn’t. Her an’ me was ould playfellows, and she used to be as much at our place as at home.”

“It won’t be your place much longer,” retorted Peter curtly. “Out o’ this ye may all go, bag an’ baggage, the whole pack of yous.”

“Me father hasn’t stirred out o’ that chimley corner for years an’ years,” urged Mike; “an’ me mother, God help her! she’s near as bad as him wid the weakness an’ the terrible cough she has this while back. It ‘ud be the death of her out an’ out—sure, where could the cratur’s go?”

“Let them go to the poor-house, unless you can make a livin’ for them somewhere out o’ this. I’ll not have ye here, mind. Ye needn’t come an’ work to-morrow, an’ ye may tell your father an’ mother to be gettin’ ready to march, for they’ll be havin’ the bailiff in on them as soon as I can get him.”

A deep flush replaced Mike’s pallor and a shiver of indignation shook him from head to foot.

“Mr. Rorke,” he cried, “ye don’t mane what ye are sayin’. Ye’d never have the heart to turn them two ould craturs out on the roadside to die?”

“Wouldn’t I though?” retorted Peter; “ye’ll soon find out for yourselves whether I would or not.”

He turned and was hastening homewards, when Mike called after him. The old man faced him, still sneering.

“This will not bring you luck,” cried Mike, his young voice quivering, his face working with emotion, his usually merry eyes ablaze with passion. “I tell you it’ll bring a curse on you. You’ll live to rue the day you turned on us that way—an’ maybe it won’t be long before ye are sorry.”

Page 140

Peter's only answer was an ironical laugh, and he once more resumed his homeward journey, leaving Mike standing pale and trembling beside the hedge.

Peter entered the house, flushed with triumph, and, calling loudly for Roseen, informed her that he was after sendin' that fine young sweetheart of hers about his business.

"Ye don't mane to say you turned him off!" cried the girl, in dismay. "The poor fellow, how is he to live at all, him that has his old father and mother to keep as well as himself?"

"His father and mother won't be costing him anything much now, I am thinkin'," explained Peter politely. "That grand ancient family of the Clancys will soon be out o' this place, an' living in the greatest aise and comfort at the country's expense in the poorhouse, me dear."

"What do ye mane at all? Indeed Mike will never let them go there. He'll work till the two hands drops off of him, but he will conthrive to keep a roof over their heads."

"Will he now?" said Rorke, still laboriously urbane. "I wonder what roof that'll be?"

Roseen looked up quickly, her parted lips suddenly turning white.

"I am thinking," resumed Peter, "he'll have to make haste an' find a place for them, for they'll be out o' the old one soon enough."

"Grandfather!" cried Roseen, "ye're not going to put them out in airnest, are ye? Sure ye'd never have the heart! The poor old couple is dying on their feet as it is. It'll be the death o' them altogether if ye go do that."

"An' a very good thing too," retorted Peter. "We'll be shut o' the whole of them out-an'-out, that way."

"Ye're a regular hard-hearted old Turk," cried Roseen, "that's what ye are! The whole countryside will cry shame on ye! It is outrageous, so it is! 'Pon me word, ye're as bad as Cromwell."

"Ah, ha," said Peter, "I'll tell ye what it is, Roseen, the more impidence ye give me, the more I'll do on the Clancys. *Now*! Ye bold little lump! How dar' ye go speak to me that way? I'll teach ye to be carryin' on wid the likes o' that. Not another word out o' ye now, or I'll walk down to the Clancys this minute an' throw them out on the road before dark."

Roseen's fury was replaced by terror.

“Och, grandfather, sure ye wouldn’t do the like! I ax your pardon for spakin’ disrespectful to ye. Sure ye’re not in airnest? Ye won’t raly put the poor old man and his wife there out o’ their little place? They won’t be troublin’ you long. A-a-h, grandfather, me own dear grandfather, do lave them where they are an’ I’ll promise faithful never to give you a crass word again.”

But neither the coaxing tone nor the touch of the soft clinging arms, which the girl now wound about him, moved Peter’s heart.

“Out o’ this them Clancys goes, bag and baggage,” he asserted; “if ye’d wanted me to let them stay where they were, an’ them owin’ me so much rent an’ all, ye ought to have behaved different. But on account of this impident young sckamer ye go tellin’ me ye won’t marry Mr. Quinn, the man I chose for ye, an’ I catch ye sweetheartin’ an’ carryin’ on wid that ploughboy there, demanin’ yourself altogether. Sure nobody could be expected to stand that. I won’t stand it anyhow. Out they go, and off the whole o’ them may march.”

Page 141

Roseen was silent for a moment, apparently battling with herself, and at last she said in a very shaky voice:

“It’s a poor case if it’s me that’s bringin’ this throuble on them all. Grandfather, if—if I was to give ye me word that I wouldn’t spake to Mike in the way of courtin’ agin—”

“Wisha!” cried Peter sarcastically, “much good that would do. I know the way ye would keep your promise, me lady; no, no, I’ll make sure of this job.”

“Oh, grandfather! I’ll promise, I promise faithful never so much as to look at Mike!”

But Peter was inexorable; he had been wounded in his tenderest point, bearded by these two impudent young people—set at nought. His pride, moreover, could not brook the proximity of the audacious youth who had dared to aspire to the hand of his granddaughter, and of the parents who had, as he had been reminded that day, ventured to befriend her when he himself had cast her off.

He felt that he must be rid of them without delay. Poor Roseen crept upstairs and sat disconsolately at the window, watching the corner of the haggard where she expected before long to see Mike appear. It had been the custom of the young pair to meet for a few moments every evening, under the shadow of the big hayrick and there converse before Mike returned home. He would surely come, if only to say good-bye. Poor fellow, what would he do? Whither would he go? Big tears rolled down Roseen’s cheeks as she thought of his desperate plight.

As she sat watching and waiting—for she dared not venture out too soon lest her grandfather’s suspicions should be aroused—a sudden rattling and fumbling at the lock of her own door made her turn round. The door was opened for a moment, a lean hand thrust into the room, the key which had been on the inner side was withdrawn suddenly; then the door quickly closed again, and before Roseen thoroughly realised what had happened, old Peter locked her in.

“Good night, me dear!” he cried ironically through the keyhole; “I think it’s as well for ye to stay quiet this evenin’ an’ not be takin’ any more walks, or tirin’ or excitin’ yourself. Pleasant dreams, dear.”

Down the stairs he went, chuckling to himself and leaving the girl furious. She banged at the door with all her might and main, but the lock held fast and no one came to her rescue; then she rushed to the window and threw it open; but the distance from the ground was too great for even a desperate maiden to jump, and she wrung her hands frantically. Mike would think she had given him up; he would fancy her grandfather had

got round her, and that she had deserted him in his humiliation and distress. Was there nobody who would help her, no one by whom she could convey at least a message?

As if in answer to her agonised prayer, certain shuffling steps were presently heard below, and old Judy's white sunbonnet appeared round the corner of the house. Roseen clapped her hands: here was one who would do her bidding, a faithful hench-woman who could be trusted to carry out her orders in defiance of old Peter's commands.

Page 142

“Judy!” cried the girl softly, bending out of the window.

Judy looked up in astonishment. “Is it there ye are?” she cried.

“Oh, Judy, my grandfather has me locked in! Listen now! I want ye to do something for me.”

Judy’s face clouded over. “I was just stalin’ out to have me little pipe,” she said. “The masther does be killin’ me, when he catches me at it, an’ I was makin’ me way off while he had his back turned.”

“Ah, ye can smoke away as much as ye like,” cried Roseen impatiently. “See here, Judy, all I want ye to do is to stand over there, by the corner of the haggard, an’ watch till Mike comes, an’ tell him me grandfather’s afther lockin’ me up, an’ I can’t get out this evenin’, but the first chanst I have to-morrow I’ll run round. An’ tell him”—here her voice faltered—“that no matther what any one says, I’ll always be faithful to him. An’ I’ll never get married to anybody on’y to himself.”

Judy’s beady black eyes were fixed somewhat vacantly on her mistress’s face during this speech, but she nodded at the end, and on being adjured not to forget, informed Roseen, somewhat tartly, that she had no notion of forgettin’. She hobbled off fingering her beloved pipe, and Roseen, sitting by the window, watched the twilight deepen and saw the world grow misty and indistinct, and heard the birds twittering as they went to roost. Then the stars came out one by one, and a pale young moon showed faintly in the sky; it was night now, but Judy had not returned. Was it possible that Mike had failed to appear at the trysting-place.

After what seemed an interminable time, Judy’s uncertain footfalls were again heard, and her white bonnet showed indistinctly in the dusk, bobbing up and down as she approached. Roseen craned forward her head eagerly. “What did he say, Judy?”

“I’m afther losin’ me lovely pipe,” responded the old woman, halting beneath the window. “What in the world will I do? I’m afther losin’ it. Oh dear! oh dear!—the on’y bit o’ comfort I had.”

“Whisht, whisht; ye’ll find it to-morrow, when the light comes. Did ye see Mike, Judy? An’ what did he say?”

“Ah, don’t be botherin’ me about Mike,” wailed Judy, “I have other things to be thinkin’ of, I’m afther losing me beautiful pipe; me heart’s broke entirely!”

“Judy, Judy! I’ll give ye the loveliest pipe ever ye seen, an’ a beautiful roll o’ twist, if on’y ye’ll tell me. Wasn’t Mike in it at all, Judy? Tell me that, for the love of Heaven.”

Judy made a desperate effort to collect the scattered remnants of her wits, and presently said doubtfully: “Is it Mike ye are axing about? Sure what ‘ud bring Mike to the haggard? I did *not* see him—an’ me pipe is lost on me!”

Roseen fairly stamped her foot. Why had she been such a fool as to count on this poor old idiotic creature? Probably while Judy was hunting for her pipe, Mike had watched and waited in vain for a sign from his love.

Page 143

Judy shuffled off, lamenting, but Roseen sat still at her open casement, pondering mournfully on the misfortunes which had overwhelmed those she loved, and bewailing her impotence to help them. Soon all was absolutely still; the house was wrapt in slumber, and at last, rising, chilled and weary, the girl prepared to go to rest. As she closed the window her eye was caught by a curious appearance in the sky, immediately above the long line of the regularly shaped stacks in the haggard. The big hayrick particularly was defined with curious clearness against what seemed to be a glow in the sky. As she looked a sudden tongue of flame sprang out from the western corner, and ran leaping up the great dark mass, spreading and widening as it went; then sparks were thrown out, and Roseen suddenly realised that the great rick, composed of tons upon tons of hay, worth at this moment a fortune in itself, was on fire. Screaming she rushed frantically to the door, but owing to Peter's forethought she was locked in. In vain she hammered and shrieked; no one heeded her. Such labourers as remained on the premises at night slept over the stables; the two maid-servants whom Peter employed only came by day. If Judy heard, she had not the sense to heed; and old Peter himself, snuggling into his pillows, merely turned over when the din reached his ears, muttering to himself with righteous indignation that a body would think the girl would know better nor behave that way, but let her shout as much as she liked an' tire herself out, she'd be apt to be a bit quieter in the mornin'. Meanwhile the little flame, which Roseen had first seen, had grown apace. The slight crackling sound which had originally accompanied its progress, was replaced by a sullen roar; volumes of ruddy smoke filled the air; a pungent, peculiar smell penetrated even to Roseen's room, almost suffocating her. Would no one hear, would no one heed? Taking the poker she knocked on the floor, hoping to produce some response from her grandfather, but finding that he did not answer she fell to hammering and battering the lock of her door with such vigour and good-will that at last she succeeded in breaking it. Rushing down stairs, candle in hand, she burst in upon old Peter.

"Get up, grandfather, get up at wanst! the big rick is on fire, and will be burnt to a cinder if you don't make haste." Old Peter sat up, blinking at the light, and at first refusing to believe Roseen; but when the girl flung open the window and he saw and heard for himself that the alarm was only too well founded, he fairly burst out crying like a child.

"Me rick, me beautiful rick! I'm ruined and destroyed entirely! What'll I do at all?"

"Get up!" said Roseen sharply, "and let's get all the help we can. I'll run out an' call Jack an' Barney, an' do you put on your clothes an' fill the stable bucket."

She flew out, and after some trouble succeeded in rousing the men in question, who, however, when they arrived on the scene and saw the extent of the damage which had already been done, gave her little hope of being able to arrest its progress.

Page 144

“Sure it’s all wan sheet of flame, none of us could get near it,” cried one, pointing to the rick. “What good would a bucket or two of wather do on that?”

“Well, do something can’t yez?” cried Roseen. “There’s no good in standin’ there, lookin’ at it. I’ll run off an’ fetch Mike Clancy; he has more sense nor the whole o’ yez put together.”

Off she sped, finding her way easily, even in the dark, along the familiar path; but when she reached the cabin, and after much knocking succeeded in arousing Mrs. Clancy, disappointment awaited her—Mike was nowhere to be found.

The news went round the country next morning, first that old Peter Rorke’s famous hayrick and two of the neighbouring cornstacks were burnt to the ground, and secondly that Michael Clancy had mysteriously disappeared. By-and-by certain additional circumstances were reported which caused people to connect the one fact with the other, and to comment thereon in whispers, with divers nods and winks, and mysterious jerks of the thumb. Michael was after havin’ words with the ould fellow, it was rumoured, on account of his bein’ sweet on Roseen, an’ him and his ould father and mother were goin’ to be put out o’ their little place. Sure no wonder the poor boy—Well, well, he’d have had the time to get far enough off by this, an’ it was nobody’s business, on’y his own, poor fellow!

It was whispered that Jack McEvoy had seen Mike on the evening before, standing in the corner of the haggard lookin’ about him “rale distracted, ye’d say.” “What are ye doin’ there at all, this time o’ night?” said Jack. “Och, nothin’ much,” says Mike, “just streelin’ about.” “Well,” says Jack, “I’m afeard ye are after gettin’ poor Roseen into throuble; there’s the great blow-up entirely goin’ on beyant there at the house. The masther’s murdherin’ Roseen for the way the two of yez has been goin’ on. He had her crying, the poor little girl,” says Jack; “I h’ard her through the windy,” says he. “’Oh, grandfather,’ she says, ’I’ll never spake to Mike agin, I give ye me word,’ she says. ‘I’ll never ax to look at him,’ says she. Well,” Jack said, “if ye’d seen the look that come over Mike’s face! He staggered back, so he did. ‘The ould devil,’ says he, ‘he’s afther gettin’ round her an’ turnin’ her agin me.’” “Och, to be sure,” says Jack, “he’s a rale ould villain! Is it true that he’s puttin’ yez all out in the road?” “He is,” says Mike, “but he’ll be sorry for it yet?”

“Mind that now,” some one would say, and the nods and the shakings of the heads would become more mysterious than ever, and then the gossips would begin to chuckle over Peter’s discomfiture; the universal verdict being that “It sarved him right, the covetious ould blackguard!” Mrs. Clancy had told Roseen, weeping, that Mike was gone off wid himself. He had come in late, very near distracted, the poor boy, an’ he had said

“good-bye” to his father an’ mother, an’ had told them he was goin’ to England to try an’ make a bit o’ money at the potato-harvest, the way they wouldn’t have to go to the workhouse when Mr. Rorke turned them out.

Page 145

Gone without a word of farewell to her! Roseen betook herself homewards full of bewildered pain; but kept her own counsel.

When the whispers anent the probable cause of his disappearance reached her ears, she felt a momentary thrill of apprehension, but her faith in her old friend survived this temptation. “Mike never done the like,” she said to herself, with a proud little toss of her head; even when by—and—by the lad was openly accused of having been the cause of the disaster, she took his part against all comers, making no secret of her own intention, frustrated by her grandfather, of meeting him in the haggard, and announcing boldly that it was on her account that Mike had come there.

Old Peter, who had behaved like a man distracted while his property was being consumed before his eyes, was the first to connect the disappearance of Mike with this act of destruction, and declared he would leave no stone unturned in his efforts to capture and punish him.

The police were soon on poor Mike’s track, and before long he was discovered in the act of embarking for Liverpool, and ignominiously dragged back to the scene of his supposed exploit. In vain he denied all knowledge of the deed, putting forward the same motive for his absence as his mother had done; circumstances were adverse to him, and the evidence against him sufficiently strong to justify the magistrate in committing him for trial at the approaching assizes. In the meantime the unfortunate fellow was despatched to the county gaol.

Peter Rorke remained in a condition of mind bordering upon frenzy; some of his neighbours opined that he was goin’ out of his wits altogether, and there were moments when Roseen herself was in terror of him. The old man’s excitement took a most unpleasant form, his hatred of Mike and his unfortunate parents being little less than rabid.

Not only were the poor old couple evicted with the least possible delay, but their few “sticks of furniture,” precious to themselves and worth absolutely nothing to anybody else, were seized and carried off to Monavoe—there being no bidders at the sale which Peter held in “distraint for rent.”

Poor old Pat was helped out of the cabin and insisted on seating himself by the roadside to watch proceedings, though his wife tried anxiously to persuade him to accept at once the hospitality pressed upon them by sympathetic neighbours.

“Lave me alone,” he growled, “I’ll see this out, so I will. Och, bedad, they are afther liftin’ out the bed now—mind it doesn’t fall to pieces on yez before yez get it into the

cart. Troth, ould Peter himself ought to sleep in that iligant bed; it's the pleasant dhrames he'd have!"

"It doesn't become ye to be talkin' that way, Pat," cried "Herself," flushed and weeping; "that was me mother's bed, so it was. Oh dear, oh dear! that I should live to see it taken off of us that way! And there's me pot that I biled mornin' an' evenin' these years an' years!"

Page 146

“Och, musha, lave the pot,” retorted Pat; “sure what good is the pot to us when we haven’t a bit to put in it? Troth, now the ould sckamer beyant has Mike in prison, we may give up altogether. Yourself an’ me will soon be undher the Daisy-quilt, never fear. There they have me ould chair, now,” he added sardonically; “troth it looks well cocked up there. Mind the china now, Jack McEvoy; herself here thinks there isn’t the like in the country,—have ye all now, the two mugs an’ the three plates, an’ the cups an’ saucers, an’ the little taypot with the cracked spout? Ah, don’t be forgettin’ the little jug though, the little weeny jug with a rose on it. Sure, what are ye crying for, woman! Isn’t it great grandeur for the little jug to be goin’ up to Monavoe? Bedad, ould Peter’ll be apt to be puttin’ it undher a glass case on the chimley-piece!”

Their friends and neighbours gathering round gazed with puzzled looks at the old man as he sat enthroned on his heap of stones, his knotted trembling hands leaning on a blackthorn stick, his face flushed, and his eyes blazing under their shaggy white brows. They could scarcely understand his stoicism; Mrs. Clancy’s lamentations were far more comprehensible to them.

“I won’t be in it long,” she wailed, “throublin’ anybody. Sure, what matther if it’s in the poorhouse the two of us ends our days, now poor Mike has been sent to gaol on us! Ah! God bless us! I could never hould up me head agin afther that.”

“God help ye!” commented a bystander. “Don’t be frettin’ that a-way, ma’am; sure even if he’s in gaol itself, he’ll be out agin before ye know where yez are an’ maybe they wouldn’t keep him in it at all.”

“’Deed then they had a right to let him out at wanst,” groaned Mrs. Clancy from beneath her apron. “The Lord knows he never done what they’re afther sayin’ he done.”

“Hothen, indeed, I wouldn’t make too sure of that,” put in Pat. “Why wouldn’t he do it? Bedad, he’ud have done well if he done twice as much. No, but he had a right to have burnt the ould villain in his bed an’ got shut of him out-an’-out—the on’y mistake the poor fellow made, was lettin’ him off so aisy.”

“Whisht, whisht! in the name of goodness! God bless us! what is it ye’re sayin’ at all? Sure, poor Mike’s as innocent as a lamb.”

“Heth, he’s the fine lamb!” retorted the father sarcastically. “Well, I believe they have everything now, down to the little creepy. Good luck to ye, Jack McEvoy; mind how ye go takin’ it up the road—don’t be dhroppin’ any of it out o’ the cart. Give me compliments to Mr. Rorke, and tell him I hope he’ll enjoy my iligant furnitur, an’ much good may it do him!”

Jack McEvoy, one of Peter's men, climbed into the cart sheepishly enough and drove off. Once more the neighbours pressed round the homeless old pair, quarrelling for the honour of harbouring them.

"It's coming along wid me they are," cried one, "aren't yez now? sure of course they are. Isn't mine the biggest house anywhere in Donoughmor?"

Page 147

“Ah, but it’s that far off,” argued another. “Look at the length of time it ‘ud take them to be gettin’ there, an’ the two of them so wake on their legs, God help them! No, but it’ll be betther for them step down to my little place that’s handy. An’ it ud’ take them no time at all to get there.”

“Good gracious, woman, where would ye put them in that little shebeen—sure there isn’t room in it for your own childer. God bless them! the fine childer they are too—but where in the world would you find a corner for Misther and Mrs. Clancy?”

“Troth, I’ll find a corner aisy enough; and it wouldn’t do a ha’porth of harm to the two little fellows if they were to sleep for a few nights undher the turf stack outside. It’s grand warm weather we are havin’, Glory be to Goodness, an’ they’d sleep as sound as a bell by the side of it.”

“Oh, not at all, ma’am,” put in Mrs. Clancy, “we wouldn’t dhrame to be puttin’ ye about that much; the poor little fellows might be gettin’ their deaths o’ cold on ye. Indeed it doesn’t matther where we go; we are a throuble to every wan. I wisht the Lord ’ud take us out of it altogether,” she added dismally; “I’d sooner be in the old gully-hole at wanst nor be goin’ to the poorhouse, and, dear knows, that’s where we’ll have to go.”

“Not wan bit, then,” cried Pat resolutely, “not wan fut will ye iver put in the poorhouse, woman, nor me neither. We’ll be back in the ould place here yit, see if we aren’t. Nobody ’ud go in it on’y ourselves, an’ it’ll be there waitin’ for us till the poor boy comes out an’ puts us back in it.”

The neighbours glanced from one to the other, and by common accord decided to humour the old man.

“To be sure ye will, Misther Clancy. The two of yez will be back there before we can turn round, an’ Mike will be apt to be gettin’ your bits o’ things back for yez too. Sure the old rogue up there will have no call to keep them wanst the boy has paid up the bit yez owe him.”

“Troth, it’ll be no time at all before you’re back, Pat, an’ ye had a right to lave talkin’ that way about the poorhouse, ma’am. There isn’t a wan of us that ’ud ever let yez go there, bad luck to it! No, indeed, ma’am.”

“Aye, we’ll be back yet in the ould little place,” repeated Pat with conviction, “we will so; come on out o’ that, Mary, an’ make up your mind where it is we’re goin’ this night. Sure the craturs here is fightin’ for the honour of havin’ us. Stop turnin’ your head round now; the place won’t run away on ye till we’re back in it.”

All the neighbours were indeed vying with each other in their anxiety to entertain and comfort the helpless old pair, and prove at once their sympathy with them in their trouble and their indignation with Peter Rorke.

“He done it just out of spite, mind ye,” they said one to the other. “Wasn’t he afther promisin’ Mike to let him work out the thrifle o’ rent they were owin?”

Page 148

“Aye! he is the outrageousest ould villain that ever stepped,” was the general verdict. Nevertheless, as in all communities there is generally one ill-conditioned person, even in the little village of Donoughmor there was to be found a time-server who, wishing for reasons of his own to ingratiate himself with Peter Rorke, was base enough to report to him old Pat Clancy’s hasty words.

“He’s saying he wished Mike had burnt ye in your bed, an’ more by token,” added Peter’s informant, “he’s tellin’ every wan that it’ll be no time at all before he’s back in his own place again the same as ever he was, an’ that you may do what ye like on him, he doesn’t care.”

“He says that, does he?” cried Peter, crimson with fury; “I’ll soon show him he’s makin’ a bit of a mistake. ’Pon me word, did ever anybody hear the like o’ that?”

“Well, that’s what he says,” repeated the other. “‘I wisht,’ he says, ‘that Mike had burnt the ould villain in his bed,’ says he. That’s the very word he said, ‘the ould villain’ he says; ‘an’ got shut of him,’ says he, ‘but it’ll be no time at all before herself an’ me is back in the ould place,’ he says. He did so—it’s the truth I’m tellin’ ye, that’s the very way he said it.”

“I’ll show him different then,” repeated Peter. “I wisht I’d thought of it first off—the way he’d have seen it.”

“An’ what’s that, sir?”

“You’ll soon see. ’Pon me word, I wisht I had him there now in his bed, the ould raskil, the way I could do on him what he’s wishin’ his spalpeen of a son had done on me. Are ye there, Pat?” he cried, raising his voice.

“I am, sir,” returned some one from the region of the stables.

“Is Barney there?”

“He is.”

“Bring him along wid ye then; an’ call Jack McEvoy and a couple more of the boys. Bring a pick wid ye, an’ a couple of them hatchets—an’ Pat!”

“Sir?” replied Pat, suddenly appearing from behind the stable-wall.

“Run round to the kitchen an’ fetch the big bottle of paraffin off o’ the long shelf there.”

“I will, sir. Where will we be goin’ to, sir?”

“I have a little job for yous to do down at Donoughmor,” said Peter. “Hurry up now the whole of yous; I don’t want to be losin’ more time over it nor I can help.”

The officious visitor, finding that matters were likely to become more unpleasant than he had anticipated, disappeared while preparations were going forward, and it was only at the head of his own startled and unwilling band of followers that Peter at length sallied forth. Not a word said Peter Rorke until he reached the Clancys’ deserted cabin, and with his own hands set fire to the thatch; then falling back a step or two he rubbed his hands and chuckled.

“There, now,” he cried, “let us see if I can’t make near as good a bonfire as Mike Clancy himself! Throw a sup more paraffin on, you, Pat; now stand back all of yous, an’ look at the fine blaze. As soon as we have the roof off of it, you can all set to work an’ pull the whole place down. Then we’ll see if the Clancys will come to their own again, as the ould blackguard Pat keeps tellin’ every one. I don’t think it’ll be worth his while to step back in it when I’ve done with it.”

Page 149

The poor little rotten roof, mossgrown as it was, did not burn as rapidly as Peter could have wished, but by dint of much coaxing and a plentiful sprinkling of paraffin, the fire at last gained ground, and a dense smoke began to issue from the smouldering thatch. Peter coughed and choked, and at last calling out to his men that he would be with them again as soon as that part of the job was over, climbed up the rocky hillside, pausing only when he had reached the summit, and turning round with a long gasping breath. The air was clearer there, and it pleased him to look down from this eminence on his destructive work. The smoke of the burning roof hung over the little dwelling as though to hide its degradation; jets of flame leaped through it now and then; from time to time one of his men approached with the bottle of paraffin, but the rest stood together looking on, somewhat sullenly. Farther down the lane a few women and old folks had gathered together; from his altitude Peter watched them, marking their eager gestures and imagining the horror and disgust in their faces. “Let them say what they like,” he muttered to himself grimly, “I’ll not leave a bit o’ the place standin’. Aye! they may curse an’ swear as much as they like, it doesn’t hurt me.”

Suddenly he bethought him how Mike had threatened him before setting fire to his rick; his hard-heartedness would bring a curse upon him, the boy had said. Peter asked himself now, with a dry chuckle, upon whom the curse had fallen most heavily. It was certainly a piece of bad luck to lose his splendid rick, but he had paid the villains well out for it. There was Mike in gaol, the old people living on the charity of their neighbours, with no prospect before them but to end their days in the workhouse; their goods scattered, their cabin razed to the ground—who was the most accursed?

Ha! one of those women down there had fallen on her knees and was raising her hands to heaven; another crone was shaking her fist in his direction. Let them pray and let them threaten—Peter was not afraid of anything or anybody, neither God nor man—not of the devil himself!

A sudden sound of stones falling just behind him made him turn round quickly. He could see nothing, but a curious scraping and rustling were still to be heard. He was standing almost beneath a low stone wall which traversed the summit. The sound appeared to him to come from a spot immediately above his head; he looked up and could see through a fissure in the wall what seemed to be a moving form. His gaze remaining fixed and fascinated on this object, distinguished at last a dark face with two gleaming eyes surmounted by *horns*. All Peter Rorke’s vaunted courage deserted him; conscience-stricken and smitten by sudden agonising fears, he uttered a shrill quavering scream and began to totter down the hill with all the speed he could muster.

The steep path had been rendered more slippery than usual by recent rain, and afforded very insecure footing. Peter, rushing blindly forward, soon lost all control over his limbs, and fell at last, rolling over and over until he dropped on the rocks below.

Page 150

His men, hastening to his assistance, hardly dared to raise him from the ground, and when they had at last mustered courage to do so, they were under the firm belief that it was the corpse of their master which they were carrying home. But Peter Rorke was not dead yet, and to the surprise of all who had known him, soon demonstrated that he was going to cheat a certain Old Gentleman—who had been considered his intimate friend during his long life—of his company at the close of it. His end in fact was most edifying. He made his peace with both God and man before he departed. To the last he remained persuaded that the horned face, which had peered at him through the ruins of Donoughmor, was that of the devil himself.

The explanation that the McEvoys' goat, which had been tethered on the hill, had broken loose and clambered up the ruined wall did not seem to him to have any bearing on the case. It was his belief that the "Ould Boy" had somewhat prematurely appeared to claim him; and his most anxious endeavour was to cheat him of his due. So Peter accomplished deeds which, under other circumstances, would have been impossible to him. He made his will to begin with, leaving a good deal of money in charity, and the bulk of his fortune to Roseen; he left directions that the Clancys were to be reinstated in their cabin and emphatically announced that he forgave Mike. When this last item, by the way, was reported to Pat, the old man's indignation knew no bounds.

Peter's last hours were not, however, disturbed by any hint as to the Clancys' attitude, and it was with the most peaceful and resigned disposition that he, at last, betook himself to another world, with the full assurance that it would prove a better one.

When Roseen had in some measure recovered from the shock of her grandfather's death, her thoughts turned at once to the Clancys. One of the family indeed had never been absent from them, and it was with surprise and indignation that she learnt that old Peter's forgiveness would in no manner affect Mike's actual position. The crime of which he was accused was so serious in character that he would have to await his trial at the approaching Sessions.

For his parents, however, something could be done, and Roseen, now finding herself mistress of Monavoe and all who dwelt there, proceeded to give orders right and left with an assurance which surprised those who had formerly known her. Injunctions were issued that the Clancys' cottage should be re-roofed and made habitable without delay, and, meanwhile, she announced her intention of taking the old couple to live with her at Monavoe. Many were the jokes and comments made upon this act of hers; a few people of what had now become her own standing in the neighbourhood offered her sage pieces of advice; some of her former cronies laughed and inquired if she were going to set up a home for incurables, as what between ould Judy that had no sense to speak of, an' Pat Clancy with ne'er a sound limb in his body, and his wife, God help her!

hardly able to crawl with rheumatics, she would have her hands full up there. Roseen thanked her advisers kindly and laughed with the jokers, and went her own way.

Page 151

One fine morning, her smart outside car drove up to the hospitable cabin which had sheltered the Clancys, and Pat and his wife were with some difficulty hoisted on to it. Some twenty or thirty neighbours kindly escorted them, “to hould them on for fear they might fall, the craturs!” With a deal of shouting and huzzahing, the little procession halted at length at Monavoe, where Roseen’s health was drunk in due form, and then Mike’s, and then Pat’s, and then Mrs. Clancy’s, and then Roseen’s again; and at last the escort went reluctantly homewards, and Roseen conveyed her charges to the apartment she destined for them. It was a comfortable room on the ground floor, larger than the whole of the Clancys’ former dwelling, which, nevertheless, it resembled oddly in many particulars. For, lo and behold! there in the corner stood their own venerable four-poster, and drawn up by the hearth was Pat’s particular elbow-chair; all their possessions were there in fact, Roseen having carefully collected them previous to installing their owners—not even the little creepy-stool was absent.

Pat Clancy, who had maintained a certain dignified reserve all day, not quite liking the notion of being regarded as Roseen’s pensioner, and not being certain whether this new move did not involve a sacrifice of independence, was now fairly overcome. “God bless you, me child!” he said brokenly, “ye were always the good little girl, Roseen. Herself and me will be quite at home here.”

“Ah then, musha, look at me pot,” cried Mrs. Clancy, who had been troubled by no scruples and whose tongue had been wagging freely during the course of their transit to Monavoe. “Look at me own *i*-dentical pot that has biled for me ever since we got married! I declare I could very near kiss it! I could never fancy any stir-about the same as what come out o’ that pot! And there’s the dresser an’ all me cups and saucers widout so much as a crack on them. Well now, who’d ever fancy anybody that thoughtful? Sure we’ll be in clover here—if only we had poor Mike out o’ gaol!”

“He’ll be out soon, never fear,” cried Roseen. “We’ll get a grand clever lawyer from Dublin to come an’ spake for him, see if we don’t. But rest yourself now, Mr. Clancy, ye’ll be tired afther the drive. Maybe Mrs. Clancy would like to wet a grain o’ tay for ye. Ye’ll find plenty there, ma’am, in the little caddy, an’ I’ll send up Judy with a bit o’ griddle cake.”

“God bless ye, alanna!” said Mrs. Clancy, with shining eyes; “I’ll set on me own little kettle this minute; it’s a grand little wan to bile in a hurry, an’ I’ll make himself a cup of tay in no time.”

Roseen withdrew with a bright nod, her innate delicacy prompting her to leave the couple to themselves for a time. Mrs. Clancy’s own particular little rusty kettle was soon

singing merrily on the hob, and Judy presently appeared with the griddle cake and a roll of butter of Roseen’s own making.

Page 152

“She’s afther fetchin’ it herself from the dairy,” she remarked. “It’s herself has the grand hand for butter, God bless her!”

“Ahmin!” said Pat emphatically, “she’s the grand little girl altogether, there’s not her aiquals in Ireland.”

“Aye, indeed,” chimed in his wife, “an’ lookit how humble she is—no more stuck up now nor she was when she was a little slip of a colleen, leppin’ about on the Rock, beyant.”

“An’ she has the fine fortun’, mind ye,” said Judy proudly, “the Masther left her a power o’ money—’deed an’ he did, a power o’ money!”

“Bedad, he must have left her a good bit,” agreed Pat meditatively, “and she desarves it all. ’Pon me word, I wisht Mike had left that ould rick alone. Sure, it’s her that’s the loser now. It’s into her pocket all that fine money ’ud be comin’.”

“Musha,” exclaimed “Herself,” “I declare I am sick an’ tired hearing ye goin’ on that way, an’ me tellin’ ye twenty times a day that it is the last thing poor Mike ‘ud do. He would never dhrame o’ such a thing, him that wouldn’t hurt a fly. Many a time I seen him drivin’ home the sheep, an’ he’d have his heart scalded wid them runnin’ this way an’ that, an’ he’d niver offer to rise a stick to them, or so much as to peg a stone at them.”

“Ah, ha! then, maybe he didn’t!” cried Pat triumphantly; “I know me own son as well as ye do, ma’am, an’ he has a fine sperrit of his own as quiet as he is. There now! Who done it if he didn’t? Tell me that if ye plase.”

“Sure them hayricks often and often goes on fire of themselves,” retorted Mrs. Clancy, flushed and tearful; “ye know that as well as me, Pat. Weren’t they at the loss of a lovely stack down there at McEvoy’s, four year ago? No, it was five, I believe—look at that now.”

Pat laughed derisively. “’Pon me word, Mary, you have no more sense nor herself there,” nodding towards Judy. “Sure, McEvoy’s rick took fire because they were afther stackin’ it, an’ it wet. Whoever heard of a three-year-old rick takin’ fire of itself, an’ every bit of it as dry as a bone?”

“Troth it was,” put in Judy, “powerful dry, ma’am. Sure, when a little spark got on it out o’ me pipe it burnt up the same as if it was tindher.”

As she spoke she drew her stool up to the table; she was unusually loquacious and sensible that day. The potations in which she, in common with the other members of

Roseen's establishment at Monavoe, had indulged having apparently at once loosened her tongue and brightened her wits.

Pat's face suddenly changed; his eyes flashed, and his voice shook when next he spoke, though he endeavoured to assume a casual air.

"An' was it smokin' alongside o' the rick you were, Judy? When was that, agrah?"

"Sure, it was the very night I lost me pipe," replied Judy. "Roseen bid me go out an' watch for Mike an' tell him the Masther had her locked in an' she couldn't get out to spake to him."

Page 153

The Clancys looked at each other; the old man making an imperative sign to his wife to keep silent.

“That was the very night the rick was burnt down,” he observed; “ye didn’t see any one go near it, did ye?”

“Aye, indeed, it was the very night,” agreed Judy; “I lost me lovely pipe that night too,” she added plaintively.

“Did ye, now?” said Pat, adding in a menacing aside to his wife: “Woman, I’ll be the death of ye if ye say a word now! Lave her to me. Well, Judy, it was a poor case your losin’ your pipe that way. I wonder what become of it at all? Ye didn’t see any one comin’, did ye, who would be apt to pick it up? Give the woman some tay, Mary, can’t ye see she’s dhry?”

Mrs. Clancy poured out the tea with a shaking hand, and Judy, spilling some into her saucer, proceeded to blow it vigorously, her hosts with difficulty restraining their impatience the while.

“Beautiful tay, ma’am!” she remarked, after gulping down the first instalment. “Elegant tay now, isn’t it? Herself never gives less nor two an’ thruppence a pound for it.”

“Doesn’t she now,” cried Pat; “well, an’ ye never seen anybody goin’ near that rick?”

“Ne’er a wan at all,” replied Judy, collecting herself.

“Ye didn’t see Mike then?”

“Well, I’ll tell ye. I was sittin’ wid me back to the rick waitin’ for him, an’ he didn’t come, an’ I fell asleep, an’ when I woke up I couldn’t for the life of me find me bit of a pipe, not a sign of it was in it at all.” Here Judy began to weep. “Me heart’s broke ever since! I just laid it out o’ me hand for a minute, and ne’er a bit o’ me could find it since—and—-Och! och! Mr. Clancy, ow—wh! Murdher! What are ye doing at all?” For old Pat had struggled from his chair, and hobbling across to where Judy sat, had seized her by the shoulder, the grip of his one sound hand being as the grip of a vice.

“Woman!” he cried, “it’s you that’s afther bein’ the ruination of me boy! It’s you that set fire to the rick wid that ould mischeevious pipe o’ yours! An’ there, ye let him be sent to gaol an’ the whole of us be disgraced for what you are afther doin’. ’Pon me word, I could throttle ye this minute.”

Mrs. Clancy ran screaming out of the room, bursting in upon Roseen with the announcement in the same breath that “Himself would be the death of ould Judy before he was done wid her,” and that “poor Mike must be fetched out o’ gaol widout the loss of a minute.”

Roseen, rushing to the scene of action, found indeed a prodigious uproar going on. Old Pat, who until then had been thoroughly convinced that his son had accomplished the destruction of Peter Rorke’s hayrick, could not now restrain his indignation on learning that he had been wrongfully accused; and in the intervals of proclaiming at the top of his voice more energetically than even “Herself” in the past that “anybody wid a grain o’ sense ’ud know poor Mike ’ud be the last one in the world to go disgracing himself that way,” was shaking Judy backwards and forwards till, as she subsequently declared, she nearly lost her life.

Page 154

"'Pon me word," he cried, when with some difficulty and a certain amount of physical force he had been separated from his victim, "that's the ould scut yez ought to be clappin' into gaol! Did anybody ever hear the like? She must go smokin' her dirty ould pipe under the loveliest rick in the country—sure, that rick is worth its weight in gould these times—an' settin' it on fire an' bringin' ruination an' destruction on her misthress as well as on me poor innocent boy! I declare hangin' 'ud be too good for her!"

"Didn't I tell ye," cried Mrs. Clancy triumphantly, "that Mike never went next or nigh that rick?"

"Of course ye did. Anybody 'ud know that. Bedad, Mike 'ud know better nor do anythin' that senseless an' mischeevious. Sure, what good 'ud it do anybody to go burnin' that beautiful hay? 'Pon me word, Roseen, if I was you I'd walk that lady straight off to the magisthrate."

Judy, meanwhile, with shrill wails and much rocking backwards and forwards, was incoherently declaring that she wouldn't sit there to be murdhered, an' she didn't know why they was all shoutin' at her that way, an' that—as the culmination of woe—she'd lost her lovely pipe.

After some time Roseen succeeded in calming the belligerents, and in gathering the sense of their various statements.

Trembling with eagerness and excitement, she led Judy to the stackyard, and there, after much coaxing and persuasion, induced her to describe her position on the fateful night in question.

"I was sittin' here," announced Judy, pointing to a certain spot.

"You had your back to the rick then?" said Roseen, "ye can't see the haggard gate at all from here. No wonder ye didn't see Mike."

"I was tired waitin' for him," said Judy. "I just put me pipe out o' me hand," she added meditatively. "I was thinkin' of goin' to look for him—and when I woke up it was black night an' I couldn't find—"

Suddenly she uttered a shrill scream, and darting forward, stooped over one of the stone supports which had formerly upheld old Peter's beloved rick, eagerly groping in a certain little fissure in the rough stone, almost hidden beneath the horizontal slab which surmounted it.

“Sure, there it is!” she cried triumphantly, producing indeed the grimy little object so dear to her heart. “I have it now! there’s me darlin’ pipe! I was afther forgettin’ I put it there; it was turned upside down in the crack an’ all me baccy’s spilt on me!”

Roseen could at first scarcely believe her own eyes and ears; this then was the solution of the mystery which had so long baffled them. Poor old Judy, growing sleepy and tired after her long wait, had laid her pipe on one side intending to rise and look for Mike, but, overcome by drowsiness, she had slept instead, and on awaking had forgotten the spot where she had stowed her treasure. The little pipe, slipping downwards in the crack, had turned over, upsetting

Page 155

its contents upon the loose hay beneath the rick, which being, as Judy had related, dry as tinder, quickly caught fire from the smouldering embers. A strong breeze had arisen that night, and the flame had spread to the stack itself with the results which Roseen knew. The pipe that had done all the damage, being snugly stowed away beneath the overhanging slab of stone, had told no tales; but now its evidence was conclusive, and while Judy rapturously embraced and mumbled over it, Roseen fell upon her knees and thanked God.

It was on a bright October morning that Mike was released from prison, but in spite of the joys of regained liberty and the warm congratulations of his friends, the poor fellow looked downcast and bewildered enough when he came forth into the sunshiny world. Roseen had sent her car for him to the prison door, and Mike, releasing himself at length from the handshakes of the friends who awaited him outside, and being anxious to dispense with their escort, had induced the driver, with a hasty whispered word or two, to whip up the fast-trotting mare, which had thereupon started at a break-neck pace down the street, soon leaving the astonished convoy far behind.

“Bedad, ye are in a terrible hurry altogether,” remarked Jack McEvoy, who happened to be driving. “I suppose ye are in a hurry to get to Monavoe.” He laughed and winked. “Begorrah, if the ould Masther could lift his head out o’ the grave, I wonder what he’d say at me goin’ to fetch a husband for his granddaughter out o’ Mount Kennedy gaol?”

Mike flushed to the roots of his hair and turned his back more completely on his opposite neighbour.

“Sure, ye needn’t think shame o’ that,” went on Jack, quick to perceive that the joke was not appreciated. “If ye burnt the rick itself, there’s nobody hereabouts but ’ud say ye done right. But your father’s breaking his heart now bekase the loss o’ the rick ’ull be out o’ your own pocket.”

“What call has he to say any such thing at all?” said Mike, glancing round fiercely.

“Och, bedad, doesn’t every one know the way it is between the two of yez? Sure, there never was a fellow in such luck as yourself, Mike Clancy! Ye’ll be the richest man between this and County Cork, an’ let alone the fortun’, ye’ll be havin’ the greatest jewel of a wife. ’Pon me word, if ye was to see the Misthress now of a Sunday!”

“Who’s that?” said Mike absently.

“The Misthress—Miss Rorke!”

“Oh, aye, of course, Miss Rorke is the Misthress now,” mused Mike to himself.

“Well, if ye was to see her in her black silky dress an’ the beautiful feathers in her hat, an’ her gould watch and chain an’ all—’pon me word, ye’d think it was the Queen.”

Clancy did not answer, and McEvoy, more and more anxious to retrieve his former error, waxed eloquent on the subject of Roseen, her beauty, her wealth, and the bounties she lavished all round her.

Page 156

“Look at the way she whipped off your father and mother there,” he remarked at last, “and the comfort she keeps them in! I b’lieve the improvement in them since they went up above there is somethin’”—Jack paused for an adjective and finally selected “outrageous.” “Tay, they do be tellin’ me, at two and thruppence a pound no less, an’ mate wanst and twice in the day, an’ a sup o’ punch at night the way they’d sleep sound! Sure, it’s somethin’ altogether”—again a pause—“unmintionable!”

Jack actually leaned across the well of the car to peer into Mike’s face, but alas! the more choice and picturesque was his language, the deeper seemed to be the gloom of Michael Clancy. At last, when within a few yards of Donoughmor, Mike abruptly requested to be set down there, and after thanking the man in somewhat tremulous tones, walked away rapidly in the direction of his former home.

“Sure, what’s the good of your going there?” shouted McEvoy, “the roof is off of it yet, an’ not a soul about. Come on home wid ye, can’t ye?”

“No, thank ye,” said Mike, without turning his head. The car drove on, and soon Mike stood within his dismantled home. There had been some delay in procuring wood for the new rafters and the poor roofless, smoked-begrimed walls looked very forlorn. Mike glanced round him and groaned aloud; he could have wept, so great was the turmoil in his heart and in his mind. Everything was changed, it seemed to him; everything was gone. Could this poor little place ever be home again? How silent it was now that the old father was not cracking his jokes in the corner! How empty now that the mother’s spare form was absent! They were safe and sound at Monavoe, he knew, “well looked after,” as the driver had told him, by “Miss Rorke” herself, but for the time being it almost seemed to him as though they were dead. As for Roseen, she was Miss Rorke now, the Mistress, the owner of Monavoe—*his* Roseen was gone too!

His heart was still sore at the recollection of his bitter disappointment on the fateful evening when the rick was burnt. She had not come to meet him on that night of all nights in the year! He knew, through Jack McEvoy, that she had promised her grandfather never to speak to him again. She had broken faith with him. All through these weary weeks in prison, the anguish of this thought had deadened all his other sufferings and anxieties, but in any case, how could he ever expect her, amid her new grandeurs, to think of him as she used to do? She had the best heart in the world, he knew that, and wouldn’t ask to do anything that was not kind; she’d try to make up as well as she could for the “differ of things” by doing all in her power for his father and mother and by befriending him. It had been mainly through her exertions that he had been released, and she had sent her own car to meet him—oh, to be sure she had done that! But as to consenting to be his sweetheart again, sure, goodness knew, Michael could never expect that.

Page 157

“Afther me bein’ in prison an’ all!” he said to himself mournfully. “I had a right to be givin’ up thinkin’ of her altogether.”

He left the cabin presently and climbed the hill, entering the ruins and seating himself on the great stone slab on one side of the banqueting-hall. By-and-by, he would have to go to Monavoe to see his parents, but he would wait for a little while first; he shrank from the meeting with Roseen. He intended to convey to her straightway his sense of the distance between them, and his determination to take no advantage of their former intimacy; but it was hard, and Mike, crushed and shaken by the trouble and anxiety of mind which he had recently undergone, suffering in every fibre from an unaccountable sense of desolation, felt that his heart failed him.

But all at once a light foot sounded on the stone steps behind him, and Roseen came quickly forward to the rocky recess. Her face was pale, and there were tears in her eyes; her attire, by no means so magnificent as that which Michael had depicted to himself, was somewhat disordered; she had not even taken the trouble to assume a hat, and her curly hair was blown about her brow, so that she looked very like the little Roseen of old.

“Michael Clancy,” she cried, “what did I do to ye that ye wouldn’t come to see me?”

Mike rallied all his self-possession.

“Ye never done anything that was not kind, Miss Rorke,” he said, standing up and removing his hat, “and I am truly grateful.”

Roseen’s face quivered. “Why are ye talkin’ to me that way, Mike? I’m no more Miss Rorke to you now nor I have ever been. Sure, ye are not angry,” she added piteously, “at me not goin’ to meet ye on the car? I was afeard that every wan would be talkin’ an’ tormentin’ us.”

“Indeed, it wouldn’t have become you at all,” responded Mike, still standing, hat in hand, and speaking with a kind of aggressive humility, “and it ‘ud be far from me to be expectin’ such a thing.”

Roseen knit her brows and tapped her foot impatiently, the angry tears now standing on her cheeks.

“What is it ye are driving at at all?” she cried; “I can’t for the life of me make out what it is ye be up to. It ’ud have become me well enough to go meet ye, if it wasn’t for the way people ‘ud be goin’ on.”

“Indeed, of coorse, ye’ll have to be mindin’ yourself,” agreed Mike, with cold politeness. “People’s always ready enough to be gossipin’ and gabbin’ about any young lady.”

“Young lady, fiddlesticks!” cried Roseen. “If ye go on that way I’ll take ye by the two shoulders an’ shake ye—it’s all I can do now to keep me hands off o’ ye! What in the name of goodness would ye be at? I’m not a young lady no more nor ye are, I am just Roseen, the same as ever I was. It’s you that’s turned nasty and contrairy.”

“Not at all!” replied Mike, still frostily. “I’m only wishful to let ye understand that I know me place, miss, an’ would never think of being presumptious.”

Page 158

Roseen suddenly collapsed on the stone slab and began to sob, making a good deal of noise over it and drying her eyes with the corner of her skirt, not being at that moment equipped with an apron.

“Ye’re a nasty, bitther, disagree’ble ould fellow,” she remarked inarticulately, “an’ I hate ye.”

Mike had turned his back to her the better to intrench himself in his fortress of reserve, but now he could not help stealing a glance at her from over his shoulder. There sat Roseen, still vigorously sobbing, her feet dangling downward as she sat on her high perch, her shoulders heaving, her ruffled brown head drooping, the tears forcing their way through fingers that were just as sunburnt as of old. Many a time had Mike seen her give way to paroxysms of childish woe, and comforted her with loving words and no less loving kisses. The recollection flashed across him now, and he immediately looked away again, stiffening himself more than ever.

“I thought the day ’ud never come,” lamented Roseen, “when ye would be back wid me. I never closed an eye last night countin’ the time an’ me heart leppin’ that much for joy, that the bed shook undher me—an’ this is the way ye go trate me when ye do come home!”

Mike turned round quickly. “Ah, Roseen, can’t ye whisht?” he cried; “sure it’s twice as bad for me as for you. Sure, asthore,”—he couldn’t for the life of him prevent that little word from slipping in—“it’s only thrying to do me duty I am; it ’ud never do at all for you an’ me to be goin’ on the same as we used to do, and I wouldn’t like yourself nor any wan to be thinkin’ I’d be forgettin’ the differ there is between the two of us now.”

Roseen looked up, her blue eyes still drowned in tears, but just the suspicion of a smile beginning to creep about her mouth.

“Troth!” she said with a toss of her head, “the on’y differ there is in it is that I am the same as ever I was, an’ you have turned crabby an’ cranky.”

“’Deed then, I’m not,” rejoined Mike, adding hotly, “I’d have ye remember, Roseen, it’s you that changed first. Why didn’t ye come to me that evenin’ at the haggard gate the way you always did? And me in throuble wi’ all an’ breaking me heart for a word from ye!”

The dignified hero was gone for the nonce, and look and tone were those of a youthful and offended lover. Roseen immediately fired up too.

“God give me patience!” she cried, “I never come acrass such a contrairy boy in me life! Didn’t I nearly lep out o’ the windy to come to ye? Sure, me grandfather had me locked in!”

“Oh that, indeed!” said Mike, his face brightening for a moment, but immediately clouding over again, “but a man told me that same night, that he h’ard ye sayin’ ye’d never spake to me agin nor so much as look at me.”

Page 159

“He tould you a lie then,” said Roseen with flashing eyes; “I never said that—oh, aye, to be sure, I believe I did though, but ye have no call to be castin’ that up at me, Mike; if I did itself, I done it for love of you. Now! When me grandfather tould me he was goin’ to put your father and mother out on the road I begged and prayed an’ done everythin’ I could to persuade him to give up the notion, an’ at last says I, ‘Well, grandfather,’ says I, ’I’ll promise never to speak to Mike agin,’ says I,’ nor so much as look at him,’ says I, ’if ye’ll only let them stop in it.’ Sure, whoever it was went carryin’ stories to ye must have been hard set to find somethin’ to say if they brought up that, an’ you had no call to be listenin’ to them. I’d soon stop the mouth of any wan that went about makin’ out tales about you.”

Never had she looked more bewitching than in her anger; her great blue eyes, open to their fullest extent, were flashing with scorn and wrath though the big tears still hung on their long lashes. The little curled upper lip showed glistening white teeth, the colour came and went in the pretty dimpled cheeks—cheeks that looked so soft and inviting. Mike bit his lips and thrust his hands in the depths of his ragged pockets, clenching them in the effort to preserve his self-control. He could not help a flash of joy lighting up his face for a moment, but he turned away to hide it. Wasn’t she the jewel of the world altogether, an’ how could he ever have been such a gomeril as to doubt her? But all the same he must mind himself. It was not for the likes of him to be thinking of her that way. Sure, what matter if she had been his sweetheart twenty times over in days gone by—she could never be his sweetheart now. Stiffening himself therefore and again resuming his lofty tone, he proceeded: “Indeed I am truly grateful to you, Miss Rorke, for all your goodness an’ all ye done for me father and mother. Jack McEvoy’s afther tellin’ me that they are in the height o’ comfort. Indeed I’d never have thought of lookin’ for them there at all; I never have expected you to be puttin’ yourself about that way for them.”

“An’ why wouldn’t they be with me?” cried Roseen quickly. “Isn’t it the right place for them to be? They had a right to be stoppin’ there altogether, on’y that they are that fond of their own little place I don’t think they ’ud ever contint themselves.”

Mike suddenly sat down on the slab, but at a very discreet distance from Roseen. He cleared his throat and looked towards her, but seemed to find a difficulty in speaking. Roseen began to swing one of the little pendant feet and looked away into the blue distance.

“Sure,” she resumed in an indifferent tone, after a moment’s pause, “when their own house is not ready for them, the best place for them to be in is their son’s.”

The colour rushed over Mike's cheek and brow; his heart began to beat violently, and his limbs to tremble. There was a long silence, broken only by the old familiar song of the lark sounding jubilantly from above their heads; the rustling of the tall fawn-coloured grasses that grew among the stones, and the distant faint lowing of cattle.

Page 160

The outline of Roseen's pretty face and head stood out cameo-like against the background of sunlit stone; Mike's gaze fastened itself there and could not detach itself. There was a long pause, then with a great effort he forced himself to speak.

"Roseen, darlint, there's not a ha'porth of good the two of us goin' on this a-way; we may as well talk out plain. Ye're the best-natured an' kindest-hearted little girl in the wide world, God bless ye!—"

Roseen drooped her head a little demurely, the colour mantling in her face now, and dimples coming and going about her mouth.

"But," resumed the young man, steadying his voice, "I wouldn't take advantage of ye, alanna, an' let ye do what ye'd be apt to be sorry for afther a while. It wouldn't do at all for ye to be takin' up wid the likes o' me now. Sure ye'd be the laughingstock of the place, if ye went an' got married to a poor fellow like meself that hasn't a rag to his back nor a penny in his pocket, an' just stepped out o' prison more by token—sure, that alone 'ud make a deal o' differ!"

"Aye, indeed," interrupted Roseen, throwing up her head, "it 'ud make that much differ, Mike, that if a girl was fond of a boy before, she'd be apt to be ten times fonder after. Now lookit here, Mike Clancy, I have had enough of this—'pon me word, isn't it too bad for a poor girl to have to go beggin' an' prayin' a fellow this way! Ye ought to be ashamed of yourself! Saints presarve us, this is the third time I am afther axing ye! I declare I'm out o' patience wid ye altogether. Sure, didn't we have each other bespoke ever since we could say a word at all, an' what matter in the name of goodness, if ye haven't a penny in your pocket? Haven't I plenty for the two of us? And sure, good gracious, if me poor grandfather, God rest him! put ye in gaol for what ye never done, isn't it me that ought to be ashamed an' not yourself? There now, I'll never say another word to ye, good or bad, if ye don't make up your mind at wanst an' lave off talkin' that rubbish!"

Apparently Mike did make up his mind, for he left his particular corner of the stone bench and came close to Roseen, his face aglow with happiness and his arms outstretched. And there they sat and talked among the ruins till the birds flew twittering to roost and the golden light faded from the hill-top: yet, as hand in hand they came down the path and wandered homewards through the dewy grass, it seemed to them that they still were walking in a glorified world.