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## FATHER ANTHONY

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**Guardian.**—"A most excellent story, excellently told, and one which we commend with the greatest satisfaction to our readers. The novel is vivid, and full of life and colour; and the characters of the two priests, Father Anthony, the delicately-bred, pure-souled gentleman, and Father John Croly, the jovial, homely, but not less sincerely pious man of the people, are drawn with singular charm and sympathy."

**World.**—"There is always a certain fascination about the sanctity of the confessional, and Mr. Buchanan's young priest, who becomes possessed, in virtue of his office, of a secret . . . is an exceedingly picturesque and pathetic figure. Undoubtedly this story is as good as, if not better than, anything that Mr. Buchanan has given us for some time."

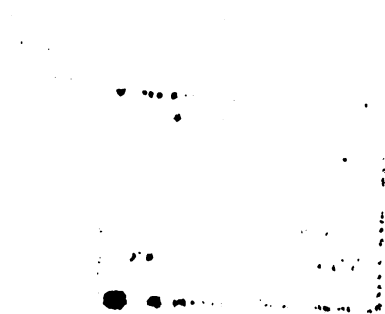
**Tablet.**—"It comes as an agreeable surprise to have a friendly and sympathetic picture of a priest in English fiction. A thrilling story. The picture given us of life in the West of Ireland reads like a transcript from nature by a keen and, we are pleased to say, a sympathetic observer. Mr. Buchanan has given us an effective story, which grips our interest, and the treatment of which is so generally sympathetic that we cannot but be thankful for it."

**Daily Graphic.**—"A vivid romance of the present day, the scene of which is set in an Irish village, and it is concerned with that always engrossing problem to some minds: should a priest who has obtained information under the seal of confession persist in withholding that information from the minions of the law, even though withholding it means the sacrifice of an innocent man who is under the sentence of death? It is a very dramatic situation worked out in very dramatic fashion."

**The Archbishop of St. Andrews and Edinburgh** writes:—" . . . Have read with a good deal of pleasure. The book is written in a very kindly and sympathetic spirit; and one cannot feel surprised that the writer (for I suppose he is not a Catholic) has not quite realized in some respects the idea of how a priest is bound to act, when placed in so painful a position. That, however, is but a small matter, and I shall be very pleased to encourage the circulation of the book in this diocese."

**The Bishop of Elphin:**—"All the best qualities of the author's style are apparent throughout—his marvellous power of poetic and graphic description, his weird sense of the supernatural, his genial good nature and love of what is truly lovable in our national character. I shall make the merits of this work widely known."

FATHER ANTHONY



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**"MULLIGAN, YOU THIEF, THIS IS DOCTOR SUTHERLAND."**

*[Page 146.*

# FATHER ANTHONY

*A Romance of To-day*

BY  
ROBERT BUCHANAN

AUTHOR OF "GOD AND THE MAN," ETC.

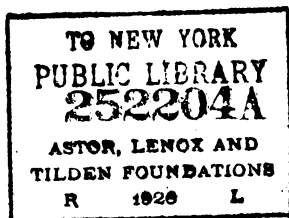
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## DEDICATION

TO THE REV. JOHN MELVIN

(Formerly Parish Priest of Rosport, County Mayo)

Dear FATHER JOHN,

I am inscribing this book with your name, in memory of our many meetings among the sea-surrounded wilds of Erris. Certain scenes and characters in it will be familiar to you, and in "Father Anthony" himself you will recognise a dim likeness to one whom we both knew and loved. For his sake and also for yours, I shall always feel strong affection toward the Irish Mother-Church, and towards those brave and liberal-hearted men who share so cheerfully the sorrows and the privations, the simple joys and duties, of the Irish peasantry.

As I close the unpretentious tale, for which I claim only one merit, that of truth to the life, I look back with regretful tenderness to the happy years I spent in Western Ireland and to the friends whom I found there, to "brighten the sunshine." Some have already passed away; dear "Father Michael," who sleeps in his lonely grave at Ballina; and the good "Colonel," blithest and best of hosts and truest of sportsmen, at whose table you denounced the "Saxon," to the Saxon's unending delight, joining afterwards till the rafters rang in the chorus of "John Peel." Ever leal, faithful, brave and honest, tolerant to all creeds yet staunch and steadfast to your own, you survive, beloved still, I am sure, by all that know you, and still carrying with you the brightness of a kindly gospel and a broadly human disposition.

Believe me, dear FATHER JOHN,

Yours always affectionately,

ROBERT BUCHANAN.

London, August, 1898.

P.S.—You will find also in these pages another "Father John," not to be confounded with yourself, whom he resembles only in goodness of heart and amiability of temper.

R. B.





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## FATHER ANTHONY

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### CHAPTER I

ON the night of the 15th of October, 18—, I, Charles Sutherland, medical doctor of the University of Edinburgh, member of the Royal College of Surgeons, and for the time being general practitioner in London, went to bed, slept, and dreamed a dream.

I thought that I stood on the banks of a great rain-swollen river, which rushed rapidly towards a leaden-coloured sea. The banks were vividly green and covered with large white flowers, the sky was cloudless but dim, the scene all around me strangely unfamiliar, and the air oppressed and still. Suddenly, however, a cold wind blew in my face, and my ears were filled with a long low moan.

I gazed again at the waters, which were rushing on towards the ocean. This time my gaze became fixed, for in the middle of the stream, half-engulfed by it, and being ever sucked lower and lower by the boiling eddies, was the figure of a Woman.

She was clothed in black. Her face, which was

white as death, was turned towards me. A young face it seemed, the features delicately moulded; but their expression was one of intense agony. The great dark eyes were fixed wildly upon mine, and, as I returned the look, the woman stretched her hands imploringly towards me and cried in a low, despairing voice, "Save me! Save me! Save me!" three times.

Without a moment's hesitation I answered that piteous appeal. "I am coming!" I cried; and I was about to plunge headlong into the water, when I—awoke.

Awoke to find myself lying in my bed at my rooms in Wigmore Street, my forehead bathed in cold perspiration, and my body trembling like a leaf. I lay for a few moments motionless, gazing about me with a stupefied air, trying to assure myself that I was really in my own place; then I sat up in bed and drew my hand across my eyes.

"Pshaw!" I said to myself, "it was vivid enough, but it was only a nightmare!"

True, it was only a nightmare; true, too, I had often dreamed before; but hitherto my night visions had come as they come to ordinary mortals, and when they had done their work they had faded, leaving no trace behind. I was, in fact, the least romantic of men, with a nervous system which, regularly as clockwork, ensured me sound digestion and peaceful slumber. But this special dream

would not fade; the memory of it clung to me so tenaciously that although I tried again and again to sleep I could not; the moment I closed my eyes I saw again that pale agonised face, heard again that pitiful voice calling on me for help.

Finding that all attempts to sleep were futile I unlocked my door and gave a vigorous pull at my bell; then I looked at my watch and found that it was half-past six o'clock.

My little household, however, was early astir; so, in answer to my summons, my man Ferguson speedily appeared. He tapped at the door, then opening it, cautiously put in his head and asked softly:—

“Did you ring, sir?”

The question seemed ridiculous, and I answered somewhat sharply:—

“Of course I rang. Any letters?”

“No, sir,” replied Ferguson, who evidently thought I had gone demented. “It’s only half-past six.”

“Well, put my things ready. I’m going to get up.”

“Yes, sir!”

He withdrew, half-closed the door, then opened it again and returned.

“Excuse me, sir,” he said, “but are you unwell?”

At any other time this remark, which was certainly harmless enough, would have been received by me with a laugh and an assurance that I was in

my normal condition; but on that morning I must certainly have been unstrung, for the man's innocent question irritated me beyond measure.

"Idiot!" I exclaimed, "can't one order one's bath at six o'clock in the morning without being thought either a madman or an invalid? There, put out my things, and order my breakfast for half-past eight!"

My bathroom adjoined my bedroom. I could hear Ferguson busily preparing my tub for me. In a very short time he returned to say that all was ready, then he descended to the kitchen, doubtless to communicate to his wife, my one female servant, the exceedingly crusty condition of their master that morning.

After my bath my unstrung nerves were braced up, and my normal condition seemed in a measure restored to me. When I descended, followed closely by an old spaniel which always kept watch at my bedroom door, the discomfort of my nightmare seemed to be fading away.

It is not always a cheerful thing to walk in the streets of London at an early hour in the morning. On this occasion the air was fresh enough, but the sky looked grey and lowering and scarcely any one seemed astir. As I left my doorstep, and strode up towards Regent's Park, we, myself and the dog, seemed to be monarchs of all we surveyed. Only here and there was a little sign of life. Reaching

the park I went northwards, walked round the Drive, then down Portland Place towards home. At 8.30, precisely, my breakfast was on the table and I was eating it with an appetite. At ten I started on my rounds to see the patients whose ailments managed to keep me in bread and butter. I was not a very busy man—what doctor at thirty is?—but I managed, by a little hospital work, to fill up my days with not altogether unremunerative professional labour. My evenings were spent in study, and latterly, indeed, I had been reading very hard.

When the day's work was done, and I found myself in my study busily pondering over certain new theories and experiments which were to enlighten the world and make my fortune, I had forgotten the experience of the previous night. At midnight I went to bed, feeling particularly tired and in want of rest. The moment my senses were dulled by slumber, or so it seemed to me, my precious nightmare came again! Again I stood upon the river's bank, again I saw the turbulent waters sucking down that helpless form, again I saw the large dark eyes fixed imploringly upon mine, the white hands piteously extended towards me, and again I heard that voice appealing to me for help. This time the cry was so shrill and wild, that I, crying out in answer to it, sprang up in bed.

I stared about me like one demented.

---



"What the deuce is the matter with me?" I exclaimed.

The gas was burning brightly, and Ferguson, partially dressed, and looking by no means as calm as usual, stood by my bedside.

"Beg pardon, sir," said he, somewhat astonished at my extraordinary behaviour, "but the door was unlocked, and you seemed to be sleeping so sound, I thought I'd better come in. Mrs. Lennox is much worse, and they've sent a hansom cab and want you to go round."

"All right," I replied, "I'll be down in five minutes."

I was really glad of an excuse to leave my bed. On descending to the surgery I found that Ferguson had lit up the gas and was ready to accompany me, as he frequently did to cases of the kind.

"I shan't want you," I said, buttoning up my coat.

He seemed rather glad; at any rate, I thought he looked relieved as he opened the door, saw me to the cab, and watched me drive away.

Night was about to turn into morning, but it was still quite dark save for the light of the street lamps. A cold wind blew, whistling cheerlessly around the cab as it rattled along. Speeding thus through the silent streets I forgot, or partially forgot, my past discomfort. The case which had called me from my bed was a particularly important one. I had

performed a very difficult operation, the success of which would mean much to me. For the time being, therefore, anxiety for my patient obliterated the memory of that agonised face which had appealed to me in my sleep. With an effort I shook off the nervousness which had taken possession of me, and turned heart and soul to my work, which, indeed, needed all my wits and all my skill. The patient lay in a very critical condition, and it was only by a miracle that I saved her life. For hours I remained beside her. At seven o'clock she was sleeping tranquilly, and I knew that all danger was past.

Returning home, I began my work for the day. At eleven o'clock that night I felt as tired as if I had felled half a forest, and I went to bed anticipating peaceful slumber. For many hours I must have slept soundly, far too soundly for any visions to trouble my overwrought brain, but as sleep restored strength to my wearied frame the blankness of annihilation passed away, and my Vision returned. It was the third time it had come to me, and all its phenomena seemed more terrible in their distinctness than they had ever been before. The cry was more piercing, the look of anguish on the woman's face more intense; and this time I saw another face, that of a man, turned towards her from the water, while a hand was clutching her by the hair as if to drag her down.

"This will never do," I said to myself, as having sprung from my bed I stood panting and trembling in the middle of the room. "It's quite evident my nervous system is out of order, and I must adopt the only means of cure."

I rang for Ferguson and asked for some telegraph forms. When he brought them I wrote out a telegram:—

"To Dr. Ambrose, New Cross,—

"Come to me at once, if possible. Important.

"CHARLES SUTHERLAND."

The telegram was sent, and with good effect. Just as I was sitting down to breakfast Jack Ambrose, my old college chum, entered the room.

"Well, what's the matter?" he asked, as he fell to upon the breakfast. "Have you discovered the philosopher's stone, or become a convert to Bastian's theory of spontaneous generation? I suppose something more than ordinary made you send that telegram? In any case can I be useful?"

I nodded.

"You can, and I am going to tell you how. But first, how do you think I'm looking?"

"Not quite up to your usual form," returned Jack. "I am afraid you've been relapsing into midwifery and general practice!"

"Well, not exactly, but for one reason and another my nerves are out of order—liver wrong—I

can't sleep—I want a change, and I'm going to take a holiday!"

"I see, and you want me to go with you," said Jack; "all right,—my assistant can look after my one paying patient."

"Just so," I answered with a laugh. "But I want your wisdom here, not your company away from home. Somebody must look after my practice during my absence, and you're the very man."

Jack's face brightened. Here was a chance he had never dared to hope for. Though we had been college chums, though we had walked the hospitals together, and had together passed our final exams., Fortune had certainly not distributed her gifts to us equally. Practice had come liberally my way, while poor Ambrose had to sit day after day in his consulting-room, stare blankly out of the window and wonder when those mystical consulting fees were likely to pour into his rapidly emptying pockets. The chance thus offered him was therefore promptly accepted; in half an hour we had arranged matters to our mutual satisfaction; and that same evening I stood upon the platform at Euston Square Station, waiting for the Irish mail.

I had chosen Ireland as my destination, and for two reasons. Firstly, because, having spent a fortnight there during one of my college vacations, I had pleasant recollections of both the country and the people; and, secondly, because I knew the out-

lay in cash would be moderate enough to suit my not over-filled purse. At eight o'clock, therefore, when the Irish train steamed out of Euston, I was one of her passengers, seated in a corner of a first-class compartment, cosily wrapped up in a thick ulster, with a couple of travelling bags, my sole *impedimenta*, in the rack above my head.

It was a capital journey. Before I had half waded through the "shilling dreadful" which I had purchased at the London bookstall the train reached Holyhead, and I and my bags were transported to the steamer. Most of my fellow-passengers retired below, but I, still restless and out of sorts, remained above, and paced the deck until the ship steamed into Kingston Harbour.

## CHAPTER II

ALTHOUGH this narrative will be chiefly concerned with events in which I had little more than a spectator's interest, it may be as well to explain before proceeding farther that I am neither a superstitious man nor one subject to nervous fancies. My medical training and professional experience had made me very sceptical on all matters outside the explanation of science. I knew very well, therefore, that the discomfort I had experienced meant simply brain-fag and an irritated nervous system. I did not believe then—I do not believe now—that either my recurrent nightmare or the strange coincidence which followed it, and which I shall describe in due course, was due to any supernatural influence, or solicitation. The facts, however, are the facts, and I shall conscientiously put them down.

On reaching Dublin I found I had a couple of hours to dispose of, so I drove to an hotel, took a bath, and had some breakfast; after which, feeling tolerably fresh, I made for the station and was just in time to catch the train to Ballina. It was a slow train, containing only a small number of passengers, and I had little difficulty in securing a first-class

compartment to myself. For this small mercy I felt unfeignedly thankful, since now that the freshness produced by my tub had worn off, I knew that to struggle longer against sleep was impossible. Selecting my carriage, therefore, I deposited my baggage in the rack, assumed my travelling cap and ulster, and, settling myself in a corner, gave myself up to a drowsiness which was pleasantly numbing every nerve.

I must have slept for some time, when the heaviness of my slumber passed away, and I became dimly conscious, though I did not open my eyes. I listened to the rumbling of the train as it crawled slowly along; then I was attracted by another sound, like the sob of a human voice, which seemed to be close at hand. I opened my eyes, and met the gaze of two large tearful orbs which were fixed wistfully upon mine. I started up with an involuntary cry! A lady dressed in deep black sat opposite me, and shrinking away nervously as I awoke, averted her face, drew down her veil, and gazed silently from the carriage window.

"I—I beg your pardon," I stammered, "I am afraid I startled you, but I thought I was alone."

The stranger made no reply, while I resumed possession of my seat and quietly watched my companion. She was clothed in deep mourning, and judging from the outline of her figure, as well as the glimpse I had had of her face, I knew she must be



**"I STARTED UP WITH AN INVOLUNTARY CRY!"**

**[Page 22.]**



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young. While watching her thus I made one or two attempts at conversation, but she still maintained a rigid silence. I had still the prospect of two hours' travelling before me, and the thought of beguiling a part of that two hours by pleasant conversation with a fair neighbour was too enticing to be resisted. I made another effort to break through her reserve by handing her the daily paper. To my amazement she put up her hand as if to ward off a blow.

"I do not wish to see it!" she said. "Please take it away!"

Feeling rather foolish I subsided again into my corner, and holding the paper up before my eyes began to look over its contents. As I sat thus, half-vacantly regarding the sheet before me, my attention was arrested by an article headed, "The Mylrea Murder Case—Latest Particulars." I had read the first few lines of the article when a movement from my companion again arrested my attention. She sat in the same place, but she had lifted her veil, and again I saw her face. It was young and singularly beautiful—but that was not all—it was familiar to me, though when and where I had seen it I could not recall. The rounded cheeks were white as death, the large dark eyes, gazing abstractedly before her, were filled with tears.

That my companion was in great trouble was very clear, and my heart at once went out towards her.

I left my seat and took the one opposite her. I was about to speak, when she once more turned her eyes full upon me, and we gazed at each other in silence. Then all at once it flashed upon me that she bore a startling resemblance to the vision which had come to me three times in sleep, and which in simple truth had sent me wandering from my London home!

Although, as I have explained, I am by temperament neither nervous nor superstitious, I am free to confess that I was startled by the real or fancied resemblance; it seemed, to use our homely Scotch expression, "uncanny." I suppose my expression must have betrayed some feeling of astonishment and curiosity, for my companion also seemed surprised and slightly alarmed.

"Pardon me," I said, "but have we ever met before? Your face seems familiar to me, and yet I cannot recall when and where I may have seen it."

She hesitated for a moment, and then replied in a low, clear voice, with just the faintest suspicion of the educated Irish accent, which is musical above all others:—

"No, sir, I do not know you, and I don't think we have ever met"; and so saying she turned her face away and seemed wishful to put an end to the conversation.

But I persisted.

"I am afraid you are in trouble?"

Her face flushed, and she glanced at me almost angrily, but this time she did not reply. I stammered another apology, and then, seeing the hopelessness of all attempts at conversation, turned again to my study of the daily paper.

But the letters danced before my eyes, and my thoughts went back to that nightmare in Wigmore Street! Either I was *non compos mentis*, or here, sitting before me in the flesh, was the very woman of my dream; and to strengthen then the coincidence, she too, like her visionary prototype, was in dire distress. The white tearful face, the black crape dress, every look and gesture, betokened some great recent sorrow.

From time to time I stole a glance at her. She could not have been more than eighteen or nineteen years of age, and her beauty was that of refinement and gentle breeding; the eyebrows dark and finely pencilled, the mouth sweet and childlike yet full of gentle determination, the eyes between brown and grey, with those bright agate hues which are peculiar to the Irish race. And the form, just developing into womanhood, was worthy of the face—slight and graceful—from the finely arched foot to the delicate finger-tips.

I was more than interested—I was fascinated—but I could only look and wonder.

## CHAPTER III

It was afternoon, and the train was still rumbling along westward towards the wilds of Mayo and the Atlantic Ocean. Athlone was left behind us, and with every mile we traversed the landscape surrounding us grew drearier; bleak barren hills, stretches of moorland, and shallow reed-sown loughs and meres, replacing the green wooded prospects of the earlier part of the journey. Despite my nervous curiosity I must, I suppose, have dozed off again, for I suddenly became aware that the train was slowing into a solitary railway station, and that my companion had risen from her seat and was gathering together her wraps, umbrella, and sundry small packages which lay on the seat beside her.

The train stopped at the platform, and before I could offer her any assistance the lady had opened the carriage door and was in the act of alighting. A rough-looking fellow dressed as a groom approached and saluted her by touching his hat. She said something to him in a low voice, handed over to him her *impedimenta*, and walked rapidly away. I watched her until she disappeared, then scarcely knowing what I was about, but urged by an irresist-

ible influence not to lose sight of her, I seized my own belongings and jumped out on to the platform. A moment's pause, a banging of carriage doors, a whistle from the engine, and away went the train. Without pausing to look for a porter, I made my way along the platform, delivered up my ticket, and emerged from the station just in time to see my mysterious unknown drive away in a well-appointed jaunting-car drawn by a pair of bays. She did not appear to see me; her eyes were fixed on vacancy, or on what was very much the same—the distant rainy prospect.

Feeling somewhat foolish I looked around me, and found myself in a sort of Tabor in the wilderness—a few wretched houses with one or two forlorn shops, and on every side great stretches of moorland and gleams of water; but standing in the road there was a ramshackle one-horse car, in the custody of a ragged driver who appeared to be fast asleep. I hailed the latter, threw my bags and rugs on to the vehicle, and jumped up.

“Now then, off you go—quick!” I cried.

“Where to, yer honour?” said the man, who had every reason to regard me as a lunatic.

“Where to? How the deuce do I know? Follow that lady!”

“Sure, I can't follow a shadow, sor! Who is it that you're afther, entirely?”

“Why, the lady, to be sure! The lady who drove

away just now on the jaunting-car. Keep her well in sight, and when we come to the end of our journey, I'll give you a sovereign over your fare."

This time the trick was done! Quick as lightning the driver was in his seat, one wild whoop and a vigorous crack of the whip sent the weedy-looking animal off at a gallop—indeed, so vigorously did we plunge into space that for several minutes I could think of nothing but how to keep my seat. The road was a rough one and full of heavy ruts, and as the car went quickly over them it bounded about like an india-rubber ball, making my bag execute a kind of war-dance, and nearly making me turn a Catherine-wheel and land head downwards in the mud. I managed, however, to retain my seat, and presently, when the horse slackened its speed a little and the car went more smoothly, I turned to look about me.

My first glance was forward.

The jaunting-car was in sight, proceeding at a quick but measured pace, with its occupant, the young lady in black, seated on the left side of it. Satisfied that my quarry was in view, I looked back and saw the village at which I had alighted—a mere handful of miserable mud-huts lying in a hollow, and having for a background the still more miserable-looking station.

I turned to the driver.

"What do you call that place?" I asked.

"Is it the village, yer honour?"

"Yes, the village."

"Ballymore, sor; but it's queer that ye didn't know it, since ye came to it in the train."

"Do you know that lady?" I asked, indicating with a nod the occupant of the car ahead of us.

"Sure and I do, sor!"

"Well, what is her name?"

"She's Miss Eileen Craig, of Craig Castle."

He looked at me curiously, as if he had doubts as to my sanity, and I, feeling that I was gaining little by questioning him, relapsed into silence.

"Miss Eileen Craig, of Craig Castle!" The name sounded romantic, and my curiosity was piqued still more. Her name was Eileen, she lived in a castle, and she was unmarried! The last fact, I should explain, did not interest me on sentimental grounds—I had not, that is to say, fallen in love at first sight; but as a rule married ladies did not appeal to the little enthusiasm my profession had left in me. I was longing, however, for an adventure, and all my recent experience, from my dream onward, seemed to suggest that an adventure might be forthcoming.

How I should have laughed in derision only a few days previously had any one prophesied that I, a staid professional man of mature years, would shortly be pursuing a will-o'-the-wisp through the bogs of the Emerald Isle! Indeed I could not help smil-



ing now at my own folly. I had yielded to a sudden impulse without a moment's thought whither it would lead me; and there I was, perched on a ramshackle car, and proceeding—Heaven only knew whither!

As to my driver, he showed no curiosity whatever as to either my destination or my state of mind. Now whistling, now crooning to himself the words of some old song, he urged his sorry steed along in pursuit of the other car. The country we traversed was flat and uninteresting, with scarcely a sign of human habitation. Here and there lean cattle grazed on dismal stretches of meadow, beyond which lay reaches of bleak and barren moorland, clumps of stunted trees and sheets of sullen water. The prospect was monotonous, to say the least of it, and before we had gone half a dozen miles I began to long for a little variety.

Presently I was reminded by certain inward cravings that many hours must have passed since I had tasted food. I looked at my watch; it was half-past four; the best part of the day had gone, in a very short space of time evening would be upon me, and here was I, driving through an unknown and desolate country into desolate space. And why was I doing it? Simply because a face, resembling that of the lady I had met in the train, had appeared to me in a dream.

Having by this time cooled down, and feeling

utterly depressed by the prospect around me and the hunger within, I began to curse my folly in allowing a miserable superstition to lead me by the nose and make a goose of me. I called to the driver, bent on ordering him to turn at once and drive back to the place whence I had come; before I had succeeded in arresting his attention I changed my mind.

Why, I asked myself, should I return? For what purpose had I left my home save in order to find distraction and excitement, and should I not find these in all probability as easily in the neighbourhood I was traversing as at Ballina, whither I had been bound? I answered these questions by attacking my sandwiches and emptying my flask.

The mountain air had sharpened my appetite. I ate my sandwiches and drank my whisky with a relish. Just as the repast was over the car came to a full stop.

I looked up, glanced forward, and found that the vehicle ahead of us had stopped also, nay, more, that the lady had descended and was standing on the roadside. The spot was utterly lonely; far as eye could see there was neither habitation nor sign of life.

What was my astonishment, the next moment, to see the mysterious lady sink upon her knees in an attitude of prayer, and cover her face with her hands. My driver, who was quietly regarding her, reverently took off his hat.

"What is the matter?" I whispered. "I believe she is actually praying."

"Indeed she is, sor. The poor young mistress!"

"But what does she mean? Why is she kneeling there?"

"Wheest, spake low!" answered the man. "It was there they found her father—rest his soul—five weeks ago, and by the same token they built up the cairn of stones yonder to mark where he fell."

"But how had it happened?" I demanded; "an accident?"

"No, yer honour; sure it was no accident, for he was kilt and murdered, bad luck to him that done it!"

"Murdered? That young lady's father, you say?"

"Sure enough, and a fine, bold, free-spoken gintleman he was, with a kind heart and an open hand! Sure I remember the night well enough, for I was driving from Kilsyth fair meself with this very baste, and I came upon the crowd, and when I leapt from the car I saw the master lying dead. It was a black night, your honour, but the boys had lit up torches of bog wood, and they flared over the master's face! Well, nobody knowed rightly what to do wid him, when Dr. Mulligan came driving up. As soon as he heard what was the matter he cleared the crowd and laid a-hold of the master. 'Sure enough, boys, he's dead,' said he; 'some villain has

shot him through the heart. We'll have to go to the Castle and take the black news to Miss Eileen.' Well, they up wi' the body, and placed it on the doctor's car, and it was driven to the Castle, and since that day the poor lady has been heart-broken, as you see her now."

Thoroughly stirred and interested, I was about to ask for more particulars when the lady, sobbing violently, rose to her feet and remounted the car, on which her servant sat bareheaded. She had not once glanced in my direction, but seemed to be oblivious to everything but her own great sorrow.

The car drove on rapidly, and at a signal from me my driver followed. From that moment forward further conversation was difficult; the road became rougher than ever, night was rapidly closing in, and the air was thick with a mist more penetrating even than a heavy downpour of rain. Wrapping myself in my mackintosh and pulling my travelling cap over my ears, I looked around, trying in vain to penetrate the darkness which gradually enveloped us like a cloud. Nothing was visible—even the presence of the car ahead of us was soon only indicated by the rattling of the wheels and the crack of the driver's whip.

Thus we proceeded for some distance, while the road every moment became wilder and more uneven and the darkness denser all around. Full of amazement and pity I sat thinking over the episode of the

murder, when the car came suddenly to a full stop, and the driver turned to me.

"Here we are, yer honour," said he.

"Where are we?" I asked.

"Just at Mylrea, sor. Do you see them lights, shining through the darkness there? Them's the windows of Craig Castle, and that noise that ye hear is the say that comes almost till the doors."

"Does Miss Craig live there?"

"Indeed she does, sor. All alone now the master's dead, except for the boys and girls that's along wid her."

"Do you know a good inn where we could put up for the night?"

"An inn, is it? Sure there's no inn in Mylrea, sor. Divil a place of that kind will ye find nearer than Kilsyth, and that's ten miles behind us."

"Then what are we to do?"

"Shall I drive yer honour back?"

"No, I think not," was my reply. "Is there no place of any kind where I could put up for the night?"

"No, sor; sure now, I thought it was to the Castle itself that yer honour was going, and that I could get bite and sup there for the poor baste till morning!"

Thus pressed, I was bound to confess that I knew as little of Craig Castle as I did of its mistress, and that under no pretext whatever could I present my-

self at its door and ask for shelter. There seemed nothing for it but to retrace our way, but the horse was a poor, half-starved animal, like its master, and sorely in need of rest.

"There's only one way out of it, yer honour," said the driver at last. "We'll drive up to the Castle and put the poor baste in the stables there for an hour, and sure the boys will give him a feed of corn and a mouthful of hay."

"But the lady—Miss Craig?"

"Sure it's not Miss Eileen that would ever refuse shelter to a man or baste. It's open house the master used to keep when he was alive."

"That may be," I said; "but I shall certainly not intrude upon her. Drive to the stables if you like—I'll wait on the car till your horse has rested and been fed, and then we'll return to Ballymore."

"All right, yer honour," replied the man; and once more we began to move through the darkness.

We went very slowly, and it seemed to me that we were descending a steep hill. In a few minutes, however, we saw lights before us, and heard a murmur of voices. The driver jumped down, and leading the horse through an iron gate, paused at a door, on which he rapped sharply with the butt-end of his whip. The door opened, and a young servant-girl stood on the threshold, holding in her hand a lighted candle. Before the driver could say a word the girl gave a cry of recognition.

"Is it yerself, Andy Blake?" she exclaimed. "Oh, praise be to the Lord for sending ye here this night! Will ye mount upon the mare's back and bring Dr. Mulligan here, for sure the young mistress is dying?"

"What's that?" cried the astonished Andy. "Dying, is it?"

"Is it deaf that ye are or drunk?" replied the girl. "Didn't I say she was dying? And never a doctor at hand to save her, the darling! Sure ye know well enough where to find Dr. Mulligan—so don't come back without him."

I listened with amazement, not unmixed with satisfaction. I saw my chance, and took it. In a moment I was off the car, I had pushed the driver aside, I had taken his place.

"If the lady is ill," I said, "perhaps I can be of some use? I am a doctor, and shall be pleased to do what I can."

I had placed the magic key in the lock and turned it—without a word the girl seized my arm and led me into the Castle.

## CHAPTER IV

IN a moment I passed from darkness into a blaze of light, and found myself in a great stone-paved kitchen. A turf fire blazed on the open hearth, and round the fire was gathered a motley group of human beings—old men and women, boys, girls and ragged children. As I passed through their midst they uttered a sympathetic moan; but I had only time to cast a glance at them before I was hurried along a narrow passage leading to the front part of the house.

"You seem to have company?" I said, in my supreme ignorance of Irish manners and customs.

"Sure, they're only a few of the boys and girls," replied my guide, "gathered in from the village to hear the news Miss Eileen was bringing home."

As she spoke she guided me into a wide lobby, and thence, by a short flight of stairs, into a large, old-fashioned sitting-room; and there, stretched insensible on a couch, I saw the young mistress of the mansion.

Relieved now of her hat and cloak, and with her hair hanging loosely about her shoulders, she lay as she had evidently fallen, and close to her, support-



ing her gently, stood an elderly, grey-haired woman who was crying and moaning pitifully. However, one glance at the recumbent figure of the girl was enough to show me that she had merely fainted.

"Loosen her dress and corsets," I said to the elderly female, who was addressed as Bridget, "and give her as much air as possible, while I fetch my bag."

Hurrying out to the car I soon found my luggage, took from it a small medicine chest, my invariable travelling companion, and returned to the room. As I passed through the kitchen and back again I was greeted with sympathetic murmurs.

Meantime my instructions had been carried out. My patient was wrapped in a loose gown. I administered the usual restoratives, and in a few minutes the marble-like cheeks were suffused with faint colour, the eyelids quivered, then opened, and the eyes rested upon me. As they did so a curious feeling of faintness crept over me—for again I seemed to see, looking into mine, the eyes I had seen in my dream, full of the same wild, wistful look which had haunted me and driven me from my home! With an effort I shook off the sense of superstitious discomfort, and said:—

"Excuse me for being here, but I was passing by the Castle when I heard that you had been taken ill. I am a doctor, and only too glad to be at your service."



**"ONE GLANCE AT THE RECUMBENT FIGURE OF THE GIRL WAS  
ENOUGH TO SHOW ME THAT SHE HAD MERELY  
FAINTED."**

**[Page 38.]**

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With a sigh she turned her eyes away and murmured: "Thank you, sir," in a voice so infinitely pathetic that it touched me to the very heart. Then placing her hand on the arm of the woman who bent over her she continued:—

"I think I shall be better in bed, Bridget," while to me she said: "You must excuse me, sir, but I have passed a terrible day. I thank you for what you have done for me, and if you are remaining in Mylrea I hope you will accept the hospitality of Craig Castle!"

Thanking her as well as I could I extended my hand, and frankly and unhesitatingly she placed hers in it—a frail little hand, white as snow and delicate as down. As my fingers closed over it I found that it was icy cold.

Instinctively my fingers sought the delicate wrist, and rested on the pulse.

"Have you a medical man in the village?" I asked.

She shook her head.

"We have Dr. Mulligan, but he is ten miles away!" Then suddenly a wild despairing look came into her eyes, and she cried as if in terror: "Do you think that I am going to be ill?"

"I hope not," I returned. "Indeed, I am sure not, if proper care is taken; but your nervous condition is such as to induce prostration and fever, and you want some little medical care."

"Ah, do not say that," she cried; "I must not be ill. I cannot! There is another human life depending upon mine! I have blood enough upon my hands! I do not wish for more."

"Miss Eileen, acushla!" interrupted Bridget; "don't talk like that. You wid blood upon ye! You that's as innocent as the babe unborn! The doctor's right, mavourneen; 'tis the fever that's on ye or ye wouldn't talk so."

"It is *not* the fever," said the girl, whose excitement was increasing, and whose eyes were now streaming with tears; "it's all this trouble which is just breaking my heart! Oh, Bridget, if you had seen him to-day, as I did, looking so pale and worn, the shadow of what he used to be. He says he is innocent, and sure I know it, and yet they will condemn him to his death! As if it were not enough that I should lose my father, but they must lay the guilt at *his* door, and so break my heart!"

In her excitement she had almost forgotten my presence. For a minute or so I allowed her to cling to the woman, talking and sobbing hysterically; but when the violence of her grief had somewhat abated, I offered her a draught, which I had quietly mixed, and asked her to drink it. She did so at once, saying as she returned the empty glass:—

"You are not an Irishman, sir?"

"No, I am English. I have come to seek health and recreation in Ireland. For the present, at any

rate, my time is entirely my own, so if I can be of any service to you pray command me."

"You are very kind," she replied gently, and as she spoke her eyes travelled thoughtfully over my face. Whether or not she recognised me I cannot tell, but I fancied at the time that she did, and was wondering whether my attentions were quite disinterested.

"At all events," I added, "since you have so kindly offered to let me remain for the night I will gladly do so, but pray put yourself to no inconvenience on my account. Any sort of shakedown will be good enough for me, and I will see you again before I continue my journey in the morning."

Again she thanked me, and rising from the sofa, quietly bade me "good night." As the door closed upon her and I was left alone to reflect over what had taken place, I felt glad that I should be enabled to see her once again. Could it be possible, I asked myself, that some more than human force had led me to Craig Castle, in order that I might respond to the cry for help which had come to me in my sleep?

Although the mistress of the house had retired, leaving me to my own device, I soon found that she had attended to my comfort in a spirit of true Irish hospitality. The girl who had brought me into the house speedily reappeared, and requesting me to follow her once more, led me upstairs to a

clean little bedroom, and thither a few minutes later climbed the car driver with my travelling bag. He informed me with evident satisfaction that he also was comfortably looked after, and that the "poor baste" was snug in the stables.

When I had washed myself and arranged my things for the night the girl knocked at my door and informed me that supper was waiting for me down below; so down I went to the sitting-room where I had seen my hostess, and there I found a bright fire burning on the hearth, and the table spread with a feast just fit for a tired traveller,—tea, new milk, home-made bread, new-laid eggs, and broiled slices of salmon fresh run from the sea. I was just about to fall to, when Bridget entered the chamber.

"My mistress's compliments," she said, "and maybe you would prefer wine? There is claret in the house, and burgundy that the master (rest his soul) kept for his own drinking."

I thanked her and told her that I infinitely preferred the tea, and then asked after my patient.

"She is all right now?" I inquired.

"She is better, sir," replied the woman, "but I'm thinking she'll never be all right again in this world." And then, before I could protest, she quietly left the room.

During my repast the waiting wench returned once or twice, and I tried in vain to beguile her into conversation, and so satisfy my growing curi-

osity. She only replied to me in monosyllables, and so afforded me no information whatever.

However, there I was, comfortably fed and housed; and to crown my felicities, the girl presently brought in a bottle of Jameson's whisky and the usual materials for making hot punch! I mixed myself a stiff tumbler, and found it so pleasant to the taste that I followed it with another; finally, in the most pleasant frame of mind possible, I betook myself to bed and slept like a top till morning.

No nightmare troubled me that night—not even the glimpse of a dream! When I awoke it was broad day—nine o'clock, I found, on looking at my watch. I sprang out of bed, drew up the window-blind, and looked out. The sun was shining brightly, and before me, not a hundred yards away, were silver sands and the tranquil waters of the Sea.

Half an hour later I was downstairs and out of doors, standing on the seashore and looking at the Castle.

Strictly speaking, it was not a castle at all. At one time or another no doubt an edifice answering to the name had stood there, but few traces of the original building now remained, and the dwelling-house was a modern one of stone, with no pretensions to architectural beauty. Such as it was, however, it dominated the scene, looking almost due west over a great arm of the Atlantic Ocean. Inland stretched lonely moors and heather hills, the



latter scarcely attaining the dignity of mountains, and down from the hills flowed, with many a leap and fall, a small river, plunging into the sea within a stone's throw to the left of the *soi-disant* Castle.

Returning thither, I found a royal breakfast awaiting me, and I had scarcely done it justice when my hostess appeared and greeted me with a kindly smile.

Thanks to the draught which I had given her, she had passed the night, she told me, in quiet slumber. Though she still looked pale and sad, that weird, haunted expression which I had noticed at our first interview had left her eyes. With childlike frankness she extended her hand to me, and, smiling faintly, expressed a hope that the strange occurrences of the night before had not made me feel that I had fallen among "savages"; that she had dreaded meeting me that morning, lest in opening my lips I should want to say "good-bye."

"I don't know how it is, sir," she added, "but during the few hours that you have been in this house a feeling of restfulness has come over me that I have not known since my great trouble. Sure I think God has sent you to help me in this terrible time! Forgive me if I seem foolish, but I feel like a woman who was drowning in the sea, and who had called out to some one to save her by reaching out a helping hand."

As she spoke a new feeling of wonder took pos-

session of me, for I seemed to hear the voice that I had heard in far-off London. I stood speechless, gazing at her tearful face and outstretched arms, when the appearance of Bridget in the room reminded me that I was not dreaming, and that my companion was a living woman.

"There's Andy Blake, yer honour," said Bridget, "asking what time yer'll be ready for the car."

Instead of answering her I turned to Miss Craig.

"I have not yet thanked you for your hospitality," I said. "But for you I should have been last night both homeless and supperless. While thanking you now, however, I am about to trespass upon your kindness still further. Now that I am at Mylrea I feel inclined to remain at least for a little time. If you will allow me, I will leave my luggage here while I go and interview the car driver and take a stroll through the neighbourhood to see if I can find some habitable rooms."

Her reply was characteristic. She begged me to remain in her house—the best rooms, she said, would be at my disposal, and Bridget would see that I wanted for nothing.

"You are too kind," I replied, "but I am not going to take advantage of your goodness. I am quite a stranger and have no right to trespass on your hospitality."

"But I wish you to remain," she said.

"And so I will, if I can find quarters. Kindly leave that to me—I am used to roughing it, and besides I want to see as much as I can of the Irish people."

Seeing that I was determined, she did not persist. I think, indeed, she was a little relieved to find that I would not remain in the house, where my constant presence might have been irksome. To tell the truth, my resolution was dictated by a truly English regard for what are known as *les convenances*. I was thinking, indeed, of what the world might say if I, a stranger and a bachelor, were to remain as a guest in the house of a young girl without kinsmen and relations. I was not aware at that time that a young maiden in the wilds of Ireland is looked upon as her own protector, and is free to set convention at defiance.

"I am going to look after you, however," I said smiling, "and to be, if you'll permit me, your physician in ordinary."

So saying, I went off to interview Andy Blake, and to look for a lodging in Mylrea.

Andy was waiting for me, looking brisk and lively after a sound night's rest and a comfortable breakfast. My conversation with him, however, was unsatisfactory enough. He assured me that though the village contained a number of houses there was not one of them which contained a room which would be fit to become even a temporary lodging

for a "dacent gintleman" like myself. Under ordinary circumstances I might have been tempted to take his word; but having made up my mind to find quarters, I sallied forth under his guidance to inspect the village with my own eyes.

I found that what he had said was true in the main. Cabin after cabin was entered and left in hot haste. "They might be fit to shelter cattle and pigs," I thought; "they were certainly not fit to harbour human beings, either 'dacent' or otherwise." At length, seeing that nothing could shake my determination to remain, Andy suggested that we should try the "Widdy Macrae," and to the "Widdy Macrae" we accordingly went.

The cottage occupied by the said widow was situated on the outskirts of the village, and close to the seashore. To all outward appearance it was like all the others, a little low-roofed hovel scarcely better than an English barn, yet the moment I entered the door I took off my hat to the Widow Macrae! Here, under her presiding care, cleanliness and order reigned supreme, and though the means of comfort at the widow's command were not great, they were utilised to the full. True, the floor of the kitchen was only of earth, but the earth was dry and clean, cleaner than many a boarded kitchen, the plates on the wooden dresser shone brightly, the open hearth was clean swept, and there was a muslin curtain to the window.

When informed of my wants, the widow, a buxom, dark-eyed, good-looking woman of forty, the relict of a sergeant of Irish Constabulary, conducted me into an inner room which, through tiny enough, was clean as a new pin. From the linen on the recess bed to the white curtains round the window, everything was bright and cheerful; there was a small circular mahogany table, an old arm-chair, writing materials, and to crown all, a bunch of autumn flowers and heather in a white jug on the window-sill.

"The very thing," I said to myself; "an oasis in a desert of mud and dirt!"

As I spoke my eyes fell on a small volume bound in dark leather and lying near the bunch of flowers. I took it up, opened it, and found it was a volume of Irish songs.

"It belongs to Father Anthony," explained Mrs. Macrae; "he lodged with me all last winter, when he was curate here, and when he went away he left it behind him."

Pressed between the leaves of the little volume were several leaves of shamrock and a withered white rose, and on the page where they lay were the words of a favourite and passionate song, beginning:—

"O my dark Rosaleen!  
My own Rosaleen!  
Do not sigh, do not weep!"

I glanced at the fly-leaf and read the following words, written in a clear, girlish hand:—

“To Anthony Creenan,  
“From his true friend,  
“EILEEN CRAIG.”

Seeing that I was curious and interested, the widow proceeded:—

“Sure the young mistress gave it to him just before he was ordained.”

“And where is Father Anthony now?” I asked carelessly.

“Your honour doesn’t know?” returned Mrs. Macrae. “Sure it’s a long story and a sad one, sir. He was taken ill when his brother’s trouble came, and he’s been lying at death’s door ever since.” Then, as if anxious to change the subject, she added: “If your honour likes the room I’ll be proud to have you here as long as you wish to stay; and as for Andy there, there’s a bit of a room beyant the kitchen, good enough for the likes of him!”

Here was an idea which had certainly not occurred to me, but now that it was mooted it seemed to me by no means a bad one. Established in the widow’s cottage, with Andy as attendant and factotum, with the car to scour the country with, a little fishing, a little shooting, and the possibility of being mixed up in a mysterious romance, I should be able, I reflected, to put away a few weeks not un-

profitably. Directly I had arranged terms with the widow, and secured the little room, I made my proposal to Andy; he literally jumped at it, and forthwith an arrangement was made which bound man, horse and car to my service so long as I might choose to remain in Mylrea.

That question being disposed of, we were now puzzled as to the means of providing stabling. Andy looked at me, and I looked at Andy, and the widow spoke.

"The young mistress," she said, "would be only too glad to let the baste remain where it is, in the stables of Craig Castle."

After some hesitation I despatched Andy to the Castle with a message to Miss Eileen and instructions to bring back with him my luggage. While he was gone I had a chat with the widow.

I found that she was by no means a badly informed person, and that in manners and conversational powers she was considerably in advance of the ordinary Irish peasant, which was accounted for by the fact that her mother had been for many years housekeeper at Craig Castle, that she had been decently educated at Ballina and had learned the "dressmaking," but that finally she had made a muddle of her life by falling in love with and marrying a good-looking sergeant of police, who had died only a few months after the marriage.

Garrulous like her class, the good woman poured

out the uneventful story of her life. When she paused I asked:—

“And how do you manage to live now?”

“Sure, your honour, I’ve got a few cocks and hens and a pig, and I do a bit of sewing, and the young mistress, God bless her, is very good to me.”

“Miss Craig seems in sad trouble?”

“Indeed she is, sir; and there isn’t a soul in Mylrea that wouldn’t die to help her out of it. But everybody knew what would happen as soon as she fell in love with Mr. Michael.”

“Who is he?”

“Michael Creenan, that’s in gaol this day for the murder of the master, God rest his soul!”

“And you say that Miss Craig fell in love with him?”

“Sure enough; she was in love with him, and she wanted to marry him, too; but the master hated him and all his race, and swore never to give his consent. So one night the old man was carried home murdered, and the dirty deed was laid at Mr. Michael’s door.”

“But Miss Craig assures me that he is innocent.”

“And so he is, sir,” cried the widow; “but the proof’s black against him, and the mistress is sore afraid that he’s going to his death. But trouble never comes singly, sir! When they arrested Mr. Michael, poor Father Anthony, his brother—him that lived here and owned that book—went mad



with shame and grief, and a week or two after he took to his bed with the fever, and now they're saying he'll never lift his head again."

"They are brothers then—Father Anthony and the unfortunate young man who is in prison?"

"They are, sir; and by that token they were the talk of the country side for the love between them, and though Anthony was the eldest he was the handsomest and the cleverest—the wonder of all the clergy when he went to Maynooth."

Here our conversation was interrupted by the reappearance of Andy, carrying my luggage.

The young lady, he said, would be only too glad to have the horse and car remain just as long as I might choose to wish. She also was anxious to talk further with me, and would be glad if I would return as soon as possible to the Castle. The homely Bridget, however, had been of a more practical turn of mind. On learning that I had located myself with the Widow Macrae, she had expressed satisfaction because, she said, Mary Macrae, if she had a mind to it, could not only mend my clothes but cook my food, and knew how to make a "dacent" gentleman comfortable. Whatever Mary lacked which would add to my comfort, she was to be sure and send for to Craig Castle.

Having deposited my *impedimenta*, and finally installed myself in my new lodging, I strolled back to the Castle.

I found Miss Craig in the sitting-room, gazing from the window out on the quiet sea. As the door opened to admit me she turned, her pale face flushed, she stepped eagerly forward extending her hands, and grasped mine as if I were an old friend.

"I am so glad you have come," she cried. "I was afraid you might not. I was afraid I might never see you again."

"There is no fear of my disappearing like a phantom," I replied; "I am too comfortably settled for that. But you said that you wished me to help you. I have come to ask you in what way I can do so?"

Something in my voice and manner seemed to depress her and remind her that I was almost a stranger. She withdrew her hands and turned wearily away.

"You know that my dear father was murdered?" she asked, nervously plucking at her handkerchief with trembling fingers.

"Yes, I have heard that, and believe me——"

"It is too late to help the dead," she cried, interrupting me nervously; "all my thought now is how to save the living! There is no rest, no sleep for me, until I discover the man who killed my dear father."

"But the person who is arrested, and who is charged with the murder?"

Her eyes flashed at me almost angrily.

"He is innocent!" she exclaimed.

"Can you prove that?" I inquired gently.

"Not yet," she answered, "but I *will* prove it! I must prove it! God will help me!"

I watched her in wonder as she moved like a fluttering bird up and down the room; for I knew now that the man she sought to save was her lover.

"Then you have no proofs whatever?" I asked. "May I ask if there is any evidence against him—any evidence, I mean, that he might be the guilty person?"

She paused, trembling, and looked me in the face.

"They think they have proofs," she replied; "and, indeed, indeed, it looks black against him. But he is innocent, and I know it. Sure I've talked and talked, trying to convince them, and now every one thinks trouble has turned my brain! No one will help me! They are all sorry for Michael, but they all believe him guilty. Oh, it is cruel, cruel! I am so weak, so friendless! But sure God has sent you to me, and may be *you* can help me!"

How could I reply to such an appeal? I could only look at her and wonder. Was it possible, I asked myself, that what she herself hinted at was true—that the great trouble of her life had really unhinged her reason? The strange wild look in her eyes, that wild despairing tone of voice, the peculiar restless habit of pressing her white hand to her fore-

head—all seemed inconsistent with complete sanity. As this fearful thought came to me I felt for the poor girl a feeling of intense pity; she seemed to read this feeling in my eyes, and when I took her hand and pressed it sympathetically she drew it irritably away.

"Sure I don't want you to pity me," she cried, "but to help me! You will do so, will you not?"

Of course I assented.

"I will do all I can," I replied, "but at present, you see, I am somewhat in the dark. I am ignorant of the details of the affair as well as of the actors in it, and without some more information I don't see how I can advise."

"You are quite right, sir," she said, "but during the last few weeks I have been so absorbed in my own trouble that I have come to think everybody must know it as I do. Well, since you have promised to help me, it is but right you should hear the whole story."

"And you will tell it me?"

"Yes; but not now."

I had gained her confidence, and was satisfied. Feeling that the interview had lasted long enough for her strength, I rose to go. I had wished her good-bye, and had nearly gained the door when she called me back.

"It seems strange, does it not," she said, looking

wistfully at me, "but I do not even know your name?"

I produced one of my cards and handed it to her. She looked at it, then at me—finally she said thoughtfully:—

"I wonder, after all, if we have ever met before?"

"Never to my knowledge till that meeting in the train, but I trust that will not prevent our becoming friends."

Again I moved towards the door. I had opened it, when her voice again arrested me.

"I wondered if we had met," she said, "because when you saw me in the train yesterday your manner was very strange. You recognised me, did you not?"

"I thought I recognised you."

"How could you have done so if it was our first meeting?"

I hesitated for a moment, then feeling that perfect frankness would be necessary to ensure perfect trust, I replied:—

"I, like you, have a story to tell, and I will tell it, but not now. At present you must allow me to assume a doctor's privilege and prescribe for you perfect rest."

This time she allowed me to go.

My first care was to find Bridget and to give her minute instructions as to the treatment of her young mistress. All these directions the housekeeper was

eager enough to carry out, my former treatment of the young lady having been successful enough to inspire confidence; and when I told her that, for Miss Craig's sake, I was about to remain for a time in Mylrea, her gratitude knew no bounds.

## CHAPTER V

WHILE awaiting such further information concerning Craig Castle and its young mistress as might reach me from the fountain-head, I amused myself by studying the locality into which accident had so strangely brought me.

If my reader will look at a map of Ireland he will perceive that the counties of Galway and Mayo stretch for many miles along a lonely seacoast looking directly across the Atlantic Ocean. Southward, the town of Galway nestles on the edge of the sea, at the mouth of a river famous for its salmon-fishing; and in the extreme north, on the borders of Sligo, stands the dismal market-town of Ballina, where the railway until lately ceased. Between these two towns, and stretching out in peninsula fashion westward and northwestward, lies a lonely stretch of lough, moor and mountain, with here and there a lonely cluster of cabins, distinguished by the name of a village. So desolate is the country that a pedestrian might follow the high road for a summer's day and scarcely meet a single human soul. There is water everywhere—for where the sea does not throw in an arm or estuary, fresh-water

loughs and meres of all sizes, from the mighty Lough Conn to the tiniest reed-fringed pond lying in the depths of the moorland, dispute the supremacy of solid land—nay, the very land itself is permeated with the softer element, and presents to the intruding visitor only the dangerous foothold of a slippery bog.

Having alighted some miles south of Ballina, and driven along the lonely road winding in a northeasterly direction, I had left the wilderness to my left, and almost entered the limits of County Sligo. Mylrea, in fact, is situated just on the border line between the two counties, Sligo and Mayo. Some twenty miles away to the south-west is the town of Castlebar, the centre of business and the seat of the assizes.

I had no sooner settled myself comfortably in the widow's cottage than I began to puzzle myself how to pass the time in a region where there seemed no society, and little or no amusement. I had brought a few books, but I was certainly in no humour to sit down and read. So summoning Andy to my presence I consulted him as to what I should do, pending another summons from the young lady of the Castle. He at once proposed that I should go "fishing."

Curiously enough, I had never thought of that, for although I had once or twice handled a trout-rod on a Devonshire stream I was no fisherman. However,



it is never too late to learn, and I accepted Andy's suggestion without any hesitation. There was only one difficulty—I had neither rod nor fishing-tackle of any description.

"Sure, I'll get your honour them same," said Andy. And sure enough he did, for within an hour he appeared at the cottage with a formidable salmon rod and tackle which he had borrowed at the Castle.

"The young mistress's respects," he said smiling, "and she hopes your honour will have good sport."

"But where are we to fish?" I inquired in my ignorance, "and what are we likely to catch?"

"Sure we'll fish the river beyant," replied Andy. "There was a fine flood yesterday, and the wather's running down. The pools are full of white trout fresh run from the say, and there's may be a chance of a salmon."

Away we trudged across the moorland, Andy shouldering the rod and other tackle, and I stumbling after him, till we reached the riverside. A thin drizzle was blowing from the mountains, and there was a strong westerly wind, coming now and again in great, stormy gusts.

Certainly the weather did not look promising to my unsophisticated eye, but Andy assured me that it was a fine fresh day, and that the fish were rising.

About a mile above the village was a long deep pool, through which the river poured in a black, sullen stream, foaming at the banks round rocks and

boulders, and rushing at the lower end towards a noisy fall. On the verge of the pool I took my stand and began to cast, but no sooner had I raised the rod than my line seemed to be at the wind's mercy, and I found it almost impossible to strike the water. Again and again I made the attempt in vain. Andy looked on in puzzled wonder, but made no sign whatever until I had succeeded in fastening the line to the stump of a tree projecting from the opposite bank of the river. Then he said, with a twinkle of the eye:—

“Your honour will be out of practice? Sure the line's fast this time, but more's the pity it isn't a fish!”

Laughing heartily at my own clumsiness, I tugged at the rod, which was bent almost double with the strain. It was no use. I was hard fast.

“Bide a bit, sor!” cried Andy; and off he ran to the head of the pool, and without pausing to divest himself of boots or stockings or to turn up his trousers, plunged in over the knees and waded across to the opposite bank. Then running on to the spot where the hooks were fixed, he set the line free, and leaving the shallows, hastened back to my side.

I renewed my efforts, and now and again, directed by my henchman, succeeded in striking the pool with my cast-line, and lashing the water as with the thong of a whip. No result whatever ensued, except once, when there was a slight boil in the water

close to my tail-fly, and I caught a glimpse of something like a fish's shining back.

"It was a salmon, your honour!" cried Andy.

"A salmon!" I echoed, panting with my exertions. "Did he rise to the fly?"

"Sure he rose to take a look at it!" returned Andy, grinning. "Try him again, sor—drop it gintly over his nose."

I tried to drop it gently, but it fell like a lump of lead! Again and again I cast, and always the same disastrous result; till at last, panting, perspiring and out of breath, for the rod was heavy and my back was aching, I paused in despair.

"I'm afraid it's no use," I said. "I'm no fisherman!"

"Will your honour let me try?" asked Andy; and only too delighted to be rid of it, I handed him the rod.

No sooner had he taken the rod in his hand than the ragged rogue became transfigured, and I recognised a master of the craft. Neither the weight of the heavy rod nor the force of the blustering wind troubled him in the least, so completely did native talent and acquired skill make him the master of the situation. Standing a few yards back from the bank, his face set, his body slightly bent, he wielded the great rod as if it had been a willow wand, and with nimble turns of the wrist made the line slip out and the flies alight on the water with a touch

as soft as gossamer. Inch by inch he fished the pool, leaving no likely spot untouched by the fly; but for a long time his patience and dexterity met with no reward. I followed him step by step until he had nearly reached the top of the pool; then, suddenly the line tightened, the nimble wrist struck gently, and the fish was hooked!

"Take the rod, your honour," said Andy. "Take the rod and play him gently!"

I took the rod, and as I did so there was a leap, a splash, and a large fish leapt three or four yards out of the water.

"Gintly! gintly!" exclaimed Andy.

"What is it?" I panted, as the hooked fish plunged again into its native element. "A salmon?"

"Sorra salmon!" was the reply. "Just a little, small, white trout; but, faix, he's lively!"

A "little, small, white trout"! Away he went like a lightning flash down the pool, making for the rapids at the bottom, while the reel whistled and the line ran out, and I followed, panting and stumbling. Again he leapt into the air, and yet again! Then, before I knew it, he was over the falls and in the shallows beneath them, rolling under a stone.

"Reel in! Reel in!" screamed Andy. "He's fast yet, your honour!"

I reeled in as fast as possible, and still obeying

Andy's instructions managed to dislodge the fish from his dwelling-place; but away he went as fresh as ever towards the ocean!

"Hooroo!" said Andy. "He's drowning himself rushing down stream, sor! Hold on to him yet!"

How it happened I cannot guess—certainly it was through no skill of mine—but a few minutes later the fish had lost all power of fight and I was drawing him gently towards the shallows where Andy was waiting, gaff in hand. At the first attempt Andy missed him, and with a plunge and a struggle the fish almost broke away. The next moment the gaff had done its work, and away went the fish over Andy's shoulder, alighting in the grass at my feet—a fine fresh-run silver trout of about three pounds.

Small as he was from an experienced fisherman's point of view, he seemed in my eyes a monster, and I was jubilant. Out came my flask, and we drank my first victim's health in mountain dew.

"When your honour's ready," said Andy, "we'll try Pol na Bedach Gal."

Pol na Bedach Gal—in English, the Pool of the White Trout—lay just above the piece of water we had just fished, and no sooner had we reached its banks than I discovered that there had been no mistake in its christening. It was a dark, long pool, so situated as to be rippled from end to end by the westerly wind, which was then blowing; and every-

where among its eddies the white trout were rising. Under Andy's direction I again essayed the rod, and this time more successfully. I hooked several fish, and managed to secure three out of the five—the largest was only about two pounds, but all were bright and fresh run. So small were they that Andy did not attempt to use the gaff, but, taking off his narrow-brimmed chimney-pot hat, he used that as a landing-net, a task which was the easier, owing to the fact that there was a large hole in the upper rim through which the water could stream comfortably.

"Sure it's poor sport your honour is having," cried Andy, as he captured the last of the small fry, a silvery youngster of about a pound. "Will we try for a salmon?"

As he spoke the water beneath us boiled, a dark back gleamed and rolled over, and a great circle widened in the pool.

"Monomondiaol!" said Andy grinning. "That's a big customer! He'll be nine or ten pounds if he's an ounce!"

Seating himself on a stone Andy detached the last line of thin gut and substituted another, drawn from an old fly-book which he carried in his pocket. On the tail of the new cast-line was an enormous salmon-fly of the coarsest and gaudiest description, looking more like a humming-bird than any insect found in these islands.

"Surely the fish will never take that!" I exclaimed. "Isn't it a great deal too large?"

Andy shook his head.

"It's just a little, shmall fly of my own making," he replied. "Many's the fish I've kilt with it on the Moy. You see, your honour," he added with a smile, "fishes is like colleens—they like what's foine to look at, and they're mightily taken by a red jacket trimmed wid gold."

He handed me the rod.

"Now, your honour, ye'll just try the bit o' wather where the big fish rose, and if he comes, sor, give him time and don't strike till he's taken the fly well into his mouth. Never fear, sor; it's aisier to chate a big salmon than a small trout, for the smaller they are the cunninger they are—and by that same token it's the same wid the colleens."

Again we approached the water, and again I saw the water boiling at the same spot and the circles enlarging round it. Raising the rod gently, and taking full advantage of the wind at my back, I let the great fly fall in the very centre of the circle. It dropped lightly, and was just whirling away with the current, when, whish! the water boiled, the fly disappeared, the line suddenly tightened, and I was into the fish! A salmon this time and no mistake! Away went the line, whizz went the reel, double bent the rod; then the line suddenly slackened, and up into the air leapt a glittering ten-pounder!

more small trout came to my conjuring, and one of them—a very minnow of less than half a pound—had actually the impudence to impale himself on the great salmon-fly; but that day, at least, I did not rise another salmon.

“There’s more rain coming,” explained Andy, “and the wind’s going round to the north-west; the big fishes will be waiting for the storm.”

As we left the river, however, the wind had quite fallen, and the air was full of a sultry stillness, such as often precedes a change of weather. The water seemed veritably alive! The salmon were rising high out of the water, which boiled and plashed around them, and the trout were leaping high into the air.

“Sorra fish will look at the fly now,” said Andy; “we may be getting home.”



## CHAPTER VI

MISS CRAIG had promised to tell me her story, and her promise was quickly kept. Two evenings later I found myself standing in the drawing-room of Craig Castle, waiting for the appearance of the young lady whose message had brought me thither.

It was a large rambling room, with an oriel window looking inland towards the mountains. The furniture was old-fashioned and much the worse for wear, but there were a piano, a harp, some music, and a dainty little bookcase full of quite modern books, chiefly novels and volumes of verse. It was the hour of gloaming; the sky, which had been ashen grey all day, had turned to a deep purple and red, which warmed the brown bog-land and made even the tumble-down mud-huts look picturesque, suffused as they were by the beams of fast-fading light. All was intensely still and solitary, save now and then when a creel-laden donkey, driven by a red-petticoated colleen, would flit wearily and slowly over the bog, or when the distant bark of a dog would fall like an echo on the ear.

I turned from the window and drew an easy-chair near the fire; for the evening was chilly. On the

white skin rug near to my feet two dogs were stretched, rough Irish greyhounds which had belonged to the late Mr. Craig, and which ever since his death had wandered aimlessly about the place as if seeking their master. They had endeavoured to attach themselves to me; but they were not satisfied, for at times they would whine piteously, and gaze wistfully into my face, as if asking me to take them out and amuse them. I had been waiting for some minutes when they sprang up with a joyful bark, and I saw that Miss Craig was in the room.

I rose to meet her, but she motioned me back.

"Please remain where you are, Dr. Sutherland," she said; "I have come to tell you the story I promised. I should like you to remain just where you are, please, and I will sit here."

She took a stool, placed it near to the fire, and sat down. Then folding her hands on her knee she looked up in my face.

"Do you know," she said, "I used to sit like this with my father! Ah, do not think it pains me to talk of him; it does me good! Ever since I talked about him to you, I have felt my grief grow lighter. I have no one to talk to but Bridget, and whenever I speak to her she bids me be silent. I suppose you wonder who Bridget is? Sure she is my foster-mother. My poor mother died in her arms the day I was born, eighteen years ago. Until I was ten years old I lived here with Bridget and my father.

Michael I asked him for an explanation. At first he seemed disinclined to give one; there was something he wished to hide from me, and the moment I made this discovery, I, girl like, determined that nothing should be hidden. I continued to urge my request, and at last he yielded to my entreaties, and told me that for many years our families had been separated by an old feud, and that, in the natural order of things, we two ought to be mortal foes. 'But my father would not believe in such nonsense,' I said. 'He does believe in it,' Michael answered. 'Your father hates us just as his ancestors hated mine.' 'And do you hate my father, Michael?' I asked. 'God forbid,' he replied; 'I don't hate any man, and I certainly could not hate any kith and kin of yours!'

Her voice broke, and she passed her hand over her eyes, as if to brush away the tears.

"I understand," I said gently. "I have heard that the vendetta still flourishes in Ireland, and this is a case in point."

"It was some stupid old quarrel," she answered, "which took place ever so long ago. There was a duel and some one was killed—a Craig of those days. Well, I had not been reared in a superstitious school, and I was too young to meet trouble half way. Before a day had passed the nervousness which the recital of his story had caused me passed away, and my heart was full of the work of friend-

ship and mercy which I was about to perform through my acquaintance with Michael Creenan. How it was to come about I did not exactly know, but I felt assured that I was going to be peace-maker. Ah, if I had known then what was about to happen—if I had only known!”

She paused for a moment, while a shudder passed through her frame.

“I am afraid,” she said, “that my story wearies you?”

I assured her that it did not, and begged her to continue.

“Well, my heart was very light with hope for the future, when one day my father came to me and announced his intention of taking me home. By this time both Anthony and Michael Creenan had left Dublin, and had returned to their home in Mayo. Anthony, who had entered the priesthood, had been offered a curacy, which he had accepted, allowing Michael to take his place as his father’s heir. Now, I thought, the time has come. Anthony, Michael, and their mother were the last representatives of their line, my father and I were the two last representatives of ours, and it seemed to me absurd that we should be enemies any longer. I had invented a plan to end it all, and I determined that my plan should be carried through.”

“You returned home?”

“I returned home with my father, and for several

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bade me, and, God forgive me, I never saw him again!"

Overmastered now by her grief she sobbed aloud. I rose and bent over her, begging her to calm herself, and since the recital was so painful to tell me no more—but she clung to me eagerly, and calming herself with a great effort, continued as follows:—

"I spent that night in misery, sitting in my room alone, thinking every moment that my father would repent of his harshness and come to me. But he did not come. The next morning when I came down to breakfast I asked for him. Bridget told me that he had already left the house. He had driven off at daybreak, she said, to attend Kilsyth fair. When I heard this I felt relieved; for it was his usual custom to attend the fair, and perhaps, I thought, he would be calmer when he returned. By this time I had made up my mind to tell him the whole story of my acquaintance with the Greenans, and entreat his forbearance and forgiveness. How wearily that day dragged along! The village was quite desolate, for most of the men had driven cattle to the fair, and the women had gone with poultry and butter to the market. I walked out on the seashore, and then up towards the moorland. Just outside Mylrea I came face to face with Anthony Greenan."

"Who had become a priest, you said?"

"Yes, sure, and had come to be Father John's

curate here in Mylrea. Though I had met Michael so often, I had seen next to nothing of Anthony. He had always avoided me before, but this time he came to me and held out his hand. I was a little surprised, since I knew he must have heard of what had taken place the day before. I tried to apologise for my father, but he stopped me. 'There is no need for that, Eileen,' he said. 'Through things like this the family feud has been kept up all these years, but we are going to stamp it out. I have spoken to Michael. What took place yesterday must be forgotten.' I thanked him with all my heart: then having wished him good-bye, I hurried home hoping to find my father. He had not returned. I came into this room, sat close by the window, and watched the road till nightfall. People were driving their cattle home from the fair, but soon it grew so dark I could see nothing; so I closed the window and rang for the lamp. An hour later I heard the sound of car-wheels and ran to the door, but the moment I appeared upon the threshold and saw the crowd of boys with torches, I knew that something was wrong. Before I could speak Dr. Mulligan drew me inside the hall and told me my father was dead!"

Again she paused, and again she dropped her face into her hands. The room had grown quite dark, I could scarcely see her, but I heard that she was crying. Instinctively I laid my hand upon her bowed



**"THE MOMENT I SAW THE CROWD OF BOYS WITH TORCHES,  
I KNEW THAT SOMETHING WAS WRONG."**

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head and stroked her golden hair as tenderly as if she had been a child. She choked down her sobs, and lifting her head, said quietly:—

“They carried him in and laid him on his bed, while I crept quietly to my room and sat there, not crying and moaning, but quite still and half-stunned, like one who had received a death-blow. By-and-by some one knocked at my door. I opened it and Bridget came in. Her face looked white and dreadful, for she came with dreadful news. They had found my father’s murderer, and he was in the hands of the police. I asked the man’s name, and she told me that it was Michael Creenan.”

## CHAPTER VII

"THE next thing I remember," said Eileen, "I was lying dressed upon my bed. Biddy was standing on one side of me, and Dr. Mulligan on the other. At first I was too dazed to understand what had really taken place; then in a flash it came back to me and I burst into tears. The doctor quietly left the room, Biddy tried to soothe me, but my first question was, 'Where is Michael?' 'Sure he's in the barrack, darlin',' said my foster-mother, 'and there let him stop till he's on his way to the gallows, bad cess to him.' I sprang from the bed, took the first cloak I could find, and wrapped it about me. 'Where are you going?' asked Bridget amazed. 'I am going down to the barrack to see Michael,' I said. 'He did *not* kill my father—I am sure of it! At any rate I will never believe he did till he tells me so with his own lips.'

"I silenced Bridget's protestations, hurried from the house, went straight to the police barrack, and found that what I had heard was only too true. On the evidence of a gun, found near my father's murdered body, they had taken Michael prisoner. The scene which had taken place between him and

my father had been witnessed and reported. People spoke also of a second interview which had taken place at Kilsyth fair, while others averred that Anthony Creenan must know of his brother's guilt, for when he had been told of my father's death he had turned very white and almost fainted away.

"I begged the police-sergeant to let me see the prisoner, and after much hesitation he took me to the strong-room. There I found Michael looking deathly pale. He told me of the second interview which he had had with my father in the fair. After the interview they had separated, he said, and had seen each other no more. Michael had his greyhound with him, and walked home across the hills; and he had been only a few hours at home when he heard the news of my father's death. A little later the police came, accused him of the crime, and took him prisoner. I asked him about the gun; he acknowledged it to be his, though he could give no explanation of how it came to be found near my father's body. Unfortunately, too, when he left Kilsyth he struck out over the loneliest part of the mountain, so that he met no one on the way.

" 'It all looks black against me,' he said, 'but they're on the wrong scent. I never harmed your father, Eileen. I swear it before God.'

"I felt that he spoke the truth, and I told him so. I saw innocence in his eyes, but without proof

belief was nothing. Suddenly I remembered what I had heard about Anthony, and leaving the barrack I went to the young priest's lodgings. Anthony was not there—he had been out all night, the widow told me, and had returned just before his brother was arrested for murder. Then, after Michael had been led away by the police, Anthony had rushed from the house, and had not since returned. Dazed and half stunned I hastened home, crept up to the room where my father was lying, and looked at his dear dead face.

"During the whole of that week I lay in my bed more dead than alive; but when my dear father was laid to rest, I rose and followed him to the tomb. It was a miserable day, I remember; a chilly wind was blowing and a thin mist was falling, but all the countryside seemed to be gathered about the grave.

"It was Father John Croly, our parish priest, who read the service; but his curate, Anthony Creenan, was beside him, and it terrified me to look at his face. How changed he was! His cheeks were haggard, and his gentle eyes were filled with a look of wild despair. As I looked at him I asked myself if the people could be right when they said that he knew something of his brother's guilt? But the moment the thought entered my mind I banished it. I believed in Michael's innocence; yes, as firmly as I believe in it now!"



**"IT WAS FATHER JOHN CROLY, OUR PARISH PRIEST, WHO  
READ THE SERVICE."**

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This was Miss Craig's story. When she had finished it she looked at me again eagerly and wistfully, and waited to hear what I had to say.

"Your faith is great," I said, "and I hope it will be justified. You have not the least doubt whatever that the police have arrested an innocent man?"

"I am certain of it," she answered, "and if you knew him, you would be certain of it too!"

"You have been called upon, of course, to give evidence concerning that unfortunate interview, when the prisoner was struck by your father, and your father was threatened by him?"

"Yes," she said. "When Michael was brought up before the magistrates of Kilsyth both myself and Father Anthony had to appear as witnesses against him. Oh, Dr. Sutherland, that was hardest of all to bear; to tell the truth, and to know that the words of my mouth would help to condemn him!"

"And the priest, his brother—what had he to say?"

"He could only protest as I did that he knew Michael to be innocent, and he, too, was heartbroken and helpless. We could do nothing. Michael was committed to be tried at the assizes for the murder of my father."

Just then the room door opened and Bridget came in with the lights. She looked somewhat aston-



ished to find us sitting so confidentially together, but she was evidently not displeased. Having drawn the curtains and made the room look generally cosy, she retired, leaving us again alone.

For a time neither of us spoke; then I broke the silence by asking her if she had anything more to tell.

"Nothing more," she replied. "You know that Michael is in prison. In a few weeks he will be tried, and then if the real murderer is not found——"

"He may be found yet," I replied, "if your instinct is right."

"It is, it is!" she cried, stretching out her hands and clasping mine.

"Then, if a man's help is of any avail, rely on me. Keep up your heart and trust in God!"

"Oh, what strength and courage you give me!" she exclaimed. "Before you came I felt so helpless and despairing that I cried out, 'There is no God, or such things could not be!' But the moment you came here I felt that you might help me. That reminds me. Where had you seen me that you should know me when you met me in the train?"

"I fancied I had seen your face before, that was all."

I am not good at dissimulation. She saw that I was keeping something back, and pressed me so

But that at length, very much against my will, I yielded to her entreaties and told her of my curious dream. When I had finished she clutched at the one point which, strange to say, had entirely escaped me.

"What was the *man* like?" she asked. "Could you describe him?"

"I'm afraid not. I saw his face less distinctly than that of the woman. Remember, also, I saw him once only—the woman I saw, or fancied I saw, seven times."

"But if you could see him in the flesh you might recognise him?"

"Impossible; it was only my fancy that I recognised *you*."

"It was no fancy!" she cried, and again I saw that wild light in her eyes. "I believe you saw *me* and saw *him*! How else could you have been brought here? The man you saw in your dream was the murderer of my father; he killed him, and he is killing *me*!"

I fear her superstition was contagious; at any rate I yielded to it, and began to fancy that I might be an instrument in the hands of an avenging Providence! Whether I really was one will be discovered by-and-by.

## CHAPTER VIII

BEFORE we parted that day I had promised solemnly to devote all my time and energies, for some weeks thenceforward, to establishing the innocence of Michael Creenan. Carried beyond myself by the "aberglaube" of a beautiful young woman's enthusiasm, and transplanted from London to an atmosphere favourable to romantic unreason, I exchanged the nature of a staid medical practitioner for that of an excited amateur detective. There was a mystery—I was going to fathom it; there was a maiden in distress—I was going to save her; there was a Cain hiding from justice—I was going to hunt him down. True, I had my misgivings, chief of which was the fear that Miss Craig, so far as the faith in her lover's innocence was concerned, was labouring under a sentimental delusion. But against that I set my dream in London, my recognition of the mysterious lady in the train, and the instinct which had led me to follow her into the wilds of Mayo. Rightly or wrongly, wisely or unwisely, I had plunged into the very heart of a strange adventure, and come what might I was determined to see it through.

I spent the next few days in familiarising myself with the *locale* of the tragedy, and in making inquiries concerning the chief actors. I soon discovered that the story I had heard from Miss Craig was true in the main. There was a very general opinion, however, that her lover was the guilty person.

Meantime letters from my *locum tenens* in London assured me that the great City could do very well without me, at least for a time, and that there was not the least necessity for me to hurry back.

So I abandoned myself to the situation, and was soon so familiar with my new surroundings that I began to feel as if I had lived in Ireland all my life. I knew everybody in the village, and received a friendly welcome everywhere. Whenever I went to Craig Castle the retainers greeted me eagerly, and even the dogs welcomed me with joyful barks, while Miss Craig herself poured out her heart to me with all the artless confidence of a child.

She was a tender, unsophisticated creature, loving, confiding, truthful; the more I saw of her the more easily could I understand how her sweet girlish nature had revolted at the terrible hatred which had existed between the two families. I could understand, too, how it was that in her relations with Michael Creenan she had behaved in a manner which would have shocked an ordinary nineteenth

1

century young lady. Her confidence in myself, almost a stranger, was also in keeping with her character. Absorbed in the great trouble which she believed had been brought about by the one act of independence of her life, she saw in me a sort of deputy Providence who had been sent to her assistance in answer to her prayers.

My fame as a "medicine man" had spread, and I was eagerly called upon by one and all to cure the village sick. In answer to the call I went from cottage to cottage, and did my best to conquer ailments, three-fourths of which were traceable to constitutional aversion to soap and water. But in other respects I was not idle. Wherever I went I was searching for the clue which might lead me to the heart of the Mylrea mystery.

It was a strange task which I had set myself, and the more I thought of it the more hopeless it seemed. So far as I could make out only one individual had been at open feud with the murdered man, and that individual was under arrest. Mr. Craig had been a good landlord—a tolerably humane man, and popular with all classes. His very faults had been of a kind which win and secure affection. There was not the slightest reason, therefore, to presume that he had any enemies among the common people. With my deepening conviction that the police were right and Miss Craig utterly wrong, it was terrible to me to meet Eileen's

eager questioning look, and to know that I could hold out no hope whatever.


I had been lunching with her one day about a fortnight after my arrival, and immediately the meal was over I had made an excuse to get away. She had been very silent, and when I rose to go I saw that her eyes were full of tears. She said nothing, but her face wore a look of despair and even reproach. Hastening to my lodgings I took up some old newspapers containing accounts of the murder, the coroner's inquest, and preliminary inquiry, and began to re-read them through to see if, by any chance, I could discover the clue of which I was in search.

I had been reading for an hour or so when there came a tap at the door; almost immediately it was thrown open and my landlady announced:—

“His Riverence, Father John.”

Looking up I encountered the gaze of the stranger, who was none other indeed than the parish priest of Mylrea.

Father John Croly, who had been located at Mylrea, as curate and as parish priest, for over twenty years, was a little plump man who wore clothes a couple of sizes too large for him. Seen from a distance he had the appearance of a black mushroom, his body forming the stalk and the huge felt hat, which completely extinguished his head and face, completing the resemblance; but when the hat was



removed Father John was seen to possess a handsome weather-beaten face and a pair of striking coal-black eyes. He came up to me with his little fat hand outstretched and a smile of welcome on his cheeks, to which I cordially responded.

"He may be able to tell me more than the newspapers," was my mental comment. "I'll try."

"I am glad to make your acquaintance, Father John," I said, as I shook him by the hand.

The priest turned his head on one side and screwed up one eye; with the other he scrutinised me carefully from head to foot.

"Sure you're only a boy," he said reflectively; "and yet, in a couple of days or so, you've snuffed out Mulligan, bad cess to him!"

I informed him, with a laugh, that I had passed the mature age of thirty, and then asked him, for form's sake, who Mulligan might be.

"Sure it's Mulligan the doctor," said Father John, with a chuckle, "and you'd best keep out of his way, sir, for he swears he'll have your life!"

"Indeed? Then I suppose he's angry because I've been to see some of his patients?"

"Sure that isn't what he objects to, it's because you've *cured* them," said Father John, laughing boisterously. "But you needn't mind him; he's a bad fellow, and if he got his deserts he'd have been out of this long ago. He's always in drink, sir, and there isn't a man in the village can tell ye of a case

he's cured. Now there's my own curate, sir, down wid the fever, the poor boy, and devil a doctor handy to do him a good turn. I was wondering," he added, screwing up the one eye again, and gazing at me steadily with the other, "I was wondering if you'd mind taking a look at him yourself, doctor?"

I expressed my willingness to make myself useful, and then assuming entire ignorance asked who the curate might be.

"He's just own brother to the young fellow who's taken up for murder," said Father John, lowering his voice; and on the instant my senses were on the alert. "You've heard about that affair, sir? Well, now, it's about as ugly a business as I've known in Ireland; for if Michael Creenan didn't do it they'll never catch the blackguard that did, and if they hang the poor boy they'll kill three others wid him! For there's his brother, my own curate, knocked down with the shock; there's his poor mother watching him and thinking of her other boy in gaol, and though she doesn't cry her hair turns grey; and then there's Miss Eileen, just broken-hearted, with her father lying in his grave, and her lover waiting to go after with a rope round his unlucky neck!"

"Her lover, did you say?"

"Sure enough," said Father John; "sure it's no saycret, sir, for everybody knows it hereabouts.



That's the boy she wanted to marry, sir, and that's the boy she *will* marry, if he gets clear of this!"

I invited Father John to give me his version of the story, but he was eager to take me away to see the young priest.

"If you'd tell that blackguard Andy to put the horse to the car I'd take you over to him at once, sir."

I ordered the car, and in a very short space of time we were driving rapidly away towards the mountains. Presently I asked the priest if he had known his curate long.

"For eighteen years, sir," he returned. "When I first came to Mylrea as curate he was a little, small boy of seven, and even then he was playing the father to his brother Michael, who was just two years his junior. They grew up together, the father's pride and the mother's joy, sir. Well, the mother was anxious that one of her boys should be a priest, and since Michael was a wild, devil-may-care kind of a boy, her choice fell on Anthony, who was grave and wise beyond his years, and so the lad was sent away to Maynooth. It was years after that before I saw him again, and when I did I couldn't recognise him, for he'd grown into a tall, fine young fellow, as handsome as Michael, only dark instead of fair, and without the devil-may-care look that Michael had in his eyes. He had a quare worried look

about him, and I soon found out why. It was one day when I had been holding confessional in my own house yonder. I had had a bad time of it, for I was crippled with the rheumatism, and couldn't move, and a couple of my people played a dirty trick on me. It was the blackguard Rory Bournes, as they call him, and his sister Kate. They're a bad couple, sir, the two o' them, and I've been always sorry I gave them absolution that day, for as Rory left me he just lifted down the saddle that hung in the hall and made off wid it; then came Kate, and after I'd absolved her and given her wholesome advice, out she goes and takes the bridle that was along wid the saddle! But I got them both back, sir," continued the priest emphatically, "for I denounced the pair from the altar, and the very next day some of my congregation fetched the things and placed them in the hall."

The priest, who had evidently forgotten the thread of his story, rambled on garrulously for some minutes; then I led him back.

"Did Anthony Creenan confess what was troubling him?" I asked.

"He did not, sir," returned the priest indignantly. "If he had done so I should not be speaking to you about it now, for the secrets of the confessional are not to be revealed to man. No, sir, he came to ask my advice. 'Father John,' said he, 'have I gone too far to turn back? Must I go on now and be-

come a priest?’ Well, sir, I was in a bad mood that day, and when I saw that the lad was wavering I did not try to steady him. I placed my hand upon his shoulder and looked into his eyes. ‘Anthony Creenan,’ said I, ‘unless you feel that you’ve done with this world, never enter the priesthood. It’s a barren life! So long as you’re on this earth you must sever all ties and crush out the heart that’s in ye, and then, when you’ve passed through a weary, isolated existence, you die lonely and isolated still, with the glory of the priestly robes around you, and that’s all!’ Well, sir, the lad’s cheek flushed, and he poured into my ear his tale o’ trouble. He had fallen in love with Miss Eileen!”

He paused for a moment, while I looked at him in amazement.

“Is it of Anthony Creenan you are speaking?” I asked.

“Sure enough,” returned the priest; “of the lad I’m taking you to see.”

“But he is a priest.”

“He wasn’t ordained then, sir,” answered Father John, “and at the same time he had the heart of a layman, for he was fairly sick for love. I could see it in his eyes. Well, my advice to the lad was this—and may be it wasn’t such bad advice after all—‘If your heart fails ye turn back, and may be God will make a man of ye and find Himself a bet-

ter priest.' So he went away happy, and since I had promised to guard his secret I said nothing. Well, sir, as nothing occurred I ceased to think of the matter, especially as the two lads were in Dublin, and I had never set eyes on Miss Eileen at all. But only last year I was warned to expect a new curate, and when he came, who should it be but Anthony Creenan? The same lad, sir, but wid all the soul gone out of him. I just mentioned the past, and I saw it was just like tearing open an old wound. 'It was not to be, Father John,' said he; 'Michael loves her. It is well I discovered this, for if I had tried to win her love and had succeeded in doing so, it would have broken his heart. It wasn't for me to enter the lists against my brother, though it broke *my* heart to lose what he would may be win!' Well, sir, I feared for him, and I gave him some good advice. He took my hand. 'Father John,' said he, 'have no fear for me. I swear to you before God that I will keep every vow I have taken till the day I die.'"

"Then for his brother's sake he had given up the hope of marrying and had entered the Church?"

"Yes, sir," replied the little priest, "and 'twas a sacrifice that did him credit, the brave boy!"

"He must have been deeply attached to his brother?"

"Attached, is it? Damon didn't love Pythias better; and by the same token blood is thicker than

water, and the two boys had drunk their milk from the same mother's breast. It's little wonder, ye see, doctor, that the poor boy is fairly knocked down, now that his brother, for whom he has sacrificed all his life, is waiting in gaol to be hanged!"

## CHAPTER IX

THE road along which we were driving wound inland, through as desolate a landscape as the eye ever rested on, even in Western Ireland. Dark stretches of moorland extended on every side, and beyond them rose low sullen mountains, half obscured with rainy clouds. Only the sound of the car-wheels, and from time to time the cry of a curlew, broke the silence.

Twice we passed through a cluster of cabins dignified by the name of a village, and ragged men, women and children stood at the doors saluting the priest as he passed by.

At last the road began to ascend upward, and passing into the very shadow of the hills we reached an elevated plateau, in the centre of which stood a large, slate-covered mansion, with farm buildings clustering around it, and green patches of park or meadow-land on every side. There was a small lodge on the roadside and an entrance gate, but the lodge was roofless and untenanted, and the gate had fallen from its hinges.

"The Creenans were a rich family once, sir," said Father John, as we drove through the gate, "but

when the banks broke in Dublin the old man lost a heap of money, and soon after that he died. But the widow has the land still, and but for this trouble the place might have prospered after all."

As he spoke we drove up to the front of the house. In a moment Father John jumped down and rapped with his umbrella upon the door, which was almost instantly opened by a smart-looking Irish girl, who curtsied low at sight of the pastor, and invited him to enter. Following in his footsteps I crossed a wide hall, and was ushered into a small sitting-room. Casting a hurried glance around I saw that the room was neatly but plainly furnished, and that the walls were hung with sacred pictures and crucifixes, which marked the room as the sanctuary of the young priest. Having shown us in, the girl closed the door very gently before she turned to Father John.

"Yer riverence," she whispered, "the mistress is lying down."

"Don't disturb her, Nora," he returned. "I've just brought wid mc a new doctor to see Father Anthony. Is he better to-day?"

"He is not, yer riverence," returned the girl, her eyes filling with tears; "he's just as bad as he can be."

"The poor boy! Take us to him, Nora."

Without another word the girl left the room, inviting us to follow her. Having crossed the hall

again we mounted a flight of oaken stairs, passed along a narrow passage with closed doors on either side of it, and at the extreme end of the passage reached a door which stood partly open. At a sign from Nora the priest pushed open the door and entered. I followed.

It was the room where the sick man was lying. On first entering I could see almost nothing, but I could hear a heavy breathing, broken now and again by a deep sigh, and again by a feverish moan. The light was excluded by heavy curtains, which were drawn across the window, but when I made a movement to pull them back the girl stopped me.

"Begging your honour's pardon," she said, "but the mistress did that. When the light comes in it seems to trouble him, and so the mistress keeps the curtains drawn."

"But if I am to do him any good I must see him; and I can't do so in this light."

She curtsied, drew the curtains a little aside, and I saw my new patient.

Though his features were pale and pinched with pain he looked only a boy, not more than twenty at most. His clean-shaven face was deathly pale, but there was a hectic spot on either cheek, his eyes were half closed, and he was quite unconscious. He lay upon a narrow bed in a farther corner of the room, and while one thin white hand clutched at the coverlet and his head rolled rest-



lessly and feverishly from side to side, he gave out those heartrending sighs and moans. Very softly on tiptoe Father John approached the bed and took the young priest's hand in his own, and as he did so his kindly eyes filled with tears.

"Has he been long like this, Nora?" he whispered.

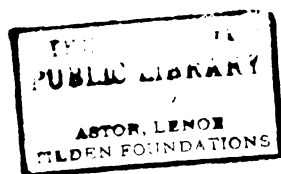
"Just to-day, yer riverence," answered the girl. "It was last night, when he was sitting up in his chair wid the mistress, that a process-server came and gave him a bit of paper. It was a process, yer riverence, to make him go and give evidence against Master Michael. Sure, Father Anthony took the paper and never said a word, but he just turned as white as a sheet; and this morning the mistress found him moaning and raving just like as if he was mad."

"Has Dr. Mulligan seen him?"

"He has not, yer riverence. The mistress sent over Andy O'Brien for him, but they said he had gone to Dublin for a week."

"So much the better," said Father John; and, turning to me, he added: "Now, doctor, can ye do anything for the poor boy?"

Approaching the bed and examining the patient, I found that he was in a high state of fever. The examination seemed to disturb him, for he moaned terribly; then, as I bent over him with my fingers on his pulse, he raised himself in bed, stared around



with vacant eyes, and moaning aloud, "Michael, Michael!" fell back upon the bed.

"Hark to that, now!" cried the girl; "that's what he's always saying. He's always calling for Master Michael. Oh, what will we do at all, at all?"

"What is it, doctor?" asked Father John, with a doleful shake of the head.

"He has brain fever."

"But you can cure him?"

"I'll try, but remember the etiquette of our profession. If he is one of Dr. Mulligan's patients, I have no right to touch him."

"Sure, you didn't stand upon etiquette with them poor creatures in the village?"

"I didn't touch one of them till the doctor had been sent for and had refused to come."

"And hasn't he been sent for in this case, and he can't come? Sure, you wouldn't let the poor boy die? Come, you'll cure him for Miss Eileen's sake if you won't do it for mine."

I wanted no persuasion, for I was already interested in this new case, and, further, my curiosity was strangely aroused. "There is something more in this than meets the eye," I thought to myself, and I was eager to find out what that something was. So I gave Father John the promise he sought, and we parted company, he going on foot to make some calls in the surrounding valley, while I, after preparing some simple medicines and giving

necessary instructions to Nora, drove straight back to Mylrea.

I was up betimes in the morning, and after partaking of a hasty breakfast, I set off on my rounds. By this time I was rather a busy man, and if guineas had flown in as thickly as patients, I should soon have been a rich one. The news of my visit to the young priest had managed to get abroad, and I was besieged with questions wherever I went. By answering some of these and applying a few others, I managed to learn that Father Anthony, though his tenure of office had been but short, had succeeded in winning the hearts of his congregation. Every one spoke, too, of his passionate affection for his brother Michael, and no one seemed surprised that the terrible position in which his brother was placed should have thrown him on to a sick bed.

Early in the forenoon I was again at the door of the old mansion, where my coming was eagerly looked for. The fever had heightened; the patient seemed rather worse. He was still unconscious, still rambling wildly, but I found that his temperature had not increased. Mrs. Creenan, a pale, worn woman with silver hair, now sat by the bed holding her son's feverish fingers in her own, while the tears were rolling slowly down her furrowed cheeks.

"The fever has only just reached its height," I said. "He will be rather worse before he is better,

but I think he'll pull round. He should have a man near him, however, and as I am not particularly wanted elsewhere I will stay if you wish it."

My offer being eagerly accepted, I settled down for the time being as nurse as well as doctor.

During the day my services were not much required. I paid frequent visits to the sick room, but was not regularly established there. At night, however, I sent all the household to bed, and remained to keep watch alone.

It was a stormy night. A north-westerly gale was raging along the coast, and about midnight thunder and lightning came on with heavy rain. The atmospheric influence seemed to have a disturbing effect upon my patient. As the fever heightened his ravings grew more wild and incoherent. Again and again he gave that piteous, despairing cry, and mentioned his brother's name; then he called aloud on his brother to forgive him, and on God to pity him, until at last a horrible dread and suspicion crept into my mind. Could it be possible, I asked myself, that the young priest was not merely mourning for his brother, but was haunted by the knowledge of his *guilt*? Was it not even possible that, in some mysterious way, he was a participator in the crime? No sooner had I entertained the thought than I rejected it indignantly. One glance at the simple, boyish face was enough; there was no guilt or evil there—only tender, over-

mastering love. The night wore away, the critical moment passed, and towards morning the young man fell into a deep sleep.

As the clock struck seven he was still resting quietly, and I was sitting in the easy-chair gazing abstractedly into the fire, when there came a gentle tap at the door, and Mrs. Creenan entered the room. She was rejoiced to hear from me that the crisis was safely over, and thanked me most fervently for what I had done. She had come, she said, to take her place by the sick bed; a room had been prepared for me, would I go and take the rest I so sorely needed?

I wanted no rest, but I went to the room which had been prepared for me, and after refreshing myself with a wash, prepared to leave the house. Before doing so, however, I returned to the sick room to take another look at my patient.

I found him lying as I had left him and sleeping as peacefully as a child. His mother was sitting in the chair which I had occupied during the watches of the night. I approached the bedside and stood looking at the sleeping man. As I stood thus he opened his eyes and returned my gaze.

For a time he lay looking at me as calmly as a child newly awakened from a refreshing slumber, then he covered his great dark eyes with his thin hand. As he removed it his memory seemed to come back. I saw it in a moment by the light

which shone in his eyes, by the terror-stricken look which crossed his face, and by the way he turned to his mother and clutched her hand.

"I have been ill," he said, "I know that. Tell me how long I have been here? What have I done, what have I said, mother?"

She bent down and put her lips to his brow.

"God bless you, my son," she said. "You have been ill, but He has spared you to us. He would not leave me altogether alone!"

"But Michael, mother," he cried wildly. "Where is Michael?"

She made no answer, and he, comprehending her silence, turned his head wearily away. There was no necessity for me to linger, so after assuring Mrs. Creenan that all immediate danger was past, and giving her full instructions as to future treatment, I took my leave and drove back through the watery moorland to Mylrea.

## CHAPTER X

HALF-WAY between the home of the Greenans and my abode at Mylrea was a miserable, tumble-down village, a mere cluster of huts and cabins, lying at the foot of the rainy hills. There was a small whitewashed house with a slated roof, and at the door of this house, as I was driving past, I found the parish priest standing, the centre of a group of ragged peasants.

"Step down a moment, doctor," he said, as Andy drew rein. I jumped down at once, not sorry to stretch my limbs, and, pushing his way into the house, Father John led me into a large room, furnished like an ordinary kitchen, but with several deal tables and stools ranged along the walls. A man in his shirt-sleeves stood before the fire, a woman sat in a corner peeling potatoes, and throwing them into a large iron pot, and an ill-favoured sow with several young ones was rolling and grunting on the hearth.

"Shamus, ye thief," said the priest, accosting the man, "clear out o' this, and take the woman that owns ye along with ye, and bring us a drop of the best ye have convanient."



The man grinned and said something in Irish to the woman, who immediately rose, curtsied, and followed him out of the room.

"Is this a public-house?" I asked, looking curiously around me.

"Well, it's not a licensed house, sir," answered the priest, "it's a sort of a kind of a shebeen, and the only place for many a mile where there's decent refreshment for man and beast. The peelers know Shamus, and are glad enough to get a taste themselves when they're passing by, though the stuff he sells has never paid duty."

As he spoke the man re-entered and placed on the table before us an earthenware jug containing spirits, another containing water, and some glasses.

"Is it the rale stuff, Shamus?" asked Father John, holding the jug of spirits to his nose and sniffing critically.

"It is, your riverence," replied the man. "Michael MacGeary made it up on the mountain."

The priest nodded.

"I'll be after telling Michael to send me some over to Mylrea; but now get along with ye, and don't come back till I call ye."

The man immediately left the room, closing the door behind him. Father John poured out some of the spirit into tumblers, one of which he passed to me, while he held the other up to the light.

"Shamus is right," he said; "it's good stuff, and

Michael MacGeary's own making. I prefer Jameson myself, but potheen like this same, when it's made by a man like MacGeary, and has been kept till it's saisonable, wouldn't harm a fly, sir."

I explained that I thought potheen was merely the Irish name for whisky of any kind.

"You're right and you're wrong, doctor," returned the priest with a laugh. "Sure enough potheen is whisky, but it's whisky with a difference. You'll observe," he continued, filling his tumbler slowly up with water, "you'll observe that this same, now I put the water to it, keeps clear as the crystal stream itself. Now, bad potheen turns blue, and bluer yet with every drop of water, and there's clouds like verdigris in it, the colour of bad milk, and besides that it has a bad smell and gives to the inside of a man the devil's own vexation. But drink up that, doctor, and tell me what you think of it."

Thus urged I filled up my glass and raised it to my lips. The liquor had a curious, peat-like smell, but was not at all unpalatable. Cocking his head on one side, and screwing up one eye, the priest watched me critically.

"It's not bad," I said. "Do I understand that it is whisky which has been illicitly distilled, and has never paid duty?"

"That's it, sir," cried Father John, with twinkling eyes. "Ye know now what potheen is, and I'm glad you like it. I gave a little of this once to

"and I am afraid that there is something on his mind."

"On his mind, is it?" echoed the little priest with a heavy sigh and a doleful shake of the head. "It's in the very heart of him, and the soul of him, poor boy; for sure he was born to trouble as the sparks fly upward. And believe me, Dr. Sutherland, it takes a strong man, a broad-chested man, a man of iron muscle, to be a priest in Ireland; and mind you, Anthony Creenan is a gentleman's son, not a common man like me. I was born of the peasantry, doctor; and my mother, Lord rest her soul, gave me the constitution for all weather and all privations and all vexations; and though they said at Maynooth that I had more Latin and Greek than many of them, it isn't Latin and Greek that serve a priest best, but the lungs and heart of a strong man!"

He paused, sipped his whisky, and continued:—

"Many's the time I've seen that poor boy almost fainting, when he had to cross the mountains on an empty stomach to say Mass, and sorra a bite of bread or sip of water to stay his stomach till Mass was said! And add to that, doctor, he's what they call a taytotaler, and doesn't know the difference of Jameson or potheen from mother's milk. Often have I said to him, 'Anthony, you should take a dhrop!' But he's only smiled and shook his head, poor boy!"

"Does his brother resemble him?" I asked.

"He does not, sir," was the emphatic reply. "Michael was always a merry boy, and many's the time he's tasted this same potheen in Shamus' kitchen here."

"I mean personally—in character and temperament."

Father John shook his head.

"No, indeed, sir," he replied. "Sure they're like sunlight and moonlight; and the sunlight was Michael till his trouble came, and the moonlight was Anthony. Michael was all for sport and fishing and coursing and dancing with the colleens; he was the life of every wake, and the centre of all diversion. But Anthony was all for books and book-learning; and sorra a colleen ever troubled the heart of him, till the day he set eyes on Miss Eileen!"

"Do you think," I asked, "that she is any way concerned with the trouble? Does he regret, I mean, the sacrifice which he has made, and——"

The little priest interrupted me indignantly, thumping his plump hand on the table.

"No, sir!" he cried. "He has buried all that with his past life, and the thoughts in his soul are clean and holy, as becomes the thoughts of a priest of God."

"Then what is the cause of his trouble?" I persisted. "Is it attributable solely to his anxiety on account of his brother?"

"Of course, and little wonder!" replied Father John. "It's killing him and breaking his heart that the shame and suspicion has come upon Michael. The night he heard of his arrest he went down like a man with a bullet in his heart, and he's never risen from his bed since."

I had my own suspicions on the subject, but I did not care to communicate them to my companion at that moment. So I rose to my feet, and intimated my intention of getting along to my quarters.

"You'll cure the poor boy, doctor?" cried Father John coaxingly.

"At any rate, I'll do my best," I answered, "and at present, as I told you, I think he's out of danger. Can I give you a lift as far as Mylrea?"

Father John shook his head.

"No, sir; I'm staying here to-night, for I've another visit to pay up the mountain."

Just then the door opened and the man of the house entered.

"I ax your riverence's pardon, but there is a woman here wants to spake to you."

"Who is she, Shamus?" inquired the priest.

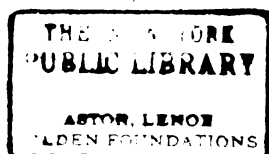
"She's Kathleen Bournes, from this side Kilsyth, your riverence; and she's been inquiring for Father Creenan."

As the man spoke a woman appeared in the doorway. She wore one of the long cloaks common among the peasant women of Ireland, and the hood



**"AS THE MAN SPOKE A WOMAN APPEARED IN THE  
DOORWAY."**

**[Page 110.]**



was drawn over her head; but I caught the glance of two great black eyes which were turned eagerly in my direction.

"What is it, my girl?" asked Father John sharply.

The woman replied at once, in a deep and not unmusical voice:—

"I was asking for Father Anthony, your reverence, and Shamus was telling me that there was an English doctor here who was looking after him."

"Sure enough, then!"

"I wanted to know if he would soon be better, your reverence?"

The question was a simple one, but the manner in which it was put revealed a deep and growing agitation, and the great dark eyes were still set anxiously on mine.

"I have just left him," I said, "and he is out of danger."

"Thank God for that!" cried the woman fervently, crossing herself as she spoke. "Does your honour think he'll soon be out o' doors?"

Here the little priest interfered, with an air of angry authority.

"What's that to you, Kathleen Bournes? You've the priest of your own parish to look after you!"

"Sure I know that, your reverence," was the reply, "but Father Anthony's a holy man!"

"Amen to that!" said Father John.



"And sure, your reverence," continued the woman, "it's many the kind word and kind look me and mine has had from Father Anthony, and our hearts were grieving sore when we heard of his distress!"

Although the speech was still addressed to the priest the dark eyes still sought mine, as if imploring me to set their anxiety at rest. So I said as I prepared to depart:—

"He'll be out and about before long, I hope."

The woman, as if satisfied, turned quickly to Father John:—

"Your reverence——"

"Well, my woman?"

"Is there any more news of Master Michael?"

"Sorra news, except that he's lying in the gaol at Castlebar waiting his trial."

The woman raised her hands and uttered a sharp cry, like the call of a bird in pain.

"Bad luck to them who took him there! He never harmed the master, rest his soul!" she exclaimed, and drawing her hood closer over her head, she left the room.

"Who is she?" I inquired of the little priest. He shrugged his shoulders.

"She's one Kathleen Bournes," he replied; "and her brother, sir, is one of the biggest blackguards in County Mayo."

Turning to the keeper of the shebeen, I inquired

how much I had to pay for our refreshment, for I had observed that Father John had made no attempt at payment.

"Not a penny, sir," cried the priest, interfering peremptorily. "If Shamus charged you for the dirty drop of liquor I'd lay my stick across his back for payment."

The man grinned.

"Your honour's welcome," he said, a little dubiously I thought, as I slipped a shilling quietly into his hand and passed out in company with the priest.

I mounted my car, shook hands with Father John, and drove away towards Mylrea. As I left the last cabin of the village behind me I saw on the road before me the woman who had accosted us inside the shebeen. She was trudging along miserably through the rain, which was now pouring down in torrents.

The moment we reached her I called on Andy to stop.

"Are you going our way?" I asked. "If so, jump up on the car."

Scarcely raising her head, she answered in the same low musical voice which had previously attracted my attention:—

"I'm going to my home this side Kilsyth. Drive on, your honour, and never mind the likes o' me!"

But I persisted; for her way I now knew lay

through Mylrea, and I was determined not to leave her afoot in such weather. Thus urged, she got up on the car by the side of Andy, and I saw as she did so that her figure was young and not ungraceful.

As we drove along I tried more than once to get into conversation with the girl, but she replied to me only in monosyllables, though once or twice she exchanged a few muttered words with my driver. She appeared to be sullen and almost savage.

When we reached the widow's cottage, and Andy pulled up at the door, I was occupied for some moments in getting my wraps together and fishing out my case of medicines and surgical instruments. When I looked up to address a farewell word to the girl, I found that she had disappeared; but I caught a glimpse of her along the road, trudging wearily through the rain.

"That's a queer sort of girl," I said to Andy laughingly.

"Your honour may well say that," was the reply. "Some say she's mad entirely, and some say she's been crossed in love."

"From what I saw of her I should say she is rather handsome."

"She is indeed, your honour," answered Andy, as he followed me into the cottage, "and many's the boy that's been after her and wanting to marry her, but by that same token she'll look at none of

them, and when they come after her she's only a rough word from behind the door."

With another laugh I dismissed the strange girl from my mind, little suspecting at that moment that we were ever to meet again.

## CHAPTER XI

ON reaching my lodgings I found a message from Miss Craig begging me to see her without delay. Hastening down to the Castle I found the girl in a state of great excitement. She was about to start for Castlebar, having received permission to have another interview with Michael Creenan, and she proposed that I should accompany her.

"His lawyer is to be in the town to-day," she said; "I thought you might see him, and learn exactly how the case stands."

Nothing could have pleased me better. It was arranged that we should drive to Castlebar at once, remain for the night at an hotel in the town, and visit the gaol in the forenoon of the next day. It was late in the day when we left Mylrea, and the distance we had to traverse was fully twenty Irish miles, but the two-horse car bore us along at gallant speed, and we arrived at Castlebar before night-fall.

Our destination was the King's Arms, a somewhat dismal hostelry near the market-place, distinguished like most Hibernian hotels by draughts, discomfort, and a wretched cuisine. A dreary chamber called

a drawing-room had been set apart for Miss Craig's private use, and there, waited on by a forlorn head-waiter with a black eye, we dined that evening together. The meal and the service were detestable, but what we lacked in comfort we gained in sympathy, for everybody in the place, from the sporting landlord to the head-waiter aforesaid, was eager to be of service to the unfortunate young lady, whose father had been a constant guest at the hotel during his lifetime.

At half-past ten o'clock the next morning we walked over to the gaol and were received by the governor, an old friend of the murdered gentleman. He received Miss Craig very kindly, but I found at once that he did not share her faith in the innocence of the prisoner. After a few friendly words he ordered us to be conducted to the cell where Michael Creenan was confined.

I was full of curiosity to see the young man about whom I had heard so much, but when we reached the door of the cell I hung back, and allowed Eileen to enter alone. A few minutes afterwards, however, Miss Craig called to me from the cell, and I found myself face to face with young Creenan.

Tall, powerfully though slightly built, fair-haired and blue-eyed, with a face still bold and bright, despite the haggard lines which care had left upon it, he seemed the very youth to win and keep a woman's love. When I made my appearance he was

standing by the little grated window, holding Eileen's hand, and looking sadly into her face. She, poor child, was crying, not wildly and passionately, but in a quiet, heartbroken way, letting the tears run slowly down her pale cheeks and biting her quivering lips to keep back her sobs. But Michael Creenan held his head erect like a man prepared to face his fate, whatever it might be.

"This is my friend, Dr. Sutherland," said Eileen. "Sure you know how good he has been to me!"

I held out my hand; the young man gave it a hearty clasp.

"Thank you, sir," he said with quiet dignity. "If you are Eileen's friend, you must be mine."

"Indeed he is your friend, Michael," cried Eileen. "You have no better in the world, for he believes in your innocence, and he is trying his best to set you free."

Then she told him of the curious dream which had been the means of my coming to Craig Castle, and of my promise to aid her in discovering the man who had caused her father's death.

"If you succeed in discovering the truth," he said sadly, "you are a clever man. They have managed to make my guilt so clear that nobody believes in me now, except Eileen."

"And Anthony!" cried Eileen, "and your mother, Michael."

"Ah, yes, my mother, God bless her," cried the

lad; "but if Anthony believes in me, as you say he does, why has he never come to see me?"

"He couldn't come," I said. "He has been too ill."

"Ill?" repeated Creenan. "He was well enough when they examined him at the last inquiry."

"The shock was too much for him," I said, "and he has had brain fever. It came upon him when he was subpoenaed to appear against you at the trial."

"Against me? How's that?" asked the young man with a startled look.

"I don't know," I replied. "At any rate, he has been called for the prosecution. Is there anything he can prove!"

"Nothing. As ill-luck would have it, I was entirely alone that day. My brother wanted me to carry a message for him to Kilsyth, and I walked there across the hills, taking my dogs along with me. In the afternoon I went up to the inn to have something to eat before I started for home, and there I met Eileen's father. We were alone in the coffee-room, so I thought it a good opportunity to say what I had to say. I told him I was determined to marry Eileen. Well, he was very angry, and said things that made me angry too, and while we were at words other folk came in. I left the inn, and I solemnly swear I never saw Mr. Craig again."

As he spoke, he looked eagerly at Eileen, as if imploring her not to doubt him. Without a word



she took his hand, and softly sobbing, placed it against her lips.

"What did you do after you left the inn?" I asked.

"I got a lift on a car, sir, as far as Ballymore; then I cut across the hills home. That night the old gentleman was shot with my gun, and his body was found about a hundred yards from the spot where I had left the car."

"Can you account for your gun being there?"

"Indeed I can't, sir."

"Hadh't you missed it?"

"No. You see, the coursing season was on, and I was a good deal out with the dogs."

"Where had you left the gun?"

"At home, in my own room. It was fair time, and most of the servants were away; but I don't think any one could have entered the house."

He spoke with all the air of an innocent man. Every word, every tone, was manly, and he looked me fearlessly in the face.

"I suppose your mother and brother saw you when you reached home?"

"My mother did. Anthony wasn't there."

"Do you know where he was?"

"No, sir. He had been out making sick calls all the afternoon and late into the night, and he only returned in time to see me arrested under our own roof. I'm afraid the evidence against me is very

strong, and I don't wonder that many people think me guilty. But I don't think they'll hang an innocent man, even if the right man doesn't come forward. Something may crop up at the trial, and if not, well, sure I'm not afraid to die!"

A cry from the loving girl, and she sprang swiftly into his arms. He whispered a few words in her ear, and I saw that it was with difficulty that he choked down his own tears. Just then the turnkey appeared and intimated that the interview must end. I moved towards the door, but Eileen clung to her lover and sobbed aloud.

"Oh, Michael," she cried, "I cannot bear to leave you here! It breaks my heart! It breaks my heart!"

The young fellow soothed her as well as he could, though I saw that it was still hard work for him to keep from breaking down himself. At last we managed to get her away, and I conducted her back to the hotel.

Having confided Eileen to the care of the landlady, a kindly, motherly woman, I sallied forth alone to have an interview with the lawyer who was preparing the defence. I found him in some temporary offices near the market-place and up to his ears in legal documents. He was a fussy little man, O'Flannigan by name, quick as a weasel, sharp as a needle, with very little belief in human nature. When I entered the room where he sat he had his

watch in his hand. He looked from it to me, and said:—

“I can give you ten minutes, sir. Sorry I can’t make it more, but this is a busy day.”

“I merely wish to ask a question or two on behalf of Miss Craig. She wishes to know how matters stand with regard to Michael Creenan’s defence.”

The lawyer’s face fell, but he answered briskly enough:—

“Very well indeed, sir. We shall do our best to get him off.”

“But do you think you will succeed?”

“I hope so, sir, but the law’s a quare thing, and the evidence is rather ugly. It’s unlucky that the prisoner and the murdered man came to words before the deed was done, and on the other hand it’s lucky that the young lady sticks to it that the prisoner is innocent. We’ll work that for all it’s worth, never fear! Our leading counsel, Mr. Docherty, would make a pig cry when he touches the sentimental stop, let alone a jury!”

“You are aware,” I said, “that the prosecution has subpoenaed Father Anthony, the prisoner’s brother?”

“Yes,” replied Mr. O’Flannigan, “but I’ve seen the priest’s depositions and they can do no harm, for when he’s cross-examined we shall be able, I think, to show that the prisoner was too fond of the daughter to raise his hand against the father.”

I hesitated, and looked quietly in the lawyer's face.

"Honestly, now, what is your opinion of the case?"

The little man raised his hands in stupefaction.

"My opinion? I have no opinion. I take the evidence and I sift it for what it's worth. I think it's a bad case, and I think it's a good case. It's a toss-up, sir, and all I ask is that luck will send us a good-timpered judge and a tinder-hearted jury!"

I wished Mr. O'Flannigan good day, and hastened back to the gaol, determined, if possible, to have a few private words with the prisoner. After some little hesitation my request was granted, my excuse being that I had a communication to make from the prisoner's solicitor.

When I entered the cell where the young fellow was lodged, I was shocked at the change in his expression. All the light and brightness I had seen there in the morning had faded from his face, and in their place I now saw a look of settled but quiet despair.

He was sitting on the side of his truckle bed with his midday meal standing untasted beside him. When I entered he rose and asked me gently, but wearily, what had brought me back. Seeing that I hesitated, he asked quickly:—

"Miss Craig is not ill?"

"No," I replied, "she is waiting for me to take

her home; but I wished first to see you for a moment alone. It is quite true that your brother has been summoned to give evidence against you."

I watched him keenly while I spoke, but his face was a blank.

"You told me that before, sir," he said quietly.

"Then there is nothing whatever they can force him to say?"

"Nothing whatever, that I know."

"You are sure he was not with you that night?"

"Quite sure."

"Excuse me for persisting; but have you no idea where he visited that night, when, as you say, he was making sick calls away on the mountains?"

"No, sir."

"Was it usual for him to be out and about so late?"

"Quite usual. He was out all hours of the day and night. You see," the young man added quietly, "my brother was always a little strange after he was ordained. I used to think sometimes that he wasn't quite happy in his new life. He had strange fits of depression, and once, I remember, I found him crying like a child."

"On that particular night, before your arrest, did anything in his appearance strike you?"

The young fellow reflected. Then, as if illumined by a sudden memory, he exclaimed:—

"Yes, sir. He came in covered with mud as if

he had been wandering over the open bog, and his face was as wild as if he had seen a ghost. I asked him where he had been, and he told me that he had been visiting the sick and giving absolution. Then when we were alone he wrung me by the hands and said, ' Oh, Michael, why did I ever become a priest of God? ' "

" Shortly after that you were arrested? "

" Yes, and when the peelers came to take me my brother went on like a madman, and cried out that I was innocent, and that he could prove it. But sure, if that were true, I shouldn't be sitting here now! "

After a little more conversation I left him, feeling in my own mind pretty well assured that if the priest could not help me to find the guilty person I should never lay my hands upon him.

## CHAPTER XII

My interviews with the unfortunate man in prison had had at least one effect—they had convinced me (in spite of the overwhelming evidence against him) that he was innocent. When I said as much to Eileen, and begged her, as I did, to forgive me for having had so little faith previously in her womanly instinct, she was grateful beyond measure, and the load of her grief seemed greatly lightened.

“From this moment,” I said, “I’m with you heart and soul, and what I attempted at first out of mere sympathy shall be done henceforth under absolute conviction. You must keep up your strength, Miss Craig, for we shall need it all! There’s time yet to save your friend, and with God’s help he may soon be a free man.”

Driving back to Mylrea together we discussed the chances with lighter hearts, since now, for the first time during our acquaintance, we were equally enthusiastic. When we parted at the Castle door, and we shook hands like sworn comrades, her pale, suffering face looked almost bright and hopeful, for the first time since our meeting.

On one point I had thought it better to keep silence, since it might be a clue to the truth, and on

the other hand might lead to nothing; and this point was the unwillingness of Anthony Creenan to testify publicly on behalf of his brother. What Michael had hinted to me seemed, to say the least of it, curious. Why should the priest have been so loud in asserting his brother's innocence, and why should the summons to testify it have filled him with such despairing terror? What was he himself doing on the night of the murder, and what was the real cause of his singular agitation? These were questions which I had determined to answer for myself at the first opportunity.

At daybreak next morning I was on the car driving towards the solitary abode of the Creenans. On my arrival there I ascertained to my surprise that Father Anthony was up and sitting in his bedroom, where indeed I found him, leaning back in an arm-chair near the window reading his breviary. The moment I entered the room he smiled faintly and reached out his hand for mine.

I drew a chair beside his and placed my fingers on his pulse, while he watched me quietly with his large black eyes. I was struck more and more by his almost child-like expression. The dark eyes were large and soft, like a woman's, the lips full and sensitive, and the whole face almost feminine in its sensuous beauty.

"You are all right now," I said, "but you should not have left your bed."



"Sure, I'm better up and about," he replied in a low, musical voice; "and here close to the window I can feel the light on me, and I can see the sunset on the mountains."

Then, after thanking me in his mother's name and his own for my attention, he sat gazing out of the window with his eyes averted from mine, a little nervously, I thought, as if he dreaded further conversation.

"Do you know, Father Anthony," I said cheerfully, "that I've taken up my quarters in your old room at Mylrea? Very comfortable quarters they are, I assure you. And that reminds me," I added, "you left something behind you which I'm sure you will be glad to possess again."

So saying, I produced the book of Irish songs which I had found in the room at Mylrea. I had my object in returning it personally to its owner, but I was surprised to see the effect which the sight of the book had upon him. His eyes dilated, his under lip quivered, and he drew back, waving the book from him with a white and trembling hand.

"It is yours, is it not?" I asked. "Of course it is, for your name is written here upon the fly-leaf."

For some minutes he did not reply; but I saw his lip still quivering, and at last he said, in a low voice:—

"Thank you, doctor. Yes, the book is mine. Will you kindly place it down on the table?"

I did so, and then returned to my seat at his side. When he spoke again his eyes were resting wistfully on the book.

"It was a gift to me many years ago," he said; "but when I left it in the cottage I did not expect to receive it again. Sure, it's a book of heathen songs, and there's only one book, maybe, a priest should read."

He raised his right hand and showed the breviary.

"But since Miss Eileen gave it to you?"

Again I thought his eyes dilated and his lips quivered, but I could not see his face well, as it was partially turned away. Not a word more was said, but he opened his breviary, glanced at it, and then closed it with a deep sigh.

"Are you strong enough," I said, "to talk to me on another subject? I have been to the prison at Castlebar, and I have had a long talk with your brother."

This time there was no nervousness, no hesitation. He turned round quickly, looked eagerly into my face, and cried:—

"You've seen Michael? Spoken to him? How is he? What did he say to you? Did he send any message to me?"

"He sent you his loving blessing," I replied. "He was wondering why you had not been to see him, but I explained that you had been ill, and he was satisfied."

"God in heaven bless him," cried the young priest fervently, looking upward.

"I did not go alone to the prison," I proceeded, still watching him intently. "Miss Craig was with me. She, like yourself, is thoroughly convinced that your brother is innocent of causing her father's death."

I waited for him to speak, but he was silent, and I saw that he was trembling from head to foot.

"You, of course, believe him innocent?"

The reply came at once, and in broken accents:—

"I *know* he is!"

"Unfortunately, however, the case is very black against him. Unless we can discover the person who is really guilty, your brother is certain to be condemned."

It was cruel of me, I suppose; but I had my object in causing the young priest the torture which he was obviously enduring. If he was concealing anything, he might be urged to speak. He sat as if spellbound, gazing out through the window on the dreary prospect of mountain and moor. Suddenly he uttered a cry, and said in a voice choked with tears:—

"God will help him! God will never let them harm an innocent man!"

"But can you do nothing?" I asked quickly. "Remember your brother's life is at stake! You say you know he is innocent."

"I know it, and God knows it!"

"But can you prove it? That is the question. Do you know anything which might throw light into the darkness, and help us to find the guilty person?"

"I know nothing, I can say nothing," he replied; and with tears streaming down his cheeks he added, as if to himself, "My God! My God!"

But I persisted.

"It is unfortunate, very unfortunate. When you are called upon to testify on your brother's behalf——"

"I have testified on the depositions. I can say no more."

"You have not even any suspicion as to the truth? If that is so, how can you say that you know your brother is innocent?"

"I do know it," was again the reply.

"But how?"

The priest rose to his feet, supporting himself with his two trembling hands; then he stood erect, crossed himself, and looked me in the face.

"God will preserve my brother," he said solemnly. "God also has taught me my duty, sir, and I shall do as He wills!"

I saw at once that further cross-questioning was useless. For some reason or other, which I had not yet fathomed, Father Anthony was unable or unwilling to reveal all he knew. Utterly perplexed and puzzled I prepared to take my leave.

"You will see your brother as soon as possible?" I asked, after giving the invalid a few general directions to be observed during his convalescence, and promising to send him some strengthening medicine "Perhaps," he replied vacantly. "I do not know."

Here was fresh cause for astonishment. Instead of being eager to rush to a meeting with one so dearly beloved, he gave me the impression that he wished to avoid an interview. He saw the surprise in my face, and added with a strange look in his dark eyes:—

"Yes, I shall go to him, but not yet—not yet!" So saying he took my hand in his, pressing it between his wasted fingers, and bade me farewell. As I left the room I glanced back and saw him standing like a spectre gazing after me.

As I drove home through the dreary moorland I tried to piece the puzzle in vain; the whole conduct and manner of the young priest seemed inscrutable; but the more I considered it the more convinced I became that he, and he alone, held the clue which we were seeking.

More than once again I yielded to the suspicion that some motive not wholly good or noble might underlie his apparent affliction and hesitation to move actively in his brother's defence. It was a horrible idea, but I could not altogether shake it away.

Was it possible, I asked myself, that he had never

quite forgiven Michael for coming between him and Eileen Craig and so driving him into the cold arms of the Church? Had the priest's conduct throughout been as magnanimous as was supposed, or, on the contrary, was he after all not the friend of his brother, but his secret enemy?

I dismissed the thought as unworthy, but I could not help remembering what I had seen with my own eyes—Father Anthony's agitation when I returned him the book of verse, Eileen's gift, and his shrinking away from it as from something almost hateful.

I went over to Craig Castle that evening and in the course of conversation with Miss Craig mentioned that I had been to see the priest, and that I had only succeeded in discovering that he knew of no circumstance which might tend to prove his brother's innocence. I gathered at once from the dear girl's manner that she had not the slightest suspicion of the truth—that Anthony had ever conceived that hopeless passion for herself.

"I should have spoken to Father Anthony long ago," she said, "but after all that had happened I felt afraid; and then you know he was taken ill. Don't you think that he might help us? He knows the country so well and all the people. A priest has sources of information which are closed to others."

"I think he might help us," I replied, "if *you* asked him."

"If *I* asked him?" she repeated in amazement.

"Surely he would need no asking from me or any one, if he could save his brother's life?"

"One would think not. But, frankly, Miss Craig, I believe he is hiding something from us—something which he is afraid or unwilling to reveal."

Her wonder seemed to increase when I inquired:—

"You are sure he has never had any disagreement with his brother?"

"Oh, quite sure. Their love for each other has been the talk of every one. Even when they were little children Michael adored Anthony, and Anthony, I believe, would have died for Michael."

Still a little sceptical and unconvinced, but pretending to acquiesce, I proposed that she should drive over with me the next day, and add her entreaties to mine that the priest should move actively and at once in his brother's defence. I knew that I should subject the young man to another cruel ordeal, but I was in hopes that the result might help me to dispel the mystery. Miss Craig offered no objection, and on the afternoon of the next day we stood together at the door of the lonely house, inquiring for Father Anthony.

To my amazement Mrs. Creenan, who met us on the threshold, told us that her son had left the house several hours before, to make some sick calls among the hills. She had tried to dissuade him from going out, for it was raining fast, but he only gave "a strange kind of a laugh," she said, and rushed away.

"Sure the fever is on him still," she moaned, "and he'll maybe get his death."

"I hope not," I said. "No doubt he'll return soon, and with your permission we will wait for him."

The meeting between the poor woman and Eileen was a little constrained on both sides, but before long the natural charm of the young girl had conquered, and the two were sitting side by side talking of the unhappy youth in prison.

"God bless you for standing by him, and believing in him, Miss Eileen!" said Mrs. Creenan. "You were the light of his eyes and the pulse of his heart."

While they mingled their tears together I left the sitting-room and stole up to the little bedroom where I had seen Father Anthony on the previous day. The first thing that met my gaze as I entered was the book of songs lying on the table close to the arm-chair. I took it up and it opened at once at the pages between which lay the pressed shamrocks and withered rose. I felt certain that the priest had been reading it before he went forth.

I walked to the window and looked out on the lonely meadows surrounding the house and on the dreary prospect blurred with mist and rain. As I did so I saw a black figure in the distance walking rapidly towards the house. I recognised it in a moment—it was Father Anthony returning home.

I hastened downstairs and stood on the threshold



to receive him. In a few moments he came up panting, and never shall I forget the gruesome spectacle that he presented.

His black soutane was soaked with rain, his broad-brimmed clerical hat was shapeless and dripping, the mud of the bog covered him to the knees and was splashed all over him, but his face was still ghastly pale and his eyes were full of feverish light.

He ran up the steps, and on entering the house staggered and would have fallen if I had not caught him in my arms.

"You must be mad," I cried, "to venture out in such weather. Where have you been?"

He forced a laugh, and released himself from my arms.

"I could not remain at home," he replied. "It was stifling in the house, and I went for a walk across the mountain."

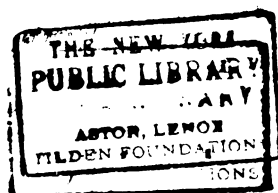
As he spoke he trembled, and drew back as if he had received a blow. Eileen stood in the hall looking at him in amazement.

As she came up offering her hand, his eyes fell, and he trembled violently.

"I am so sorry you have been ill," she said.

He did not reply.

"Come," I said, "I must exercise a doctor's authority and order you to change your clothes at once. I want to talk to you, and so does Miss Craig."





**"FATHER ANTHONY SHOOK LIKE A LEAF AT THE TOUCH."**

**[Page 137.]**

Still not raising his eyes, he answered in a low, strange, far-away voice:—

“Not to-night; no, not to-night. I’m not well, I wish to be alone.”

I looked at Eileen, whose eyes were fixed upon the young priest in strange, wistful pity.

“Father Anthony,” she said, and placed her hand softly on his arm.

He shook like a leaf at the touch, and his agitation increased; then to my astonishment he ran forward, and clutching the banisters fled swiftly upstairs, but before he reached the lobby above he looked round, cast one look downward, and uttered a mournful cry like the cry of a death-struck bird.

“Sure, it’s mad he is, indeed,” said Mrs. Creenan. “Will ye go after him, sir, and see that he comes to no harm?”

I obeyed her at once, and hastened upstairs to the priest’s bedroom, only to find the door locked in my face.

I knocked. There was no answer.

“Father Anthony!” I cried, and knocked again and again.

At last a voice answered me:—

“Who’s there?”

“It is I—Dr. Sutherland. I must speak to you.”

There was another pause. Then the priest’s voice cried again:—

“Are you alone?”

"Yes, I am alone."

The key turned in the lock and the door opened. I entered, and in a moment the door was locked behind me. Father Anthony stood looking at me like a hunted animal. He had thrown off his coat and vest, and stood in his shirt-sleeves, with the black priest's stock, dripping with wet, hanging limply from his neck.

"What is it that you want?" he cried wildly. "Why do you torture me?"

I answered him soothingly, and explained that my only anxiety was about his state of health, and ordered him to get to bed as soon as possible.

"As for the errand which brought us here," I said, "I suppose that must wait. I'll ask Miss Craig to come over another time."

"No, no!" he exclaimed. "She must not come again. I cannot speak to her. I dare not! I will not!"

Here his voice failed him, and throwing himself in the arm-chair he hid his face in his hands.

Seeing that it was useless to persist, I placed my hand gently on his shoulder and wished him good-night.

"Good-night," he replied in a hollow voice, not looking up.

I left the room, and the moment I had done so I heard him spring up and lock the door. Thoroughly startled and mystified, I rejoined the two women

downstairs, but in answer to their eager inquiries only informed them that Father Anthony had suffered no serious harm and would possibly be all right in the morning. Then I drove Miss Craig back to Mylrea. It was a stormy drive, and we spoke little during the journey, she appearing to be plunged in thought and I thinking it better to keep my own counsel as to what I had seen and heard.

## CHAPTER XIII

ON the 4th of November the annual cattle fair is held at Kilsyth, and as this same fair is a curious national function, at which all the local world and his wife are expected to be present, I determined to drive over on the car. I gave instructions to Andy accordingly, and ordered him to be ready early in the morning.

"Sure, there's not much to see at the fair, your honour," said Andy apologetically, "and Kilsyth is a poor place, but if you'll bring the gun wid ye, and let the dogs range along the bog, we might pick up a snipe or maybe a wild goose on the road."

Early next morning the car was brought round to the door, I leapt on it, carrying my gun under my arm, while my two dogs—a setter and a greyhound which I had purchased in the neighbourhood—prepared to follow.

Nearly a week had passed since I had paid that visit to the gaol. The time of the trial was drawing near, and absolutely nothing had been done to help the prisoner. Day by day the despair had deepened in Eileen's eyes as she read the look of utter helplessness in mine. I had paid two more

visits to the young priest, and after each visit my perplexity had increased. The first time I had found him again in bed propped up by pillows, too weak to talk, and suffering from a hacking cough. On my second visit, however, the day previous to my departure for the fair, he had suddenly gained strength, and was seated in his study surrounded by the emblems of his faith. I had taken the opportunity of examining him thoroughly, and I had found, not a little to my alarm, that the cold consequent on his exposure had touched his lungs, and that he was in a condition of low fever. I had ordered him to bed at once, and he had promised to obey me.

On leaving him, I had felt more perplexed than ever; for when I had touched again on the subject of the murder I saw the look of agony distort his face, and he almost commanded me to be silent. But when I spoke of his brother's approaching trial he rose from his seat and solemnly made the sign of the cross. "God help me to keep my faith!" he said, raising his eyes to heaven. Then, reaching his trembling hand towards me, he implored me, with feverish eagerness, to continue my search for the murderer, and to save his brother's life.

I was thinking of all these things while Andy drove rapidly towards Kilsyth.

It was a cheerless winter day. The bogs on every side of us looked black and sullen beneath a lowering



sky, but, despite the inclemency of the weather, everybody seemed astir; indeed, it seemed to me that the whole of the population of Mylrea was streaming towards the fair. From the earliest hours of the morning I had heard them passing my bedroom window, rending the air with their shouts and cries as they drove their unwilling cattle along the road; and still the stream was flowing on—the girls and old women—some of them in mule carts, others on foot driving before them their donkeys loaded with poultry, butter and eggs, and eager to realise in open market the rent which would soon become due. They looked at us as we drove past, some of the pretty girls giving us a bright smile and a “Good day, your honour,” while a few of the men scowled and made no sign; but for each and all of them Andy had a bright word, as he laughingly cracked his whip to send the stragglers out of his road.

Meantime the dogs, at a word from me, were ranging the open moor. Now and again the setter would find a snipe not far from the road, and wait patiently while I descended to cross over to him and take the shot. I picked up a bird or two in this way, and the greyhound put up two hares, one of which, after a smart chase, he managed to secure. Once a great flock of wild geese passed, fluttering and screaming close over the car, and alighted on the bog close to the roadside. A small sparrowhawk was pursuing them, but turned away on per-

clotted with mud. From the somewhat wandering light in his black eyes I judged he had had more than a nodding acquaintance with the whisky bottle, but his rubicund face was beaming with good humour, and he appeared to be very glad to see me.

"You've saved my poor boy, doctor," said he, "and I thank ye. Will you come and have a shnifter?"

I accepted his invitation, and we strolled together towards the inn. When we reached it we found the place besieged, the rooms full and flowing over, and a goodly crowd gathering before the door. The moment the priest made his appearance he was welcomed by one and all; even the drunkenest and most ragged of the merrymakers conjured up a smile and a "good day" for his reverence, and for the first time I understood why, though Father John was not averse to applying his stick to the back of a refractory parishioner, he was so popular among his people. He was hail-fellow-well-met with all and sundry, and he placed on an equal footing with himself the most poverty-stricken of his flock. In one of the rooms of the inn sat an agent waiting for his wretched tenants to come and pay their rent. There were many there who could not or would not pay, and had it not been for the mediation of Father John they would have been turned out to starve by the roadside; but the priest spoke up for them, even

while he gave them a little abuse, and with a "God Almighty bless your reverence," they went on their way rejoicing.

We had had our "shnifter" (the local term for a glass of raw spirits), and were about to leave the inn when there entered the room a person whom the priest welcomed with a curious smile. He was a coarse-featured, red-faced man, short and thick set; he wore a grey riding coat and breeches, both of which were liberally bespattered with mud, and carried a hunting-whip.

He nodded familiarly to the priest.

"Good day, Father John," said he, in a thick, husky voice. "Sure, you're the very man I wanted to see. I'm just afther buying a mare from that blackguard Rory Bournes, and I would like to show her to you. Will ye come down to my house? But first, will ye have one?"

Whether by this mysterious invitation to "have one" he meant a house or a mare I couldn't tell, but Father John, who seemed to comprehend his mixed phraseology, and who seemed to be immensely tickled at something, replied that he would "have one," whereupon the stranger called for "two glasses of Jameson."

"Three," put in the priest; "and mind, Katie, mavourneen, that the third is a good one, for 'tis to be drunk by a gentleman who is a stranger to the country." Then, turning to me, he added with a

prodigious wink: "Begad, sir, I think I'll introduce ye!"

Before I could say a word either of approval or disapproval he laid his little plump hand on my shoulder and added with an air of comic pomposity:—

"Let me present to you, Mulligan, a man that's worth a dozen of you, Englishman though he is! Mulligan, you thief, this is Dr. Sutherland!"

Mulligan! So this was my rival—the local Æsculapius who had sworn to have my life. Highly amused at the encounter, I held out my hand and said pleasantly enough:—

"How are you, Dr. Mulligan? I am very glad to meet you."

But Mulligan didn't seem inclined to respond. He gazed feebly at my extended hand, but made no attempt to take it; whereupon the priest interposed, and in less than five minutes my sworn enemy was hanging upon my neck and swearing eternal friendship.

Both the priest and the doctor had partaken of the national fluid pretty freely when we left the inn and walked away to the doctor's dwelling. By this time the doctor had forgotten all about the mare, but his friendship for me had increased to such an extent that he insisted on entertaining me to dinner.

The house where he lived was in a side street. It was a queer, tumble-down sort of building, half

stable, half house, and I soon found that the stable half was the best cared for of the two, since the doctor, who had originally been a veterinary surgeon, had more love for the old profession than the new.

When he entered the door I thought he had led us into the harness-room, for I could see nothing but saddles, stirrups and bits, but presently from this heterogeneous mass I picked out a wooden dining-table and a few chairs. There was a good fire, however, and the room looked fairly comfortable.

A shout from Mulligan produced a shock-headed male servant, who immediately began to spread the feast before us; cold chickens, knuckles of ham, rolled beef and hard-boiled eggs were heaped upon the table in profusion, "more Hibernico," and though the plates and dishes were not too clean, and the knives and forks were rusty and shaky, we managed to make an excellent meal, with plenty of whisky and water to wash it down.

Meanwhile the talk was merry, if not too intellectual, Father John rattling away in his brightest mood. At first I was somewhat astonished at the extremely abusive nature of the priest's remarks to his host, but as the latter took them with the utmost good nature, I soon got used to them. I afterwards discovered that this was habitual, and that though the priest entertained a warm friendship for the leech, who was a capital companion in his cups, he never addressed him in any but abusive language,

and never spoke of him but as a thief and a rogue. This, however, was entirely figurative and Pickwickian, and implied neither dislike nor malice.

The repast being over, and the necessary amount of whisky disposed of, I rose, buttoned my coat, and asked Father John if I could give him a lift home. The worthy divine cast a yearning eye upon a bottle which stood still unopened on the table, and Dr. Mulligan noticing the look said gently:—

“Father John, there’s a bed in my house that you’re right welcome to. The weather’s cold, sir, and, as your medical adviser, I say you’d better not go out to-night.”

“Do you think so, Mulligan?” said Father John, becoming polite for the first time.

“I do, indeed, Father John,” replied the doctor firmly.

“Were you thinking of going out yourself, Dr. Mulligan?” asked the priest with a twinkle in his eye. “If so, as your spiritual adviser, sir, I forbid ye! You’re safer in your own house, and by that token I’ll keep you company.”

The invitation to remain was thereupon extended to me, but I laughingly refused. Andy was waiting for me at the inn, I said, and I must depart. Then, seeing that Father John and the doctor had made up their minds to make the night merry, I took my leave amid many expressions of regret and a heartily

expressed hope from the doctor that we should soon meet again.

The hours had flown away, and when I again reached the market-place I found that the sun had set, and that gathering clouds and a shrill whistling wind seemed to portend a dark and dreary drive home. However, I thought little of this, having every confidence of Andy's knowledge of the country roads, and I was consequently in no hurry to get away. Nevertheless, I hastened towards the inn, and when I reached it found Andy at the door looking for me somewhat anxiously. He seemed relieved when I came up, and after he had heard where I had been, was immensely amused.

"Sure, 'twas Mulligan that swore to have your honour's life," said he, "but he's a quare man entirely. Will ye step inside, sir, while I put to the baste? . . . Now, then, Rory Bournes," he added, "where are you pushing? Can't ye stand out of the way for the gintleman to pass?"

The latter part of the speech was addressed to a man who stood leaning against one of the door-posts and barring the entrance to the house. I glanced at him, and was about to pass when the lowering expression in his eyes, which were fixed fiercely on mine, made me pause and look again.

He was a short, thick-set, bearded man, very squarely and powerfully built, with a coarse, evil-looking face, and a savage, almost blustering, man-

ner. His dress was that of an ordinary yeoman or small farmer—a swallow-tail coat, knee-breeches, rough boots, and a wideawake hat. A dirty-looking red handkerchief was tied round his bare throat, and under it was a coarse linen shirt without a collar.

Looking at him a second time I saw that the curious expression in his bloodshot eyes was partly the result of an overdose of whisky; indeed, he was hopelessly drunk.

“I should advise you to get home, my man,” I said. “You are not in a fit condition to be about.”

He made no answer, but drew himself closer to the door-post in order to let me pass. I entered the inn, while Andy went round to the stables to get the car.

I had not been many minutes in the room when certain wild sounds told me that a free fight had begun outside. Shrieks and yells filled the air, and increased to such an extent that at last I went to the door to see what was happening. By the time I appeared, however, the fray was practically over, and a crowd had gathered round a man who lay insensible on the ground. Pushing my way through the throng, I took a look at the vanquished one. It was the man I had seen standing hopelessly drunk in the doorway.



## CHAPTER XIV

At first I made no attempt to go near him; then, seeing that he lay quite still, I pushed my way towards him, bent over him, and found that he was quite insensible.

I called for some whisky and poured it down his throat; loosening the neckcloth, which was thickly knotted around his neck, and kneeling by him, I rested his head on my knee. He opened his eyes, gazed round with a stupefied look, and made a sudden effort to stagger to his feet, but directly he got upon his legs he nearly fell again. Then I saw to my surprise that blood was streaming down his right arm and soaking his shirt-sleeve.

"Make way," I said, addressing the crowd which was pressing uncomfortably upon us. "Hold him up, some of you, and get him into the house. He is wounded, and wants attending to."

In a moment he was seized, carried into the inn parlour and placed upon a sofa, while many of the crowd gathered in the doorway and stood gazing into the room.

"Clear out, all of you," I cried. "Give the man air."

Murmuring and muttering the crowd retired and I closed the door, leaving in the room only the landlord and one or two men who were drinking at the tables. The man's eyes had closed again, and he lay perfectly still. I ripped up the coat-sleeve which covered his right arm, but the member was so bespattered with mud and dirt that at first I could make nothing of it. Calling for a basin of warm water, I sponged the arm, and then I saw that the wound was not a new but an old one—some weeks old at least. It was a deep and dangerous stab in the fleshy part of the arm, severing one of the main arteries. Having been imperfectly bound up, the artery had burst open again. Fortunately I had my instruments in my pocket, and with the aid of some linen I managed, not without difficulty, to stop the bleeding and dress the wound.

"Does anybody know who he is?" I asked.

"Sure we all do, your honour," said Andy, who, having left his horse and car at the door, had come in to assist me. "He's one Rory Bournes, and lives on the mountain beyant, between Kilsyth and Mylrea."

"What's he doing here?"

"Sure, he came in to the fair, sor. He sold a mare to Dr. Mulligan, and got drunk on the money."

"How did he come by this wound?"

"The Lord knows, your honour. He's a bad feller, and will always be quarrelling and fighting when

the drink's in him. 'Tis not many weeks since he came out of gaol, your honour."

"Well, what's to be done with him?"

"Just put him on the road, your honour. He'll soon recover when he finds hisself alone, and some of the boys will give him a lift home."

By this time the man had again regained consciousness, and was staring stupidly from Andy to me. Taking hold of his left arm, I helped him to his legs, but they were still powerless to support him. He staggered and fell back again on the sofa, muttering an oath between his teeth, and giving me a savage glare.

"It is quite evident," I said, "that he can't help himself, and, ruffian as he looks, I can't leave him like this. Do you know the place where he lives?"

"I do, your honour. Sure we pass close to it on the way home."

"Then put him into the car," I said. "We will take him with us."

To this suggestion Andy strongly demurred.

"Sure he's a born blackguard and not worth troubling about," he said; but as nobody else seemed to take the least interest in the man, I overruled all objections and had him lifted into the car. As he was either too drunk or too weak to sit upright, I placed him beside me, supporting him on the left hand seat, while Andy placed himself on the right

side to drive. Thus we took our departure from the inn and started on our homeward journey.

The incident thus described had detained us so long that by the time we started the night had completely fallen—and a very inclement night it was. The rain fell faster and faster, with stormy gusts of wind, and the darkness gathered around us like a black shroud. Throwing a waterproof over the shoulders of the stranger so as to partially protect him from the storm, I had put on my ulster, lit my pipe, and made myself as comfortable as possible under the circumstances.

Although I was of temperate habits, I had taken a little more whisky than was good for me that day, and being somewhat drowsy, I suppose I must have dozed off. How long I dozed I cannot tell, but we must have left Kilsyth several miles behind us when I was awakened by a jolt of the car, which nearly dislodged the man I was escorting home. I gripped him firmly and sat half asleep, listening to the rumbling of the car-wheels as they scattered the stones all round, and to Andy, who was beguiling the dismal way with snatches of Irish song. We had just passed a cluster of lonely cabins, and were proceeding at a walking pace up a steep hill, when there was a flash and a loud report. The horse reared and started off at a gallop, and thrown from my seat I found myself standing in complete darkness in the middle of the road! In my sleepy state

I hardly knew what had happened; but I thought I heard the sound of human voices, and the sound of feet rushing away. I at once ran after the car, which had been pulled up some forty yards off, and found to my surprise that the wounded man had kept his seat and was lying back in what seemed a tipsy swoon.

"Jump up, yer honour," cried Andy excitedly, and as soon as I had done so he lashed the horse and sent it along at a gallop, never slackening speed until we were a good mile away from the spot where I had been dislodged. At last he turned to me with an exclamation:—

"Saints above, that was a near shave!"

"Somebody fired a gun," I said. "Do you think the intention was to hit the car?"

"Sorra doubt, and them sitting on it, your honour! I'd like to be at the funeral of him as done it. Is he kilt entirely?"

"Killed? Whom do you mean?"

"That blackguard Rory. Sure he's got a taste of the lead, and a good thing too, since if he hadn't been on the car to-night 'tis on that same spot your honour might have been sitting, and the shot would have struck you instead of him!"

Horrified and amazed I turned to the man and found that what Andy said was true. If the shot had been intended for me it had missed its mark, and the unfortunate wretch in my company had

been struck in the right shoulder. At first I thought he was killed, for he lay on his back and hardly seemed to breathe, but I thrust my hand under his ragged shirt and found that his heart was beating. As it was impossible to discover at once the extent of his injuries, the only thing to be done was to produce my flask, pour a little spirit down his throat, and order Andy to hasten with all possible speed to the wretched man's home.

"Sure it's there beyant," said Andy, pointing to a light in the darkness.

"Hurry, then," I cried; and as he drove on I asked myself the meaning of what had happened. That the car had been fired at ~~was~~ certain; the only question was with what object—and by whom? The shot could scarcely, I thought, be intended for myself, for I was not aware of having any enemies. The man in my company, however, was a notorious bad character, and possibly his life had been aimed at.

While I was thus speculating Andy turned off the main road into a narrow, deep-rutted lane, and after jolting along for some distance entered a stone-paved yard and paused before the door of a farmhouse—or such it seemed, for it was surrounded by sheds and outbuildings, and close to it were several stacks of hay.

"Here we are, your honour," said Andy, and throwing the reins on the horse's back, he jumped from the car while I remained in my seat, support-



“‘IS THAT YOU, RORY?’ SHE SAID, PEERING FORTH INTO DARKNESS.”

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ing the wounded man. Andy rapped sharply on the door with the butt-end of his whip. Almost immediately the door was slowly and cautiously opened, and there stood upon the threshold a woman wearing a petticoat and short gown, and holding a lighted lantern high above her head.

"Is that you, Rory?" she said, peering forth into the darkness.

"It's Rory, sure enough," growled Andy. "Hould a light here, woman, while we bring him in, for sure he's nearly kilt."

Without the slightest sign of astonishment, the woman stepped forward, still holding the lighted lantern on high, while Andy and I lifted the heavy form of the man from the car and bore it into the house. The street door opened right into a sort of rude kitchen, in the corner of which was a recess bed. Placing my charge on the bed I hastened to ascertain the extent of the damage which had been done.

I found to my relief that the injury he had received was comparatively trifling, but unfortunately it was in the arm already wounded. The gun had been loaded with what is known as No. 1 shot, but luckily it had been fired from some distance, and had, therefore, had time to scatter. Only a few stray pellets had struck the flesh. Nevertheless the man had fainted from loss of blood.

I at once set to work to dress the wound and to



restore Bournes to consciousness. The latter was a work of time and some difficulty, but at last he opened his eyes. They fixed themselves, not upon me, but upon the woman who stood by my side.

It now struck me as curious that, although she had been assiduous in getting me everything I asked for, she had not spoken a single word. Turning to look at her more closely, I recognised the girl who had questioned myself and Father John about Michael Creenan and who had afterwards ridden with me on my car. I saw now that she was remarkably handsome. She had the large grey-brown eyes and black lashes so common among the Irish Celts, a low broad forehead, somewhat coarse lips, and she held her head erect with an expression almost defiant. Her most remarkable peculiarity was her hair, which fell loose, in masses of rich dark chestnut curls, on to her shoulders. Her throat was white and elegantly shaped, her hands and feet small, her whole appearance, although the dress she wore was of the commonest material, that of a person superior to the ordinary peasant.

My close scrutiny attracted her attention; she turned her dark eyes full upon me and gave me an angry stare.

"Is he your husband?" I asked.

"He is not," she returned; then she moved away as if to avoid being further questioned, sat herself down on a stool by the hearth, and rested her chin

upon her hands. I noticed, however, that she glanced from time to time with a curious expression at the wounded man on the bed. He for his part neither moved nor spoke, but his eyes sought hers, and I saw that he was quite conscious.

Meantime I had set to work to extract the shots and to dress the wound. It was a nasty operation, but my patient bore it without flinching. Once, indeed, he tried to push away my hands, exclaiming as he did so: "In the name of God, why can't you let a man die!" but finding that I was determined to do my best to save him he submitted sullenly until my work was done. As for the girl she made no attempt to interrupt us. It was Andy who aided me this time, and when all was over and I was ready to go, I looked for her. She was still seated by the fire in the same attitude of sullen indifference.

"He is badly hurt," I said, "but with a little trouble and some patience you'll pull him through."

As I spoke I watched the girl's face, and was amazed to see the look of indifference change to one of sullen disappointment.

"Is there any one here who can nurse him?" I asked.

She rose to her feet, and with a wild toss of her head shook back her hair.

"Sure it's myself that'll do that same," she said, coming defiantly forward.

At that moment the expression of her face was so

forbidding that I hesitated about leaving the man in her charge. As nothing else could be done, however, I gave her instructions as to her duties, and, promising to call again some time next day, wished her good-night.

"Good-night," she replied, sullenly enough.

I hesitated, and looked at her again.

"I forgot to ask you how he got that wound. I don't mean the shot-wound, but the other. It must have been done with a sharp instrument of some sort."

"Sure enough," she answered.

"Was it a knife?"

"Maybe," was the reply. "He got no more than he deserved, for he's ever quarrelling and fighting like a wild baste."

I glanced at the man. He had dragged himself up on the bed, and was gazing wildly and almost imploringly at the girl as if begging her to be silent. There was little love and no pity in the look that answered his. If he was a wild beast she seemed nearly akin to the same species. With all her beauty she had too much of the wildcat in her to suit my taste.

I left the place, mounted the car, and drove homeward through the night.

"Well, Andy, and who is the curious colleen?" I asked, as we passed along the dark road. Andy laughed.

"Sure, she's own sister to that blackguard," was the reply, "and though she's a handsome-looking colleen enough, sure she's as big a blackguard as he is hisself."

"There seems to be no love lost between them, at any rate. I should think from her manner that she was almost sorry that her brother returned alive?"

Andy answered the question with another.

"Does your honour think that same?" said he. "Well, well, the ways of women is quare, sure enough."

"Do they live alone?"

"They do, sor—all alone."

"They seem to be very poor."

"They are that, sor, but they were well-to-do once, and the colleen had good schooling. Then Rory took to drink, and wasted his own fortune and hers. Sure, I've heard tell there's been times when they've been well-nigh starving."

"Poor girl, I must speak to Miss Craig about her and see if something can't be done to help her."

"Your honour," said Andy anxiously, "maybe 'twould be better not to do that same."

"Why not?"

"Sure, then, it's this way. When that blackguard Rory was in gaol last winter, didn't Miss Eileen (God bless her) go down to the farm herself with food and money too, but Kathleen (bad cess to her) shust took the food and the money and cast them

on the road. 'Let them take your gifts that wants them,' said she, and she put the curse on Miss Eileen and drove her from the door!"

"But why did she do this?"

"Well, your honour, she's quare-tempered like her brother. Maybe 'twas because Miss Eileen was rich and she was poor; but sure there isn't another soul in Mylrea that would do that same to the young mistress."

## CHAPTER XV

I WAS breakfasting the next morning when Andy sent in a message and said he wished to see me. When he entered, hat in hand, I saw at once that he was agitated, for his expression, usually so bright and cheerful, was grave in the extreme, and he closed the door mysteriously behind him.

"Your honour," he whispered, "may I spake to ye?"

"Of course," I answered, with a laugh. "What is it, Andy? Out with it. There's something troubling you."

"There is, sor," he returned grimly.

"Well? I'm listening."

"Will your honour be wanting the car to-day?"

"I don't think I shall; not this morning at any rate, for I feel more inclined for walking. I'm going to look at my patients; but my first visit will be paid to the man you call Rory Bournes."

"Then if your honour's going there alone, don't you think 'twould be as well to have a peeler to go along wid ye?"

"Go out guarded!" I exclaimed. "Parade about the country with a policeman at my heels! Why, in the devil's name?"

"Sure, your honour must know, thin," said Andy desperately, "that the shot that was fired last night was never intinded for the blackguard that got it."

"Ah, you think it was meant for *me*?"

"I do indeed, sor."

"What makes you think that?"

"Sure 'tis as clear as daylight, your honour," he returned. "Didn't nearly every soul in Mylrea see us drive to Kilsyth in the morning?"

"What then?"

"And didn't every mother's son of them think 'twas the same way we'd be driving back at night?"

"That would be the natural conclusion, certainly."

"And did one of them think that Rory himself would be on the car? Sorra one. Well, your honour, they just fired at the car, and they risked hitting me, bad cess to them; but 'twas not to kill me they tried, though there was one of us they did mane to kill or maybe to frighten out of the country."

"And that one you think was myself?"

"I'm sure of it, sor," cried Andy.

"Well, it's lucky for me that I overruled your objection to taking that drunken blackguard, as you call him, on the car, otherwise I might now be lying in his place, and all chance of my discovering the man who killed Mr. Craig would be at an end."

"It would indeed, sor," said Andy earnestly, "and that's shust what they wanted."

"You think so?"

"They meant to serve you as they served that thief Rory! And it's my belief, sor," he concluded, lowering his voice to a husky whisper, "that them as fired at the car last night is the blackguards that murdered the master."

Having delivered himself of this astonishing piece of information, Andy quitted the room, closing the door softly behind him, and leaving me to my meditations.

I lit my pipe to collect my thoughts, and the more I did so, the more did I think it probable that Andy was right. Some one, it was clear, had fired at us with murderous intent, and that some one was in all probability connected with the mystery which I had been trying to unravel. So far everything seemed clear enough. The question which now remained was, how could I act? Call in the aid of the police? No, I would not do that; not even, as Andy suggested, for the sake of self-preservation. To walk about followed eternally by a representative of the law would be the act of a coward. I believed myself to be no coward, and though I was not foolhardy, ordinary precautions were necessary, and I meant to take them.

Opening my bag I took from it a small revolver, which several years before had stood me in great stead during my travels in the East. On leaving London, full of the usual wild stories about Ireland,



I had thought it wise to take the weapon with me. It was only a toy, but it might be very useful in an emergency. Having found my box of bullets, I loaded the six barrels and placed the weapon in the inner pocket of my coat; then I called upon Andy to bring the box containing my instruments and medicines, and to walk with me to the house of the wounded man.

It was a good stiff tramp, four or five Irish miles, through as lonely a tract of moorland as is to be found even in Ireland; but the morning was fine, I was young and strong, and I enjoyed the walk thoroughly. On arriving at the lonely farm I found the door shut, and my ears were instantly greeted by the sound of angry voices proceeding from within. After rapping loudly several times I was at last admitted, to find that the disputants were none other than Kathleen Bournes and a ragged old man with a pale, wrinkled face, straw-coloured hair, and watery eyes, which gleamed like those of a ferret. He held in his hands some dirty banknotes, and his evil-looking eyes glanced uneasily from the face of the sick man on the bed to that of his sister. Directly I entered she pointed imperiously to the door.

"Out of this, Anthony Linney," cried the girl. "It's like you to come and blackguard me, now that my brother is sick."

Taking no notice whatever of her command, the man turned cringingly to me, and pulling the fore-



"HE FLED AS IF FOR VERY LIFE."

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Miss Craig for a bottle of port wine and some brandy, and bring them here at once."

When Andy was gone I turned sternly to the girl.

"Who removed those bandages?" I asked.

She looked at me sullenly for a moment; then she said slowly and deliberately, with a flash of fierce defiance:—

"Suppose I did? Suppose I was to tell you that though he is my own brother I *want* him to die?"

"If you told me that," I replied, "and if I believed it, I should have you locked up in the police barracks, and I should place some one here to nurse your brother until he was strong enough to defend himself against you."

"You'd do that same, would ye?" she asked, with a bitter laugh.

"I certainly should."

"Then the devil take you for an interfering fool!" she muttered between her set teeth. "Why in God's name can't ye lave poor folk alone? Don't they know their own business best? If it hadn't been for you, Rory Bournes would have died on the road last night."

"On the contrary," I said, "if it hadn't been for him I myself should most probably have been killed. The shot which struck him was intended for me—God only knows by whom it was fired—and since he saved my life indirectly, I mean to make every effort to save his!" She looked at me in a puzzled

way for a moment and then turned away, but I followed her and put my hand upon her arm.

"You and I must come to an understanding," I said. "You must give me your word to play no more tricks like that, or I shall at once put the matter into the hands of the police." She was silent.

"You had better make up your mind," I continued. "If you give me your promise and keep it, your brother will probably get well; but play another trick like this upon him, and my evidence may get you hung for murder."

Utterly indifferent to the threat she shrugged her shoulders, and gave a hard, cruel laugh.

"I won't touch him," she said brutally. "Let him live or die!"

A few minutes later Andy returned with a basket laden with soup, a bottle of wine and brandy. I poured a little of the spirit down the man's throat, and gave the rest of the things into the care of his sister, who, now that she read determination in my face, promised to do all she could for her brother: then, still accompanied by Andy, I left the house, and went to the police barracks at Mylrea to interview the sergeant of police.

The sergeant, a quiet, elderly man, listened phlegmatically enough to my account of the attack on the car, and did not appear to be the least surprised that I had been shot at—a common enough occur-

rence in those parts—the darkness had hidden my assailants, and they had got off scot free—that was all.

After making a few notes the sergeant ordered the police car to be got ready, and we drove off to the spot where the outrage had occurred. Along the roadside, close to the place where the car must have been passing when the shot was fired, there was a low stone wall, and behind the wall we found the grass trampled by heavy feet. Presently the sergeant stooped down and picked up a piece of burnt newspaper which had been used as wadding. That was the only trace of the outrage we could discover. As we drove back to Mylrea the sergeant said:—

“I don’t think Rory Bournes knows anything about it, sir, for though he’s a rogue and a black-guard, he bore you no ill-will—and besides he was on the car himself at the time. It’s more likely that the shot was fired by some enemy of his own; and if that’s the case it hit the right man.”

“But Andy here thinks the shot was meant for me.”

“I doubt it, but if you think so you can have police protection.”

This I of course refused, for I felt that I was quite able to take care of myself. Neither to the sergeant nor to Andy did I mention the fact of my little six-shooter, which in future I intended to carry on my person in readiness for all emergencies. “In a

country where there are so many secrets," I reflected, "it is as well to have a secret of one's own!"

Before many hours had passed the news that an attempt had been made on my life had spread from one end to the other of Mylrea. Just after sunset I was seated in my little room in the widow's cottage when the door flew open and in ran Father John, breathless with indignation.

"Sure, we've a dirty set of blackguards about us," he cried, "but we'll drive them out of Ireland, and by that token I mean to denounce them from the altar itself!"

Then, closing one eye as was his wont, he regarded me steadily with the other as he asked:—

"'Tis not Mulligan you suspect of this job, Dr. Sutherland?"

My only answer was a shake of the head and a hearty laugh, at which the worthy priest seemed much relieved.

"Sure he's a born blackguard," said he, "and between you and me, doctor, he's a dale too fond of this," tapping a whisky bottle which stood upon the table. "Drink's his ruin, sir; but for all that he's a decent fellow, and would never play a rogue's trick on a gentleman like yourself!"

Cordially endorsing every one of Father John's sentiments with regard to the doctor, I invited him to sit down and partake of a little of the fluid which he said had been the doctor's ruin. Nothing loath,

he accepted the invitation, and was helping himself from the bottle when the door of the room again opened, and Miss Craig herself stood upon the threshold. Her sudden appearance alarmed me, and in a moment I was by her side.

"Is anything the matter?" I asked. "What has happened?"

"Nothing, nothing," she replied. "I have only just heard the news of what took place last night. I am so sorry! What must you think of Ireland—of us all?"

I took her hand and drew her into the room, while Father John sprang up and patted her paternally on the shoulder.

"Sit ye down, mavourneen," he said, "and sure Dr. Sutherland will tell us all about it."

She did as he bade her, while I piled some more turf on the fire, and then proceeded to narrate the little there was to tell. After speaking of my adventures in the fair, and the incident of the wounded man, I came to our drive home and the attack on the car, of which I made as light as possible.

Then I described my visit to the house of Rory Bournes, and the curious conduct of his sister, culminating in the horrible incident of that morning, when I found the bandages torn off the man's wounds.

"Powers alive!" cried the little priest, "I'll talk to her!"

I glanced at Eileen; her face was very pale, and she seemed greatly troubled.

"She is a strange girl," she said. "I have thought sometimes that she is not quite sane. And she said that she wished her brother to die?"

"She certainly said so," I replied, "and she almost succeeded in disposing of him. However, I warned her, and I think I brought her to her senses."

When Eileen rose to go, I took up my hat and stick and prepared to accompany her; but she begged me to remain in the cottage.

"You are not going out to-night, Dr. Sutherland," she said. "Pray do not run into unnecessary danger. Father John will see me home."

The priest expressed himself willing to go to the ends of the earth for her, but I adhered to my intention with a firmness which could not be shaken.

"I am going out at any rate," I said, "and I may as well walk to Craig Castle as elsewhere. Never fear for me, Miss Craig! Now that I am on my guard the rascals will find I know how to protect myself."

So after we had said good-night to the priest, and I had expressed a hearty wish that he would come soon to see me again, he went on his homeward way, and I walked with Eileen towards the sea-shore.



During the walk very little was said, but Eileen clung confidently to my arm, and I was happy. It was a fine starlight night. The lonely bog-land lay black all around us, the moon shone down with vitreous rays from a cloudless sky, and the silence of the shore was broken only by the weary washing of the sea.

When we reached her door she withdrew her hand from my arm and reached it towards me.

"Good-night, Dr. Sutherland," she said softly.

"Good-night, Miss Craig," I answered, "and may God bless you!"

Something in my manner troubled her. She raised her eyes appealingly to my face.

"You think there is no hope?" she said. "I mean about Michael?"

"There is always hope," I replied. "Without it, how many of us would be able to face this world's storms—and, frankly, I begin to see light through the cloud!"

"You do!" she cried eagerly.

"Yes," I answered, "but don't question me any more to-night. Only be sure of one thing—that I have not been idle, and that I begin to think I have found a clue."

"Thank God!" she said, raising her eyes to my face; then with another good-night, she entered the house, and the door closed upon her, shutting her from my sight.

## CHAPTER XVI

THE local excitement caused by the unsuccessful attack on my person (if indeed such an attack had been really intended, which I began to doubt) soon subsided. After all, indeed, it was a very small matter in a district where the Moonlighter never ceases from troubling and the landlord is constantly laid to rest. No further attempt, however, was made to molest me, and I never had any occasion to use the revolver which remained snugly tucked away in the pocket of my coat. I continued as heretofore my daily routine of work and amusement, and whenever I entered some wretched tumble-down hut, I was received with cringing politeness, through which veneer I now and then fancied I detected lurking looks of dislike. But the attack on the car had been mentioned by Father John in the chapel; standing near the altar he had vehemently denounced the "born blackguard" who had dared to raise his hand against a "Christian gentleman," like myself; so that I was, in a sense, under the Church's protection!

Meantime, winter had come in its usual stormy guise to county Mayo; the air grew blacker and

colder, keen frosts touched the bogs and brought in the snipe, and now and then there was a snow-fall which speedily melted away. The potato season had been a bad one, and the wretched peasantry, ill-clothed, ill-fed and ill-sheltered, suffered terribly; indeed many would have died of absolute starvation but for the helping hand of Eileen Craig. She, poor girl, did not, even in her great fear and trouble, neglect her duty to the poor. But the time was now close at hand when her lover was to be tried for his life, and her heart was with Michael in his prison cell. I gave her what comfort I could, and constantly renewed the hope I had sown in her heart; for, as I have said, I had at last got a clue, and though it might lead to nothing, I was more sanguine than I could say.

I had been surprised beyond measure on returning to visit Father Anthony, whom I had left so seriously ill, to find that he was up and about, and devoting himself with more than ordinary zeal to works and ministrations of charity. The hacking cough still troubled him, and there were hectic spots upon his cheeks, but when I remonstrated with him and pointed out the danger of exposing himself to the severities of that bitter winter, he paid no heed whatever. "I'm quite well," he said, "and I shall not neglect my duty either to my people or my God."

"Sure the poor boy's too good for this world," said

Father John to me one day, "and a heap too tender-hearted. A man with a heart and soul like his should never have become a priest."

I was still greatly puzzled by the young priest's conduct, puzzled most of all that he still made no attempt whatever to go to Kilsyth and meet Michael in his prison, but I wondered more when I discovered, as I did, that Father Anthony, instead of confining his ministrations to his own district, extended them as far as the lonely farm where the man Rory Bournes lay under my care recovering from his wound. Twice I met the young priest there face to face, and on each occasion it was late at night. On the first occasion, as I was about to enter the house, I found him hurriedly leaving it, and I noticed that my patient seemed strangely agitated, and that the face of his sister sometimes bore traces of recent tears. A few nights later I encountered him there again. This time, instead of trying to avoid me, he waited in the kitchen while I interviewed my patient, and when I left the house he left it with me, saying he would walk with me along the road. For a time we walked on in silence. It was a quiet moonlight night and the road was quite deserted. Presently Father Anthony turned to me and asked:—

"Tell me the truth, Dr. Sutherland—will that man live or die?"

I shrugged my shoulders.

"One can never be certain of anything, but I fancy he will die."

His next question was, I thought, a strange one.

"How soon? What is the longest time he can live?" he asked with an eagerness which surprised me, and which induced me to reply:—

"Do you, as well as his sister, wish for his death?"

In a moment he grew calm, and quietly made the sign of the cross upon his breast.

"God forgive me," he murmured. "Why should I wish for the death of any man? You will do your best to save him, unworthy as he is?"

"I am doing my best," I answered quietly, "but you are hindering me!"

"In what way?"

"I notice that your visits agitate him. If he is to recover, you must allow me to attend to his body, and for the time being you must leave his spiritual welfare alone."

He made no reply, so I continued:—

"You seem to be strangely interested in this man?"

"I am interested in all those who are in trouble," he returned quietly.

"No doubt; but the place where he lives is outside the limits of your present cure, and I must confess I was surprised to find you ministering so far away!"

His face was turned from me, but I could see that he was nervous and agitated.

"He is one of my old parishioners," he replied. "I have known him for years, and——"

He paused, trembling violently, and then with a total change of manner he gripped me by the arm and cried:—

"Doctor, I feel sometimes as if there was a curse upon me! I know that you mistrust me—that you suspect me—God knows of what! Bear with me, I entreat you! Believe, if you can, that I am only trying to do my duty, and to grope to the light out of darkness. Trust me! Pray for me! Pray that the Lord may save me, that I may not go quite mad!"

Before I could reply to this strange tirade he had wrung my hand, and with a low cry disappeared into the night. I called after him, but he did not reply, and would not return. More than ever mystified and troubled, I walked home to Mylrea.

After this the priest's visits to the farm appeared to cease—at any rate, I did not meet him there again. From that time forward I watched with growing interest both the man and his sister, and the more I watched them the more puzzled did I become. Since our first passage of arms no further one had occurred between the girl and myself.

During my visits she maintained a sullen and dogged silence. Though she sternly refused to raise

her hand to assist the recovery of her brother, she did nothing to retard it. He, for his part, seemed to regard me with the same disfavour as did the woman, though I was certainly doing all in my power to save his life.

Anxious to learn more about the strange couple, I cross-examined Andy, but found that beyond what he had already told me he knew little or nothing. Almost by accident, however, I discovered a very fountain of information in my new lodging, and in the person of my own landlady. From the Widow Macrae I learned that Kate, or Kathleen Bournes, who had been bred and born in Castlebar, had lived for some time as a sort of upper servant with Mrs. Creenan, during the life of the latter's husband. About the same time as the return of Anthony Creenan from Maynooth, however, Kathleen had left Mrs. Creenan and set up housekeeping with her brother, lately returned from America, and since that time she had dwelt on the farm which she still occupied. At first she was visited from time to time by both Michael Creenan and his brother; Michael went more frequently of the two. He was a keen sportsman, and, when passing the farm with rod or gun, would step in to have a chat with Kathleen, for whom he was profoundly sorry. Suddenly, however, these visits ceased, and the lad was seen to enter the farm no more.

"Not a soul in Mylrea but myself knows the

cause of that same," said the widow, "and 'twas only by chance that it came to me. I had knowed Kathleen a long time, and had often helped her when she was in trouble through her thief of a brother, so one day I walked over to see her and to have a chat. Well, sir, I found her seated by the fire crying, and I thought 'twas Rory had been blackguarding her, but when I told her so she shook her head, the poor cratur, and cried the more. 'Sure, I don't mind Rory,' she said; 'he's rough when he's had the drink, but he's right enough when he's sober. All the same, I wish I was dead'; and when I pressed her a little she up and told me the truth; she had fallen over head and ears in love wid Master Michael!"

"With Michael Creenan?"

"Yes, indeed, sor; wid the poor boy that's now in gaol. Well, I couldn't believe my ears when she told me that same, but she held to it that 'twas the truth. 'And why shouldn't I love him?' she said; 'sure's he's as good as he's bold and handsome. Didn't he come here day after day to cheer me, till I looked for his coming as I look for the light o' day? Well, one day when he came he seemed a bit downhearted like, and before I knew just what I was doing I fell on his neck and told him how dear I loved him! He seemed to be a bit dazed at first an' thought 'twas joking I was, but when he found I was in earnest he blamed himself, and said I must



try to forget all about him! And ever since that day I've never set eyes on him, and sure my heart's broken, and I wish I was lying in the churchyard!' Well, sor, I was sorry enough for the poor colleen, though I knew 'twas foolish she was to set her heart on a young gentleman like Michael Creenan, and I talked to her and comforted her as well as I could, but 'twas no manner of use. She just sat day after day moping and fretting beside the fire, never doin' a stroke of work, but seemin' as if her heart was broken entirely. Then all at once she changed!"

"Changed?" I repeated. "How?"

"'Twas one day, not so long ago neither, your honour, she comes rushing over here to me. Sure she wasn't crying that time, but her eyes was flaming like fire, and her face looked that black and savage 'twas frightened I was to see her. 'Sure I know now why 'twas he told me to forget him,' she said; ' 'tis because he loves *her*, bad cess to her!' And then, your honour, she up and put the curse on Miss Eileen, and swore that sooner than see Master Michael marry the mistress she'd kill him wid her own hand!"

"When did this happen?" I asked.

"Just before you came to Mylrea, your honour, and before the old master was murdered. Sure, I often thought myself, 'twas no one but Kathleen set the master to watch Miss Eileen and Master Michael that day he came upon them on the moor.

She wanted to get them parted, your honour. Sure, she knew she could not have Master Michael herself, but she wouldn't let another colleen step in her shoes. Sooner than see him married to Miss Eileen, I believe she'd send him to the gallows even now."

The day after my conversation with Mrs. Macrae I visited the farm again, and found my patient worse. The wound was healing, but feverish symptoms had set in, and he seemed strangely perturbed; his sister, too, had lost some of her wonted calmness, and watched my doings with evident anxiety. When I had finished she followed me into the kitchen and called me back as I reached the door.

"Your honour," she said, "is it true what they're telling me—that Michael Creenan is going to be hanged?"

"Who told you that?" I asked.

"Sure, 'twas Bridget came down last night from Craig Castle to see how Rory was getting on, and she told it to us both."

"If he is guilty," I said with assumed indifference, "they will surely hang him, I suppose."

"But if he isn't, your honour? It's not guilty he is, but innocent as the babe at the breast!"

"Even then," I said, speaking slowly and watching her face keenly as I did so, "unless the right man is found—and I begin to despair of ever finding him—I fear there will be little chance for young

Greenan. Many a man has been executed on less evidence than they are bringing against him!"

She did not answer, but she slowly bowed her head and covered her face with her hands. She made no sound, but her whole body shook as if with convulsive sobs. I allowed her to remain so for a moment, then I placed my hand softly on her shoulder as I said:—

"Why do you take so much interest in Michael Greenan?"

She raised her head, and the ghastly pallor of her face startled me. I was astonished to see her eyes were quite dry.

"Master Michael was always very good to me," she murmured, as she turned sullenly away.

From that day forward the girl's whole character seemed to undergo an extraordinary change. Her former defiant air was replaced by one of dull submission, while her tone towards her brother seemed by contrast almost sympathetic. He, for his part, watched her face, her every movement with strange anxiety. His manner had become more and more that of a hunted animal brought to bay by its pursuers, and panting for liberty and life.

## CHAPTER XVII

WITH every one of my visits to the sick man my interest in Kathleen Bournes deepened, until it amounted to a sort of nervous fascination. Her strange though somewhat savage beauty, her air of suppressed yet consuming passion, the fierce yet often wistful look of her pale face and wild, watchful eyes, attracted me in spite of myself, and the account I had heard of her hopeless love for Michael Creenan now surrounded her in my eyes with a certain romantic interest. At the same time, I could not help feeling that she was a woman of dangerous temperament, capable in her wild moods of some deed of violence. In vain I sought during my visits to lure her into conversation. Although, as I have said, her manner had become more gentle and subdued, she still seemed desirous of avoiding any general communication, and when I questioned her on any subject her replies were invariably brief and unsatisfactory.

One morning, however, when I came from the sick room, where I had left the man slumbering peacefully, still under the influence of a sleeping potion which I had administered the previous night,

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**"I FOUND KATHLEEN SEATED ON A STOOL IN THE OPEN AIR."**

**[Page 187.]**

"Sure, your honour's joking," she murmured, not, I thought, angrily.

"Indeed, no. You *are* pretty; and you have at least one gift which the proudest lady in the land would envy you—your beautiful hair."

She looked up quickly, and our eyes met again; when, to my surprise, her eyes filled with tears, and she turned her face away. I had touched a tender chord, but I saw at once that she was not altogether displeased, for as I lingered watching her, her hand stole up to her head and touched the snooded folds of the locks which I had praised.

"I'll wager now," I added a little perversely, "that this is not the first time you've been told that your hair is beautiful?"

She made no immediate reply, but her heart heaved, and I saw a tear rolling down her cheek.

"Sure, I'm not caring what they say of me," she said presently. "I know I'm no lady, and I know I'm only a poor colleen. Why will your honour be laughing at me and calling me pretty? It would have pleased me once to hear that same, but now—oh, don't spake of it; don't waken the pride in my heart, and me heartbroken."

As she spoke she leant her head back against the cottage wall, and with her hands lying helplessly in her lap, permitted the tears to flow, quietly, silently, like water welling up from an overflowing fountain.

"My poor girl," I said, deeply touched by her

emotion, "I know you are in great trouble. I wish you would open your heart to me and try to look upon me as a friend."

"There's no friend in all the world for the likes o' me," she cried in the same low, despairing tones.

"Why do you say that? I have done all I can to help your brother, and I would gladly be of service to you. I know something of your story already; and perhaps if you told me more——"

In a moment her manner changed, and she sprang to her feet, brushing away the tears and looking me in the face.

"Who's been telling about me?" she cried. "Who's been telling lies about me and saying I'm in trouble?"

"No one," I replied quietly. "Only it is quite clear that you are unhappy, and I should like to know the cause. Perhaps I can help you—who knows?"

"You can't help me. No one can help me," was the passionate reply. "And I'm not asking help: I only want to be left alone in peace."

I placed my hand gently on her arm and said, still watching her intently:—

"In a few days I shall be seeing Michael Creenan again. Would you like me to give him any message?"

I felt her frame quivering beneath my touch.



Her eyes cast downward, and her face averted, she shrank nervously away.

"Why do you spake of Master Michael?" she murmured. "What message would you take him from the likes o' me?"

"I know that you cared for him. I am sure that you would, if it were possible, be of help to him in his great extremity. That is why I have spoken to you of him, and why I have offered to be your friend."

I waited quietly for the effect of my words. Since she had so persistently refused to reveal the real truth concerning her interest in the young man I had determined of set purpose to reveal my own knowledge of the secret. Trembling like a leaf she sank again on the stool near the door, and covered her face with her hands. When she looked up again there were no tears in her eyes; her face was pale and set, and her voice was firm and clear.

"If you'll be seeing Master Michael," she said, "you may tell him that Kathleen Bournes sends him her blessing, for the sake of old times; and you may tell him, that she's praying for him night and day, and waiting for the time when he'll be free. Sure I'm not ashamed now to say it—he was the pulse of my heart and the light of my life, when I was over yonder at Mylrea!"

"There is nothing to be ashamed of," I replied. "I know you loved him!"

"Sure and I did!" the girl replied with a little of her old bold manner, "and when he turned away to Miss Eileen he took the light of the day with him! God bless him! What then? The sound of his voice was in my heart, and the thought of him was like music in my dreams; and though I hated her for taking him from me, I knew that she was a lady and I was the dirt beneath her feet. Then the black hour came, and the master was struck down—rest his soul! And my heart was full of sorrow for the old man and for Miss Eileen!"

Though the words were sympathetic, the tone was almost defiant. I suffered her to talk on, only interrupting her now and then with an exclamation or a note of interrogation. The flood-gates of her reticence once lifted she seemed to find relief in the torrent of passionate words which was flowing from her mouth.

"But sure it was like a knife through my heart when I heard that Master Michael had been taken up for murder; for didn't I know that he was gentle and kind, and would never have raised his hand against the master, and him an old man and Miss Eileen's father? And when they carried him away to Castlebar and put him in the prison cell, I'd have gone to Miss Eileen and spoke the word of comfort to her, but I was ashamed. I've the black heart, sometimes, your honour, and the blood of my father and my brother rises up to my head and makes me

mad; but I'm not so bad as some think me, and I'd have died to save Mister Michael!"

"I am certain of that," I said gently. "Even now, it may not be too late to help him."

"I'm thinking of that," she said, "waking and sleeping!" She added, with a wild appealing gesture, "Does your honour think he'll come to harm?"

I replied that the case certainly looked rather black against the prisoner, but that I was sanguine of ascertaining, before the day of trial, such facts as might tell in his favour. I said nothing of my own conviction, now amounting to a certainty, that Michael Creenan, whether or not he was actually guilty, knew more than he cared to say concerning the crime, and that his knowledge was shared by his brother, Father Anthony.

"But if Michael Creenan is innocent," I said, "who is guilty? Until we can decide that, we are entirely helpless."

I watched her closely as I spoke, but I detected no expression of dread, or any change of manner whatever. She held her head erect, her gaze fixed on the far distance, as if she beheld there something invisible to all eyes except her own. With the confession of her love had come a certain bold dignity, a fearless self-assertion, which completely transformed her from the sullen creature she had once seemed, to a proud and beautiful woman.

"Maybe we're not helpless, after all," she said

quietly, "if your honour will be patient, and tell Master Michael that Kathleen Bournes is going to save his life. I am, your honour, if God will give me strength; but, oh! it's a hard task the Lord has set me, though I mean to see it through. Tell him I don't forget the old times, when he was a bold young gentleman and I was only a silly young colleen. 'Twas him that praised my hair then, and called me pretty, just as your honour did this day. I don't forget! I don't forget! And if it was my own grave I was digging, I'd work to get the boy I loved once out of the prison at Castlebar."

So saying, she turned from me and walked slowly into the house. I made no attempt to follow her or to question her further, for I was satisfied now that I had misunderstood her character, and that she was a faithful friend and well-wisher to Michael Creenan.

On the evening of that day I had occasion to see Miss Craig at the Castle, and in the course of our conversation I mentioned for the first time my acquaintance with Kathleen Bournes. I saw at once from Eileen's manner that she was not too favourably disposed towards Kathleen.

"How did you come to know her?" she asked uneasily, with a slight flush on her cheek.

"Her brother had met with an accident in a drunken brawl," I explained, "and I carried him home on my car from Kilsyth Fair the day I was shot at from the roadside. Since then I have

visited the house frequently, and have been much struck by the girl's somewhat savage beauty. It is a pity to see so handsome a creature among such surroundings."

Without replying, Eileen walked up and down the room with the impatient impetuosity peculiar to her. Suddenly she paused and faced me.

"Why do you mention this girl to me?" she demanded point-blank, somewhat to my confusion. "You have heard something? You know what people say about her and Michael?"

I was bound to confess the truth, but I added that, so far as I had been informed, all the love-making had been on one side—that of the woman.

"Of course," cried Eileen imperiously.

I ought to have known sufficient of human nature to have been aware that I had committed a *bêtise*. I recognised the fact too late, and all I could do was to drop the subject; fortunately, it was soon forgotten in our discussion of the peril which still surrounded Michael Creenan.

## CHAPTER XVIII

I HAVE said that I held in my hands a clue to the mystery of Mr. Craig's murder, and so, as it turned out, I did. It consisted, however, of several tangled threads, each of which seemed to lead in a different direction.

I had discovered, for example, that the Creenans had been for a long time in close communication with Rory Bournes and his sister; added to this, that there had been certain love passages between the latter and Michael Creenan, in consequence of which the woman Kathleen had become savagely jealous, and had possibly, as my informant suggested, warned Mr. Craig that Michael was meeting with Eileen. Here I came to a *cul de sac*; for if, as I sometimes suspected, the man Bournes knew something about the old gentleman's murder, and had been concerned in it, either as principal or accessory, how reconcile that suspicion with the fact that his sister's interests could be best served by keeping Mr. Craig alive? It was conceivable that the man might have decided to avenge the slight upon his sister by compassing the death of the person who had deserted her for another woman; it

was incredible, on the other hand, that either he or his sister could have any interest in injuring the father of Eileen. The more I thought it all over, the more I became terrified at the possible result of my investigations. Everything I had learned, indeed, increased the probability that Michael Creenan was less innocent than I had at first supposed.

Assuming his complicity, all the mystery seemed clear. Furious with Mr. Craig for the insults upon him, and despairing of winning Eileen while her father lived, Michael Creenan had taken counsel with the desperado Bournes, and with or without his assistance had committed the crime; his brother Anthony had by some means or other become aware of the truth, and hence the horror which made him shrink away from his brother, and the motive for his secret visits to the wounded man; while Kathleen Bournes, also cognisant of the facts, and sympathising with her lover, was furious with her brother for having taken part in the crime, and in daily dread that he might confess his complicity and so ensure Michael Creenan's conviction.

All this, of course, was mere theory, but it was theory which afforded a common-sense explanation of everything, and of the extraordinary conduct of all concerned. Still I could not quite convince myself that Michael Creenan was guilty. In the first place, he had impressed me personally with the feeling that he was incapable of a crime so atrocious; he

had, indeed, all the bearing of an innocent man; secondly, Eileen's belief in him was so absolute and unhesitating; and finally, Father Anthony had affirmed, under oath, that his brother was innocent.

In less than a week now the assizes at Castlebar would open, and Creenan would be tried for his life. As the time drew near Eileen's agitation increased, and whenever we met I was startled and almost terrified by the excitement of her demeanour. My dread was that she would break down before the trial. I felt convinced, moreover, that if Michael were condemned, she would never survive the sorrow and despair. I did my best to comfort her, but it became more and more difficult; she was shrewd enough indeed to see that I was assuming a hope which I did not really feel.

About this time she paid another visit to Castlebar and again interviewed the prisoner. This time she went alone, and on her return I was sent for to the Castle, where I found her waiting anxiously for me. Her usually gentle manner had quite changed; her forehead was knitted, her expression almost angry. When I entered she sprang from the chair on which she had been seated, and approached me with flashing eyes.

"Is all the world turning against me?" she cried. "Have I no true friend? Why do you not help me? Why did you promise to do so much, only to do nothing—yes, nothing?"



I tried to soothe her, but it was in vain; she had lost all self-command, and cried presently :—

“You are almost a stranger. It can matter little to you whether Michael lives or dies! But his own flesh and blood—his brother, who pretended to love him—where is he? Why has he never been to see him—never sent a word to comfort him? Oh, it is cruel—cruel! And he—he is heartbroken at the unkindness!”

“Father Anthony has been so ill,” I said, not knowing what better excuse to make for him.

“It is false!” she answered, pacing the room. “He is only pretending to be ill! He keeps away because he is a coward, and believes his brother guilty. His heart is cold and cruel; he is hateful! He calls himself a priest, but a priest of God should have compassion—even for the guilty. Every time that the poor mother has visited her son he has asked for his brother; and when I saw him yesterday he asked the same thing. What could I say to him? I could only hide the truth and tell him that Anthony loved him but was too ill to come to him!”

Knowing or suspecting what I did, I was doubly distressed by her conversation. It was not in her nature, however, to be violent long; she grew calmer presently, and after begging me to forgive her for having spoken to me so harshly, she explained that during her visit to the prison she had

him to the police, for if his evidence would be of any avail there was no time to be lost.

I was determined also to interview Anthony Creenan, and to adopt the same tactics. Come what might, I was resolved not to lie low any longer, but to tax both men with their knowledge of the crime.

It was dark as pitch when I set out on my road to the farm where my patient was lying, but I knew every footstep of the way. The night was bleak and cold, the nor'-west wind was rising and bringing with it as it crossed the dark moorland a deep troubled murmur from the adjoining sea.

The time was late for a sick visit, but I had chosen it advisedly; I wanted to face the man alone, with no likelihood of interruption. I knew I had to deal with a desperado who might have other desperadoes at his call, but I was armed, and was not going to be deterred from my object by any childish fear.

When I gained the narrow lane leading to the farm I struck a match and looked at my watch; it was ten o'clock—an hour when most of the peasant folk in that wild district are abed; but there was a light in the window of the sick room, and a faint reddish gleam, as of firelight, from the window of the kitchen. I walked on, and reaching the yard in front of the house stole quietly forward towards the door; but the kitchen window was uncurtained, and I had the curiosity to look in.

held up a crucifix; but the other covered his eyes as if to shut out the sight, then waved his hands wildly as if imploring to be left alone. The priest half turned and I saw his face. It was more like the face of a spectre than a man—every lineament of it seemed changed, and the dark eyes were full of angry light. He clutched the crucifix in his hands, kissed it, then raised his eyes to heaven as if imploring strength; and all the time he spoke rapidly—the sound of his voice reached me, but I could not clearly distinguish one word. While I stood hesitating, the priest turned again towards the bed, while the sick man stretched forth his hands and clutched wildly at the crucifix. But Father Anthony thrust the hands back and raised the sacred emblem high in the air above the man's reach.

For a time I was rooted to the spot, unable to move, even to think; but at last, unwilling any longer to play the spy, I drew back from the window, passed round to the front of the house, and without waiting to knock, pushed at the door; it opened to my touch, and I found myself in the kitchen. As I entered the woman sprang to her feet with a cry.

Without speaking I moved towards the door of the inner room, but Kathleen interposed, and said in a low voice:—

“You can't see my brother to-night, he has some one with him—and sure it's late for a sick call!”



**"HE CLUTCHED THE CRUCIFIX IN HIS HANDS, KISSED IT,  
THEN RAISED HIS EYES TO HEAVEN AS IF  
IMPLOING STRENGTH."**

**[Page 202.]**

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"Who is with him?" I asked, curious to see what she would reply.

"Only one of the neighbors, sure," she replied, and as she spoke the voices within were raised again, and the sick man uttered another woeful cry.

"Why do you lie to me?" I demanded. "Father Anthony Creenan is there!"

"And what then?" she at once responded. "Can't the soggarth visit a dying man without being followed and spied ~~upon~~ by the likes of you? Yes, it's the priest that's with him, for he's taken worse, and it's not the doctor he's needing now."

"Nevertheless, I must see him," I said. "I came for that purpose."

"Leave them alone, doctor," she cried eagerly. "Sure they're better alone."

"If the priest is ministering to him," I said, "I will wait," and I walked over to the hearth.

She returned at once to her seat, and we remained in silence—the silence being broken only by the murmur of voices from within. Presently another piercing cry rent the air. I made a movement, the girl sprang up and stretched her hand as if again to detain me, but as she did so the inner door opened, and Father Anthony, gaunt and pale, stood upon the threshold.

"Send for the doctor," he said hurriedly. "He's dying."

Suddenly he saw and recognised me, and staggered like a drunken man.

"When did you come in?" he asked eagerly. "How long have you been here?"

Without replying I passed him by and entered the inner room.

The wounded man was lying on the bed ghastly pale, his eyes staring, his powerful frame shivering convulsively, but I saw in a moment that he had merely fainted. I took out my flask and poured some brandy down his throat; in a few minutes he breathed more easily, and I saw by the expression of his eyes that he was conscious.

There was a movement behind me. Turning quietly I saw the priest standing in the middle of the room.

"He is not dying," I said. "But I should warn you that he is not in a fit state to listen to your ministrations."

Father Anthony did not reply; he merely inclined his head and made the sign of the cross on his breast. But at that moment Rory rose in the bed, gripped me wildly by the arm, and gasped in terror:—

"Keep her away from me! Strike her down if she tries to lay a finger on me! It's to kill me she's trying, your honour—to kill me entirely, though she's my own flesh and blood!"

Following the direction of his eyes, I saw Kathleen standing close to the priest's side, and looking

with a dark frown at the miserable figure on the bed.

"Don't be afraid," I said, "no one shall harm you."

"And who wants to harm him?" cried the girl. "Sure it's myself that wants to keep the life in him, not take it away. Spake, Rory Bournes! Have ye confessed to his reverence, and has he given ye absolution?"

Without replying the man released my arm, and sank moaning back upon the pillows.

"Lave me in peace," he murmured. "Lave me in peace!"

"There's no peace for you and me this side the grave," said Kathleen, "and it's well you know that; for the curse of God is on you, and on this house, and it's only his reverence can lift it away! O Rory, mavourneen," she continued, changing her fierce manner to one of wild entreaty, "spake out while there's time, and sure his reverence will absolve ye, and you'll have my blessing as well as his, to lighten the heavy load you have to bear."

But the man now relapsed into a sullen silence, refusing to speak another word. I stood by the bedside for a few minutes, then beckoned the girl from the room. She followed me quietly, and immediately Father Anthony joined us in the kitchen.

"Remember what I told you," I said to Kathleen. "Your brother's life is in my hands, and if it is tampered with in any way——"



"Your honour needn't be afraid," she replied. "Ask his reverence!"

"She is right," said the priest. "You may safely trust her! Sure it would be misfortune to her—to all of us—if anything happened to her brother."

"But she herself has said to me that she desired his death," I answered.

"She desires it no longer," said Father Anthony, looking earnestly at the girl. "She wishes him to live."

Kathleen inclined her head.

"That's the God's truth," she cried in a broken voice. "Sure enough I did wish him to die in his bed, but 'twas in dread I was for himself and not thinking of his poor soul."

There was a pause. Then the young priest turned to me and asked quietly:—

"May I walk with you to Mylrea? I wish to speak to you."

A few minutes later we left the house together. Very little was said on either side till we reached the door of my lodging. By this time it was nearly midnight, my landlady had retired for the night, and the place was in darkness; but I led the way to my room, lit a light, and invited my companion to be seated.

He sank into a chair and covered his face with his hands as if praying. When he looked up again I saw that his eyes were full of tears.

"It is very late," I said, "and you are far from home. What will you do?"

"I shall walk home across the hills," he replied; and as he spoke his breath was caught and he coughed violently.

"You are endangering your life," I said. "With that cough you should never be out after nightfall."

He smiled sadly.

"My own life is nothing," he replied. "Sure I've given it to God! But I wished to speak to you about my brother." He paused for a moment then added gently: "He thinks it very strange, does he not, that I do not visit him in his prison yonder?"

Thus prompted, I told him what I had heard from Eileen. As I spoke I saw his dark eyes overflowing, and when I paused he tried in vain to speak, so deep was his emotion. At last he said:—

"Dr. Sutherland, if I tell you that I would gladly be in my brother's place, that I would gladly die for him, will you believe me? I love my brother, and it is breaking my heart not to be near him in his sorrow; but God knows I cannot help myself. I *dare* not meet him! I need all my strength, and if I looked into his eyes and knew that I could not speak the word to save him, I believe that I should die!"

"I don't understand you!" I cried almost angrily. "In God's name, why all this mystery? If you can help your brother why do you hesitate?"

"I *cannot* help him!" was the reply.

Then I poured out all my suspicions, and explained the conclusion at which I had arrived—that Michael Creenan and the man Bournes were mixed up in the crime, and that the object of the priest's visits to Bournes was to prevent him from giving such testimony as might ensure Michael's conviction for murder.

He heard me out patiently, and did not seem surprised.

"Can you deny what I say?" I cried.

He looked me quietly in the face, then he rose, drew his soutane around him, and prepared to depart.

"I can deny nothing," he finally said, "and I can say nothing. My lips are sealed! But tell Miss Craig from me that I do not even now despair of being able to prove my brother's innocence. Tell her from me to have faith in God!"

So saying he left the cottage and passed out into the night.

## CHAPTER XIX

It was the eve of the assizes at Castlebar. The town was swarming with strangers, chiefly members of the legal profession; the hotels and inns were overflowing, and throngs of country people filled the market-place and the surrounding streets. The judge and other high functionaries were expected to arrive that evening by train, and the local authorities were preparing to receive them with all due honour.

Meantime Michael Creenan was languishing among other unfortunates in the town gaol. The Mylrea Murder Case was not likely to be reached till the third or fourth day of the assizes, although from the popular point of view it was the most interesting case on the list for trial. Report said that the judge, Sir James Cleary, a most unpopular judge in the west of Ireland, in so far as he combined with strong anti-Nationalist sympathies an almost savage severity towards the criminal classes, was unlikely to overlook any point which might lead to the conviction of the accused; but that was of less consequence than the fact that the popular verdict had already condemned Michael Creenan, and that a

jury selected from among the townspeople was certain to be strongly prepossessed against him. The whole prospect, indeed, looked black and almost hopeless when Miss Craig arrived in Castlebar to make her last despairing efforts to save her lover.

I had promised to follow her the next morning. In honest truth, I dreaded the journey in her company, and was still at my wits' end how to help or comfort her. But the real cause of my delay was my own hesitation to act. If I yielded to my impulse and warned the police of my suspicion that the man Bournes was in some way accessory to the crime, I might be merely putting the rope with more certainty round Michael Creenan's neck; and that I naturally hesitated to do. The same consequence might ensue if I reported the mysterious conduct of the young priest.

I determined, therefore, to wait and watch for a little while yet, and see what might ensue. Michael Creenan was not yet either tried or condemned, and in the meantime there was a possibility that I might make some new discovery, even at the last moment.

Somewhat to my surprise, after that midnight interview with Father Anthony, my patient at the lonely farm seemed to gain strength. In a couple of days he was out of bed and sitting up in the sick room; but with that increasing strength came an increasing sullenness and taciturnity, so that he seemed

almost to resent my efforts to restore him to health. His cry now was for drink, which his sister, under my instructions, carefully kept from him.

On the afternoon of the day when the assizes were to open I visited the farm, and found the man up and dressed, though still too weak to venture out of the house. He greeted me with his usual growl of salutation, and then said, glancing darkly at his sister, who stood by:—

“Did your honour tell Kathleen not to let me taste a drop of spirits?”

“Certainly,” I replied. “In your present condition drink is poison to you, and unless you want to die——”

“Sure I don’t mind about that,” he muttered. “I’m wake and low, and a little shmall drop of the drink would comfort me.”

“If you were a wise man,” I returned, “you would never see whisky again. I believe it’s at the bottom of all your troubles. By the way,” I added, “you’ve never told me how you got that ugly wound in the arm.”

I watched him closely as I put the question. His coarse, unshaven face, grim as a wild beast’s, went black as thunder, and he cast a strange glance at his sister as he answered:—

“My curse on them as done it! I’ll be even with them some day.”

“But how did it happen?” I persisted.

He turned his savage eyes on mine.

"You want to know too much," he muttered.

But at that moment, to my surprise, Kathleen stepped forward and, pointing at him with a trembling finger, cried:—

"Tell his honour what he asks! Tell him the truth, Rory Bournes! or shall *I* tell him?"

"Hould your tongue," growled the man, with a curious look of alarm.

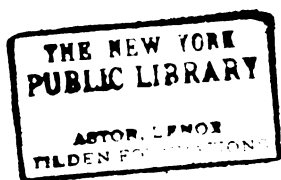
"Sure I'll not hold my tongue," returned Kathleen, with growing excitement. Then turning quickly to me she added, with a flash of her dark eyes: "'Twas myself that did it; and by that token I'm sorry that 'twas no worse!"

"Don't believe her," returned the man. "She's lying."

"I'm not lying neither," said Kathleen; and as she spoke she rushed across the room, and throwing open a cupboard, drew from it a small reaping-hook, such as women and children use in Mayo when gathering in the corn. The man uttered a cry and shrank back in terror. But without looking at him, she brought the reaping-hook to me and placed it in my hand.

"Look at it, your honour," she cried. "Look at the blood there on the blade of it—the blood of him that I struck with it, bad luck to him. Is it lying I am, now?"

I examined the weapon. The point and inner





edge, sharp as a razor, were covered with blood, as she said; blood which had dried on to it; and there were crimson spots and splashes even on the handle.

I looked at the woman in horror, while her brother, now white with terror, eagerly besought me not to let her approach him.

"Sure you needn't be afraid," she said. "I've given my word to the soggarth, and I'll never lift my finger against him again: but if he says I didn't do it he's lying, your honour. I stabbed him with the reaping-hook, and God willing I'd have had his life."

"Why did you do this?" I demanded. "You might have murdered him; and from what you say it was your intention to do so."

"Sure enough," was the reply. "Ask him why; maybe he'll tell ye the truth, or maybe it'll be only another lie!"

So saying, she took the reaping-hook from me, and placing it back in the cupboard turned the key in the door.

"Your honour may keep the key," she said, placing it in my hands. "What I did once I did, but I'll never do that same again. My brother Rory knows he's safe enough now from me."

And without another word she left the room. I sat with the sick man for a little time, but failed to elicit from him any further information. His mo-

mentary alarm over, he relapsed into his former sullen mood, and only responded to me in monosyllables; but when, as in duty bound, I asked him if he was still in dread of his sister's violence, he replied:—

“No, your honour. She manes what she says—she's sorry for what she done.”

I left him, and passing into the adjoining kitchen, found Kathleen watching by the fire, with her face hidden in her hands. When I approached her she looked up, and I saw the tears streaming down her face.

“You are a strange girl,” I said gently. “What had your brother done that you should attempt to injure him so terribly?”

“Your honour will know some day,” she answered, sobbing: “but sure, he's my own flesh and blood, and I don't want to see him come to harm. It's the curse of God is on him and me and all of us, and sure my heart's broken and I wish I was lying in my grave.”

I attempted to question her further, but could get nothing out of her. At last I expressed to her plainly enough my belief that both she and her brother knew more than they cared or dared to say about the Mylrea mystery. She did not appear at all astonished, nor did she exhibit any dread when I added that it might be my duty to communicate with the police.

"It's not the peelers I'm afraid of," she said quietly, "but the curse o' God! Sure it's no use questioning me or asking what I know, for I've sworn to his reverence to hold my tongue."

This was all she would admit, and so far it went to corroborate my suspicion that the priest, for his brother's sake, was trying to close the mouths of Bournes and his sister.

Here I hung, then, between the horns of a dilemma. It was clearly my duty to inform the authorities of what I had discovered, yet I still hesitated, fearing that by so doing I might deal the death blow to Eileen; for I still had no doubt whatever that the proof of Michael's guilt of, or complicity in, the crime would be fatal to the devoted girl who loved him so passionately, and believed so firmly in his innocence.

The assizes opened, and I still lingered at Mylrea. The journals containing the account of the opening day were brought to me, and I read that the judge, in his charge to the grand jury, alluded in strong terms to the coming murder trial, describing the case as one of "those abominable crimes which were still so common in Ireland, and which it was the mission of the law to suppress with its severest penalties." "Deeds so savage and so inhuman," said Sir James, "are still the disgrace and shame of our unhappy country, into so many districts of which the blessings of Christianity and the light of

civilisation seem to have scarcely penetrated. You may have an opportunity before long of proving that they awaken in the hearts of educated Irishmen only horror and loathing. If, as is possible, one of these barbarous criminals is brought before you and convicted, on clear evidence, of his guilt, I know that you, gentlemen, will not flinch from your duty to your country and to your God." My eyes dazzled as I read the terrible words, for I thought of Eileen and how she, too, would read them in the extremity of her despair.

I hesitated no longer, but prepared to journey to Castlebar. I intended on my arrival there to interview the solicitor for the defence and place before him all the facts I had gathered together.

It was late in the afternoon, and the car stood ready at the door, when my landlady entered the room with a terrified face and informed me that a woman wanted to see me.

"Who is it?" I asked impatiently.

"Sure it's that mad creature Kathleen Bournes," answered the widow, "and she insists on seeing your honour."

Passing out to the front door I found Kathleen, an old cloak thrown over her, and the hood falling back over her shoulders, leaving her head bare, and her beautiful brown hair falling wildly around her pallid face.

She drew me aside, and said anxiously:—

"Your honour is going to Castlebar?" .

"I am," I answered. "What is it you want to say to me?"

"I want you to come to my brother," she replied. "Sure I think he's dying."

"Dying?" I repeated. "He was well enough when I saw him yesterday. What has happened?"

Thus urged, the girl informed me that on the previous evening during her temporary absence Rory had quitted the house. On her return she found the place empty and a box containing a small sum of money broken open. She ran out searching for the man everywhere, but night had fallen, and it was pouring with rain, and she returned home in despair. About midnight she was startled by a sound outside the door, opening which she found her brother lying insensible on the ground.

"He was dead drunk, your honour," she proceeded, "and soaked to the skin, and bleeding from the old wound. I dragged him to the fireside, and just then one of the neighbours came in and told me he'd seen Rory that night in Kilsyth, drinking in the shebeen. He'd walked into the town, wake as he was, and drunk and drunk till he could drink no more, and then he'd crawled back home through the rain; and sure I think he's got his death this time, for he's lying like a corpse on the bed, and his life seems just ebbing away!"

I took Kathleen beside me on the car and ordered

Andy to drive to the farm as rapidly as possible. Entering the house, I found the man lying half-dressed upon the bed, while an old woman sat on a stool close to him, moaning and "keening" as if he were already dead. I dismissed the woman and made a rapid examination. Kathleen's fears were right; he had received his death-blow indeed, and was rapidly sinking. His breath, loaded with the fumes of drink, was drawn weakly yet rapidly, and his heart was fluttering like a wind-blown leaf.

Again and again I moistened his dry lips with water; at last, to my intense relief, he opened his eyes.

For a time he looked at me in dazed wonder, then his lips moved, but I heard no sound; I bent close to him, and he whispered:—

"Is it dying I am?"

I nodded my head.

"You have not long to live, but if there is anything on your mind you have still time to speak it."

Our whispered conversation, short and low as it was, attracted the attention of the girl, who now entered the room. She went to her brother, bent over him, and put her hand on his hair.

"Rory, acushla," she whispered, "spake out now, since God Almighty is goin' to take ye. Sure Master Michael was always very good to us!"

The man closed his eyes for a moment; when he opened them again they were dim and wet.

"Send for the soggarth," he moaned.

Hurriedly scrawling a few lines in my pocket-book, I tore out the leaf and gave it to Andy, bidding him to go at once to Castlebar and give the writing to Miss Craig. Then I turned to the girl.

"Will you fetch Father Anthony?" I said.

She hesitated, so I added:—

"I will watch your brother till you return; if you do not go at once it may be too late."

She looked at the ghastly face upon the pillow and seemed to realise that I spoke the truth; with a great sob she turned aside and hurriedly quitted the house.

The expression on the man's face now became more peaceful. He did not speak again. Seeing him so utterly exhausted I moistened his lips with a little weak brandy and water, and it seemed to give him strength.

## CHAPTER XX

For several hours I kept watch by the bedside. The night had now fallen, and Kathleen had not returned. At last she rushed in wild with excitement.

"His reverence is not at home," she cried. "He has gone to Castlebar."

"I feared as much," was my remark. "You know he is called as a witness against his brother, who is to be tried immediately."


"Sure he'll never spake a word against him," said the girl; "but it's here his reverence should be this night, not away yonder. Maybe Father John will come along! I've sent word for him to Mylrea."

As she spoke the man on the bed opened his eyes and looked wearily at his sister.

"Is the soggarth coming?" he moaned. "The cold breath is on me and the doctor says I'm dying."

The tears rolled down her cheeks as she bent over him and replied:—

"He's coming, Rory, he's coming; but maybe you'd like to speak now and ease your heart, acush-la! Didn't his reverence say that God would never forgive ye if ye died with the word unspoken?"





"I'll spake to no one but the soggarth," returned the man, with something of his old look of sullen determination. "It's him that must anoint me and give me absolution before I die."

He sank back on the pillows and closed his eyes again. Kathleen touched my arm and led me to the farther end of the room, where we talked in a whisper.

"Will he last till morning?" she asked eagerly.

"Oh, yes, I think so, and perhaps over to-morrow; but he's sinking, and he'll never rise from the bed again."

She looked at me wildly, and answered in a voice choked with tears:—

"Glory be to God! Then he'll spake to the priest and do his bidding, and the Lord will save his soul!"

There was nothing now to be done but to wait patiently, so I strolled out to the kitchen and took a seat by the fire, while Kathleen watched by the bedside. An hour passed thus while I sat revolving in my mind all the strange events in which I had been actor as well as spectator since my arrival in Ireland. I thought of Eileen, and of the message which I had sent her by my servant Andy, a message summoning her to come, if possible, to that unhappy house without delay. Would she come? And if she came would help or solace reach her from the lips of the dying man?

It was close on midnight when there was a knock

at the door. I rose and opened it. Father John entered and shook me by the hand.

I placed my finger on my lips and pointed to the inner room. Then in a whisper I explained the state of affairs. Without another word the priest made his way to the bedside, while Kathleen rose and saluted him respectfully.

"Look up, Rory," she cried softly, turning toward the bed. "Sure his reverence is here, God bless him, and waits to spake to you!"

The man started and opened his eyes, but when they fell on Father John his face wore an expression of deep disappointment.

"Look up, my poor boy, look up," said the priest. "Sure I'm grieved in my heart to see you in this trouble, but it's the road we all must take, Rory Bourne, and I'm here to help you through and to receive your confession."

"It's Father Anthony I want," moaned the man irritably.

"Father Anthony's in Castlebar," answered Father John, "and by that token I am your priest, my son, and you must speak your sins to your own clergy! . . . Clear the room, if you please, and lave us alone," he added, preparing to divest himself of his overcoat and producing from the pocket of the same a small parcel, containing, as I afterwards found, the stole and materials for administering Extreme Unction.

I was struck by the solemnity of the little priest's demeanour. He was no longer the man whom I had previously encountered, almost comic in his boisterous geniality. He was the priest indeed, clothed in all the dignity of his sublime vocation.

We left the room, closing the door softly behind us. I resumed my seat by the fire, while Kathleen crouched on a stool opposite to me, sobbing and hiding her face in her hands. All was still in the house, save for the murmur of voices from within. At last, after half an hour had passed, the door of the inner room opened, and Father John with the stole thrown over his ordinary walking garments, stood on the threshold. He appeared greatly excited, and his usually florid face was ghastly pale.

"Come in," he cried, in a stern voice, and we followed him into the room. The dying man was sitting up in bed, supporting himself on his left arm, and looked wildly and imploringly at the priest, who again approached the bedside.

"Dr. Sutherland," said Father John, pointing to the bed, "have you told that man that he is going to face his Maker and that he has only a little time to live?"

"He knows it," I replied.

The priest gazed at the man and proceeded in a low, clear voice:—

"You hear that, Rory Bournes? The hand of death is on ye, and you know it. Spake then, in

the name of God, and call them present to witness the truth that you've told to me!"

The dying man groaned and bent forward as if to clutch at the priest, who drew back sternly.

"Sure I've confessed, your reverence, and it's yourself will give me absolution!"

"Absolve ye, is it?" cried Father John, pointing at him with his forefinger. "Will God absolve ye, Rory Bourmes, when you're dying with all your sins upon your soul? I'm giving you your last chance to make your peace with God and man!"

"Tell them yourself, your reverence. I'll never contradict ye!"

"Is it me?" said the priest indignantly. "Do you dare to ask me to break the seal of confession, and lose my own soul alive? What the dying man says is buried in the heart of his clergy; but I'm asking you, as a man and a sinful brother, to speak the truth with a free and willing heart. Rory, my man," he added more gently, "there's forgiveness and grace abounding for them that repent; but for him that dies in wrath and leaves his sin upon his brother's head, there's neither forgiveness nor grace, but sorrow and shame everlasting! Spake out, Rory Bourmes, and then Father John will absolve ye, and Kathleen here will wake your soul to glory, and you'll be buried like a Christian man."

The appeal was useless, for as the priest spoke the man uttered a wild groan and swooned away. I

vent to the bedside, and bending over him, endeavored to restore him, but he continued insensible, and I almost believed that his last hour had come.

He lay thus till daybreak, while we watched beside him, expecting every moment to be his last. As the first dim rays of the winter's morning crept into the room Father John divested himself of the stole and passed out of the house, saying as he went: "I'll be waiting outside the door; call me if the sense comes back to him." It was clear to me that what he had heard under the seal of confession had shocked him terribly, for he was strangely sad and silent, and it was only with a great effort that he subdued his agitation.

Bareheaded, he paced up and down in front of the house, while I remained by the unconscious man, administering restoratives from time to time. At last, when the light of the cold winter morning completely filled the chamber, the man recovered consciousness and looked wildly into my face.

"The soggarth," he gasped. "Is his reverence here?"

I signed to Kathleen who stood weeping near the door, and she disappeared.

"You are better now, my man?" I said gently.

"Sure I thought I was dead and gone," he replied faintly. "Bid Father Anthony come to me. It's Father Anthony I want, for it's him that has promised to absolve me!"

As he spoke Father John entered the room, and again, as on the priest's first appearance, the man's face wore an expression of gloomy disappointment; but, suddenly, the wild eyes brightened, an eager cry came from the parched mouth, and I saw, to my astonishment, that the parish priest was not alone. In the doorway stood the tall figure of the curate, Anthony Creenan, who looked himself as gaunt and livid as the dying man.

Not a word was spoken, but with a wave of the hand Father Anthony motioned me to leave the room; I did so at once, leaving the two priests alone with my patient. I walked to the open door, where Kathleen joined me and whispered:—

"Sure he'll spake now. 'Twas Father Anthony he was wanting, and glory be to God he's here!"

Glad to get into the open air, I strolled up and down outside the house. It was a dull, cheerless day, and a thin rain was beginning to fall, darkening the barren moorland and veiling the distant sea. Suddenly I came face to face with my man Andy, who appeared from behind the house, where, he explained, the horse and car were waiting.

"I took your honour's message," he went on to explain, "and sure I found the poor lady heart-broken; but she bade me hasten back and tell your honour she would come at once. And coming out of the town I met Father Anthony, and when I told

him what had happened, and how your honour had sent for Miss Eileen, he came back wid me, and sure he's here!"

The presence of the young priest was thus accounted for, and scarcely had Andy finished his explanation, when I saw in the distance the two-horse jaunting car belonging to Craig Castle driving at full speed towards the farm. I ran down the lane to meet it; as I appeared the horses were reined up suddenly, and Eileen sprang down with outstretched hands.

As we turned back to the house, leaving the car to follow us at a walk, I told her rapidly what had happened, and expressed my belief that the dying man had a confession to make which I believed might have reference to the affair of her father's murder. Pale, but firm, with tightly compressed lips, she listened to what I had to say, sighed wearily, and said:—

"There was time, for the trial will not come on before to-morrow; so I thought it best to drive over without delay."

It was clear enough that she was almost hopeless, but I cheered her as well as I could, and we entered the house together. The door of the inner room was now open, but Kathleen stood alone in the kitchen; when her eyes fell on Eileen a dark shadow fell on her face, but she curtsied respectfully and motioned us towards the inner door.

"Sure they're asking for you in yonder," she said in a low voice, and then turned her face away.

We entered the room. Father Anthony stood erect by the bed, while Father John, approaching us on tiptoe, took Eileen gently by the hand.

The man lay as I had left him, but his cheeks were now suffused with a hectic flush, and his eyes were open and fixed with a strange expression on the face of the young priest. But the entrance of Eileen did not escape him, and he shuddered and shrank away, turning to Father Anthony as if for help.

"Spake to her, your reverence," he said.

Father Anthony, who had not even glanced in our direction, replied in a strange, broken voice:—

"You know I cannot speak. I have taken my oath before God, and I cannot break it!"

"Amen to that!" murmured Father John, crossing himself.

The man gave a cry, and making a superhuman effort, raised himself from his pillows—and glared wildly at me.

"Doctor," he cried hoarsely, "is it God's truth I'm going to die?"

"It is the truth," I said.

His feeble strength gave way again, and he sank back exhausted.

"Sure I'm not afraid to die," he moaned, "but I can't face the gallows. I never thought they'd want



to hang an innocent man. It's me that should be there instead of him. Master Michael never did a dirty deed to any living soul, God bless him; 'twas *me* that struck the master down!"

He paused, and there was silence. I saw the young priest make the sign of the cross upon his breast, and cover his eyes with his thin white hand. Eileen shuddered, and seemed about to faint, while Kathleen stole across the room, and, sobbing wildly, knelt at the bedside.

"Is that you, Kathleen?" he moaned, and as she sobbed in answer to his question, he continued wearily. "Sure I never meant to do it, but the luck was always against me, and the devil was whispering in my ear. The day the master was kilt I was in a bad mood. I was out drinking at the shebeens all day, and in the afternoon I came home half-mad. Kathleen was out o' the way, so I sat down and had a sleep by the fire. When I woke up I wanted more drink, and I searched about the place to see if Kathleen had got some hidden away. Well, I found half a bottle, and after that I found the gun—Master Michael's gun. I took the gun and went out to look for a hare on the mountain."

"But how," I asked, "did that gun come into your possession?"

"Sure I'd gone up the mountain at break o' day and found that Master Michael was off to Kilsyth, and the house was empty, for Mrs. Creenan was

away down the valley, and there was only Norah in the kitchen; and I knew where the gun was kept, and sure Mr. Michael had promised to lend it to me for a day's shooting, and I crept in and took it and ran away with it home, and I hid it in the turf stack behind the house, where I might find it convenient; and after that, as I told ye, I went on to the fair."

He paused again, and his cheeks grew ghastly.

I took out my flask and gave him some brandy. He closed his eyes for a moment, and again that death-like stillness reigned in the room. The girl had ceased her sobbing, and the priest had uncovered his face, but neither spoke. I put my fingers on the man's pulse, and he opened his eyes, then drew a long sigh, and spoke again.

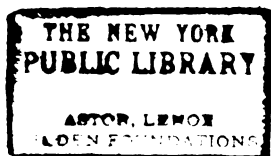
"When I was out on the mountain I saw the master lighting from the mail car to take the short cut home across the bog, and I lay down, not wanting him to see me, but sure enough he came straight to the place where I was lying, and when he saw me and the gun in my hand he began blackguarding me, and told me I was a poacher and a thief, and he meant to have the law on me. Well, thin the drink was in me, and I up with the gun as he was walking away from me, and he staggered and ran over the bog to the road, and there he fell down on his face stone dead!"

We listened in horrified silence as he continued, moaning out the terrible words:—



**"HE STAGGERED AND RAN OVER THE BOG TO THE ROAD."**

**[Page 230.]**



"Sure God Almighty knows, if I could have brought the master back to life then and there, I would, but it was too late. I looked at him, and I thought o' the gallows, and sure I felt afraid to die: and then—and then—I came home!"

Again he closed his eyes, again I moistened his lips with brandy and begged him to proceed.

"Sure it's Kathleen that knows the rest," he said. "When I came home I found her sitting by the fire, and the mad fear was on me and I told her what I'd done; and when she heard I'd kilt the master she took the reaping-hook from the nail in the wall and sprang at me to have my life, and I held up my arm to bate her off and the reaping-hook ripped up my arm, and I fell down bleeding like a pig; and when my sister saw what she'd done she came to her senses and helped me to my bed, and tried to bind up the wound; but sure I should have bled to death that night if his reverence Father Anthony hadn't come in by chance, God bless him! He stopped the blood and bound up my wound and sat by my bedside. Then I thought I was dying, so I confessed my sin and asked his reverence to give me absolution, but he only groaned and rushed away. But at daybreak he came back to me white and wild, and told me Master Michael was took up for doing what I had done. He begged and prayed me to give myself up and to save my soul alive, but, God help me, I was afraid of the

gallows, and I never thought Master Michael would be hanged."

Ghastly pale he fell upon the bed. Kathleen had risen to her feet, pale and fearless now; she bent over him and touched him softly on the cheek. As she did so he turned his face towards Eileen and held forth his trembling hand.

"Sure I never meant to do it," he repeated tremulously, "and—and—and I'm dying!"

I looked at Eileen. She still sat where Father John had placed her when we entered the room—her hands clasped nervously lay in her lap, her white face was turned towards the man, she saw the hand stretched appealingly towards her, but she made no attempt to take it.

"My father, my poor father!" she cried, covering her face with her hands.

Father John stood near her, his honest eyes full of sympathetic tears. As he bent over her, murmuring a word of comfort, my attention was attracted to Father Anthony. He had been standing near the bed, his face white as death, his form erect and rigid, his ears drinking in every word of the strange confession; but suddenly he raised his arms and clutched at the air, tottered for a moment, and then without a sound fell forward on his face.

## CHAPTER XXI

THE mystery which had puzzled me so long was solved at last. Having no doubt whatever in my mind that the dying man spoke the truth I could not compliment myself on my own ingenuity; for all my suspicions had melted away like smoke. I saw now how cruelly unjust I had been to the young priest, and I realised, in a flash as it were, how terrible had been his struggle to keep his holy oath, and yet to help his brother whom he so dearly loved. His dread of visiting his brother, his secret visits to the man Bournes, his wild despair and sorrow as the dreary days crept on, his avoidance of Eileen, all were now clearly explained. My heart yearned to him in pity, while my spirit bent in reverence before his pure and gentle nature, so firm in its sinless strength.

He had fallen in a dead faint, his face upon the ground. Bending over him I raised him gently in my arms and supported his head on my knee. At my request, Kathleen brought me a bowl of water, the contents of which I sprinkled over his pale face. His lips moved, but his eyes, which were wide open, were fixed on vacancy. Then, assisted by Father

John, I carried him into the outer room, and threw open the door that the cool air might blow in upon his brow.

"Holy Saints preserve him," cried Father John. "I love him as if he were my own son, and it's myself that knows he's an angel born, barrin' the wings. Look up, my son, look up, and speak to Father John."

The boy (for indeed, he was little more) seemed to hear the voice, and turning his dark eyes towards his friend, his pale, beautiful face broke into a smile, like the smile of a little child, and he reached out his hand, which the other took and kissed, fairly breaking down over it and crying. It was a touching sight, revealing as it did the deep affection which the two priests of God, so different in age, temperament, and character, bore to each other; and I confess that I was strongly moved.

In a few minutes Father Anthony had perfectly recovered and stood up, supported by the little priest.

"You're better now, my son?" said Father John anxiously. "Sure it's a sore trial the Lord has put upon ye, but you've come through it like a sainted man."

As he spoke Eileen entered from the inner room. The young priest did not shrink from her now, but held up his head, and looked her sadly in the face.

"All this time," she said, quietly and almost bit-



terly, "you knew the truth; you knew that Michael was innocent; you knew that this man was a murderer, and yet you did not speak!"

For a moment the young priest shrank back, startled and pained; then, without averting his eyes, he replied quietly:—

"I could not speak. I was bound by my oath!"

"There are some oaths which should *not* be kept," returned Eileen, "just as there are some things which cannot be pardoned."

"Miss Craig," replied Father Anthony, "you do not know what you are saying. I have kept my covenant to God, but how have I kept it?—what has the keeping of it meant to me? Besides my mother, the only living soul I have to care for is Michael, and you know well what my brother is to me. Yet I have been doomed to see him dragged into the very shadow of the scaffold. I have been tortured almost beyond my strength. Ah, God forgive me," he cried, raising his pale face to heaven, "there have been times when in my agony I have torn my priest's robes and almost broken my crucifix, saying, 'There is no God, or such things could not be!'"

He paused, and looked at her imploringly, his eyes dim with tears.

"Sure he speaks the truth," cried Father John, "and God will reward him."

Sadly and intently Father Anthony continued to

regard her, until suddenly she lost all self-command.

"Father Anthony, forgive me!" she cried, and sank sobbing at his feet.

The young priest placed his hand upon her head.

"Sure I've nothing to forgive," he said gently. "God bless you for loving Michael so much, and believing in him in spite of all."

Within a very few hours Miss Craig had returned to Castlebar, bearing with her the news of Rory Bournes' confession. The man lingered on till next day, and a written statement being prepared he signed it before witnesses, of whom I was one. Information had, of course, to be given to the authorities, who, seeing that he was too ill to be removed, placed a police guard around the farm and held him under formal arrest. His mind unburdened of his secret, he seemed now quite indifferent to earthly things, and sank gradually, soothed not a little by the spiritual ministrations of Father John.

Mr. O'Flannigan, the solicitor, lost no time in preparing the way for Michael Creenan's vindication; but many tiresome preliminaries had to be gone through before the prisoner could be set at liberty. On the day fixed for the trial he was brought into court; Eileen sat in the well by the side of her solicitor, and close to the dock, grasping the prisoner's hand, stood Father Anthony.

The counsel for the Crown at once rose and in-

timated that he was instructed to withdraw from the prosecution.

"I understand," said the judge, glancing at the documents before him, "that a confession has been made by the real criminal, and that it is supported by the evidence of several independent parties, several of whom are now present."

"That is so, my lord," replied the counsel for the defence.

"One of these, gentlemen," said the judge, addressing the jury, "is the daughter of the unfortunate gentleman who was so cruelly murdered; another is the prisoner's brother, the Rev. Anthony Creenan."

All eyes were turned on the pathetic figures—the tall handsome youth in the dock and the pale dark-eyed man who stood close beneath him, clasping his hand.

"Call Father Creenan," said the judge.

Amid breathless silence the young priest made his way to the witness table and was duly sworn.

"You are the prisoner's brother, and a priest of the Roman Catholic Church?"

Father Anthony bowed his head.

"According to the depositions before me you have been aware from the first of your brother's innocence, having received on the very night of the murder the confession of the guilty party."

"Yes," answered Father Anthony.

"You did not, however, make any communication

to the authorities? You did not even make the slightest attempt to exonerate the prisoner, although you knew that he was about to be tried for his life? May I ask, Father Creenan, if you would still have preserved silence, even if no confession of guilt had been made, and your unfortunate brother had been condemned, as he might have been, to a disgraceful death?"

There was a pause. The young priest glanced towards the prisoner, and, then raising himself erect, made the sign of the cross.

"The secret was not mine," he answered. "I should not have spoken."

A murmur went through the court.

"Not even to save your brother's life?" demanded the judge sternly.

"Not even to save my brother's life!" was the reply. And as the murmur deepened the priest continued: "My brother knows that I would have died for him, but I could not, even for his sake, have been unfaithful to my vows. I trusted in God—my trust is justified—and God has saved my brother!"

The murmur changed to a cheer; men shouted and women sobbed; then a cry came from the dock and rang out in the court.

"God bless you, Anthony!" cried Michael. "Sure I'd never have asked you to break your oath!"

An indescribable tumult followed, and in the midst of it stood the two young men, looking with infinite affection at each other. Even the judge was deeply affected. When there was silence again he said quietly:—

“Under the circumstances, there is no reason whatever to detain the prisoner. As a matter of form he will enter into an undertaking to take his trial again if called upon, but in the meantime he must be set at liberty.”

A few minutes later Michael Creenan sprang from the dock into the arms of Father Anthony, and, amid a scene of the wildest enthusiasm, the brothers left the court together.

## CHAPTER XXII

THE man who had killed Mr. Craig lay dead in the lonely farm, still guarded formally by the police, though he had escaped the punishment of his crime, and was far beyond the reach of any human law. During my residence in Ireland I had been to many a wake, but to none so strange or terrible as this one. On the bed in the inner room, where he had so long fought for life, the dead man lay in his grave clothes, his eyes closed, his face washed clean, and his hair and beard smoothed and trimmed by his sister's hands; the usual saucerful of tobacco was placed upon his breast, and on the table near the bed were clay pipes, glasses, and a bottle of spirits; but Kathleen Bournes was practically the only mourner. From time to time one of the peasantry would enter bareheaded, nod to Kathleen, glance at the corpse, and steal quietly away; but there was neither "keening" nor rejoicing, such as are common at wakes among the Irish peasantry, for outside in the kitchen sat two armed constables, and the shadow of a terrible crime was on the miserable house.

Twice during the three days of the "waking" I walked over to the place, and on each occasion I

found Kathleen sitting alone, her face pale as death but perfectly calm. She was dressed in her best Sunday attire, and had taken unusual pains with her person. On her head was a white cap, completely concealing her hair. On my first visit I said only a few words of trite consolation, but during my second visit, on the third day, I drew a chair near to hers and spoke to her more freely. She seemed to appreciate my sympathy, although it awakened in her little or no emotion; she seemed indeed beyond emotion of any sort, save the dull strong sense of utter despair. Only once, when I spoke of the dead man, did she emerge from her lethargy, with a vestige of her old passionate manner.

"He was a good brother to me," she said, "and when the drink wasn't in him, your honour, he was a dacent, God-fearing man. Sure he was mad with drink when he lifted his hand against the master, but he confessed his sin to the priest, and his reverence absolved him, and I'm thinking the Lord will forgive him! Sure it's a poor wake he's having," she added with a ghastly smile, "but it's better than dying in shame on the gallows—praise be to God who saved Rory from that! It's strange to see him that was so bold and wild lying quiet there, with his hands folded and his eyes closed as if he were asleep; but sure there's one left to wake his soul to glory, and that one's me! I never loved him so well, your honour, as I do this day, for I know the

sin's taken off him, and he's kneeling at the throne o' God!"

She spoke in a low tone, almost in a whisper, but every word was clear and distinct, and her voice scarcely broke, but there was a world of pathos in the still wistful face, and the eyes were dim and red as if she had wept in secret.

Deeply touched and impressed, I took her hand in mine and said:—

"What shall you do now he is gone?"

"Sure I shall stay on here," she replied, "till my own time comes, and maybe it won't be long!"

"All alone?" I asked.

"Yes, sure. The house will be mine, and the bit o' land, and there'll be bite and sup enough for a lone woman."

"But you are young still," I said, "with all the world before you. Some day, and soon I hope, you'll forget all this sorrow and enter upon a new life. That's why I asked you if you meant to remain here. The place is so desolate—the associations connected with it are so terrible——"

"It's my home for all that," the girl interposed quietly.

"But it won't be always your home. By-and-by, when you marry——"

Her face flushed slightly, but her expression did not change; the same dreamy, far-off expression dwelt in her eyes.



"Is it me?" she asked. "Sure I will never marry! what man would look at the likes of me—the sister of him that's lying there, with the shame o' murder on his name? And sure, if the man came along, he'd find no welcome here."

"When a little time has past," I persisted, "you'll think differently."

She smiled wearily, and shook her head.

"I feel like a widdy woman," she answered; "tired and old, and only fit to sit by the hearth and look at the faces in the fire."

Just then the door opened, and an old man, the same whom I had once found in the house disputing with Kathleen, crept into the room and approached the bedside. He gazed silently at the dead man, crossed himself and heaved a heavy sigh; then, still without a word, he approached the table and poured himself out a glass of spirits. Kathleen watched him quietly as he drank off the spirits and wiped his mouth with the cuff of his ragged coat.

"He's dead and gone entirely," the old man muttered, fixing his shining eyes on Kathleen.

"Sure enough," she answered.

The old man groaned.

"Then he'll niver be paying me back the three pound of good money he kept when he sold my mare at Kilsyth. Ochone! ochone!"

"Speak low," said Kathleen, a dark shadow on her handsome face.

"It's the truth I'm telling," whined the other. "He kept the three pound to spend in drink, and I'll never see it this side of purgatory!"

And with trembling hand he poured himself out another glass of spirits and drank it off.

Kathleen watched him, and the frown on her face deepened.

"Hearken to me, Anthony Linney!" she said quietly. "My brother Rory was a just man, and before he died he bade me pay all his debts. Come to me after the burying, and you shall have the money."

"Is it in earnest ye are?" cried the man, looking at her eagerly. "Three pound, and never a shilling less?"

Kathleen nodded, and chuckling feebly to himself the old man left the room. I rose and held out my hand.

"I wish I could be of service to you," I said. "I don't like the thought of you remaining here and brooding over the past."

"Your honour's good and kind," was her reply, "but no man can help me, and sure I don't complain."

I left her seated alone in the room, her bright tearless eyes fixed wearily on the dead man's face. As I passed out through the kitchen the two constables rose and saluted me, military fashion.

All that day the girl's face haunted me, and my heart went out in pity to the lonely creature, left in

the world without a friend. I knew well that her heart was still full of its hopeless passion for Michael Creenan, and small as was my faith in feminine fidelity, I felt sure that in this case the woman's devotion would be permanent.

I spent the evening at Craig Castle, and found the shadow there also. Although she was relieved from all anxiety on her lover's account, Eileen was sad and very silent. The suffering she had undergone, with its prolonged mental strain, had sadly tried her strength, and I did not disguise my anxiety concerning her physical condition.

"If you will be guided by me," I said, "you will go away from Mylrea as soon as possible, and remain away for some time. I'm your physician in ordinary, remember, and shall be very angry if my injunctions are disobeyed."

"I am going to obey them," she answered. "I shall stay with some friends in Dublin." She added, looking me anxiously in the face: "Michael is going away too. We shall not meet again till the winter is over."

"And then?"

"And then, I don't know. Sometimes I feel as if it was wicked to care so much for him. My poor father did not wish me to marry Michael, and—and——"

She paused, turning her face away to hide her tears.

"My dear Miss Craig," I said, "your father, had

he lived, would probably have changed his mind; and remember, you owe some amends to Michael Creenan for the unjust suspicions which have caused him so much misery. Consult your own happiness, and his—that is my advice; frankly, I did not think you would need it, for I understood that you had resolved to marry.”

“Sure I’ve promised,” she answered, “and I’m going to keep my word. But not yet—not yet! My father! My poor father! It seems all so strange, so terrible—more terrible than ever now, when there is time to think it all over.”

Presently she added:—

“They buried that man to-day. I know you have been over to the farm. Did you see the girl, his sister?”

I answered in the affirmative, and expressed the great pity which Kathleen’s desolate condition had awakened in me.

“You are right,” said Eileen sadly; “she is much to be pitied. I am sorry for her. What will she do?”

“She proposes to remain where she is.”

“Alone?”

“Quite alone. I tried to persuade her to leave the place, but my persuasions were useless.”

No more was said on the subject, but I was glad to see that Eileen felt no bitterness towards Kathleen Bournes.

Do what I might, I could not get away from the thought of Kathleen, and the more I thought of her the greater grew my sympathy and pity. It so happened, however, that on my return home I found waiting for me in my lodgings the very man whom I had thought more than once of consulting in my dilemma. Standing in the widow's kitchen, toasting his back at the fire, and conversing affably with my landlady, was Father John. I knew that he was, with all his eccentricities and peculiarities, a shrewd man of the world, thoroughly acquainted with the character of the peasantry, and capable in all matters connected with them of giving very sound advice.

"I was passing by, doctor," he said, "and I thought I'd look in and have a talk with ye. I've been on my legs all day up among the mountains, with nothing but black bogs to look on and poor ignorant souls to spake to, and by that token 'twill be a relief to converse sociably with a gentleman of education and discernment like yourself!"

I bowed to the compliment, and invited the priest into my sanctum, where I speedily made him as comfortable as his heart could desire. Poor Father Croly! He had only one weakness, and that was for distilled mountain dew, in the form of punch for preference, and, after all, it was a weakness which never made him forget his duty or his self-respect. Seated in an arm-chair before me, with a bumper of

hot punch in his hand, he beamed upon me genially, and then, as if greatly tickled, threw back his head and laughed merrily.

"What is amusing you?" I asked, lighting a cigar.

He slapped his plump thigh and laughed again.

"I was thinking of Mulligan, sir; and how you've interfered with the rascal's vocation! I met him on the mountain this morning. 'How's that English interloper?' says he. 'Mulligan,' says I, 'Dr. Sutherland is a friend of mine, and I warn ye to spake of him civilly.' Then he swore, sir, and said he wished ye at the devil! The poor man's praying night and day that you'll clear out, sir, and let him kill his patients dacently!"

I expressed my sorrow at having acted rather unprofessionally.

"Dr. Mulligan is clever, I suppose? I mean as a physician," I inquired.

"He's clever enough when he's sober," returned Father John, "but he drinks, sir—and drink is poison!" Here he lifted the tumbler of punch to his lips and drank heartily. "But he's cleverer with horses and cattle than doctoring human bodies. Never heed him, sir; he bears no malice in his heart, and when ye meet him again he'll taste with ye like a Christian!"

"Well," I said, "I shan't be here long to darken his sunshine. I have my own patients to attend to over yonder in London. I'm glad you called to—

night, for I want to ask your advice about that poor girl, the sister of the man who has just been buried. It seems terrible that she should remain in her present home, with the shadow of her brother's crime for ever over her. Naturally, I suppose, she will be avoided by everybody, and her life, I should think, will be unendurable."

"She's a strange girl, is Kathleen," returned Father John thoughtfully. "I've talked to her myself, and tried to fathom her disposition, but sure it's like trying to find the bottom of a fairy well. But make your mind easy, doctor. 'Twill be her own fault if the neighbours give her the go by, and if she liked, she could have a husband to-morrow for the asking."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, indeed, doctor; and I'm betraying no secret when I tell you that one Anthony Linney has already spoken to me about her and asked me to spake a word for him!"

"Anthony Linney!" I repeated. "Do you mean an old man who lives only a stone's throw from her house—a wretched old creature, with one leg in the grave?"

"That's the man!" cried the priest with twinkling eyes; "and though you may think him wretched, he's a rich man, sir, with money in the bank. The old rascal admires Kathleen, not to spake of the bit of land and the bit of money that Rory has left her,

and though he's buried two wives already he's able and willing to take a third."

I expressed my indignation at the mere idea of such an union, greatly to the little priest's amusement; but he proceeded to assure me that there was not the least danger of Kathleen listening to a proposal from such a quarter.

"It's my opinion, doctor, she'd brain the man if he spoke to her, and by that token would have an ugly welcome for his messenger. She's a queer girl entirely, and the man isn't handy that would take her fancy."

"She informed me to-day," I said, "that she would never marry."

"Never's a long time, doctor," returned Father John, helping himself to a fresh supply of punch and screwing up his eyes at the glass. "I've heard many a colleen say that same, and change her mind in a week. It's not like a young, fresh, handsome girl like Kathleen Bournes to sit mourning for ever!"

"Then the circumstances of her brother's crime would not stand in her way if she was inclined to marry?"

"No, sir," answered the priest; "and why should it? Sure the poor girl wasn't to blame; and besides that, 'twas a thing done in drink and not in cold blood. If Kathleen only raised her little finger all the marrying boys would be round her in a jiffy.



But, as I was saying, she's queer, and not like the rest of the peasant girls hereabouts. She set her fancy on the wrong man (and I needn't name him, for ye know him), and 'twill be a long time before she'll forget that same. She's a woman, however, and a woman always sees double, as the saying is! First she'll mope, and then she'll weary, and then she'll see the right man come along and raise her heart and her longing in the way of Nature."

"But in the meantime," I said, not a little amused at my companion's scepticism, "she will be terribly lonely."

"True enough," said Father John, "and sure I thought of that yesterday, when I advised her to go to Westport, where there is a home for good Catholics in trouble, and told her the Sister Superior would welcome her with a line from me. She'd find kind friends there, and have the consolations of religion, and by and by, when the trouble was healed, she could come back home."

"What did she say?"

"She said she'd think it over, poor creature! I've a notion her thoughts are turning to Heaven for comfort, for she asked me if the Church was open to receive her, in case she wanted to leave the world behind her altogether."

"Become a nun, do you mean?" I asked.

Father John nodded.

"That hardly coincides with your suggestion that

she would one day find the right man," I said, smiling.

Father John looked serious. The smile faded from his face, and he put his tumbler softly down on the table.

"That's different, sir," he said, with a certain solemnity. "There's no two ways for either woman or man, and when the Church opens its arms for a poor unhappy soul, the troubles and temptations of this world vanish, and the peace of the Lord comes down. I've a notion, too, that Kathleen is one of the sort that doesn't easily forget, without the help of religion. She'd be happier and better in that life, maybe, than out in the world of men."

I made no answer, for I could not think without a shudder of the exchange he spoke of, remembering as I did so vividly the girl's affectionate nature and extraordinary beauty. I had no sympathy with conventual institutions.

When we parted Father John promised to let me know the result of the suggestion he had made to Kathleen, that she should enter a religious home, at least for the time being. I ascertained afterwards that she accepted his proposal and entered the establishment at Westport, whence, a little later, she was removed to another establishment near Dublin, in order that she might finally take the veil.

## CHAPTER XXIII

WITH the confession and the death of Rory Bournes and the release of Michael Creenan, all excuse for my presence in Mylrea was at an end. The mystery was solved, the lovers were united, and I was at liberty to pack up my traps and depart; yet for some reason, which I feared to explain even to myself, I lingered.

I had taken my farewells, I had spent several pleasant evenings with Father John and the doctor, the latter of whom, good soul, bore me little or no malice; I had been visited and thanked by Michael Creenan; but there was another good-bye I hesitated to speak, however much I tried to force myself to do so. Twice had I gone to Craig Castle intending to take farewell of Miss Craig, and twice had I left with that good-bye unsaid. At last, one morning in December, the postman brought me a letter from my *locum tenens*, demanding my immediate return to town.

"You've been long enough away," he wrote, "to have become a regular nationalised Irishman; but you must leave your romantic surroundings and come back to solid hard work. Another operation

has to be performed upon Mrs. Lennox, and she won't let anybody but you perform it; so pray hurry up, for delay is getting serious, and you ought to be here now."

I called in Andy and told him to pack up my traps at once, as urgent business called me to London. The honest fellow's face fell. He was genuinely grieved, and said so, but I comforted him with the promise that I should return the following year. Then, while he was getting my things together, I pulled on my overcoat and walked up to Craig Castle. I was shown at once into the drawing-room, where I found Eileen, who came forward to greet me with a gentle smile.

"This is good-morning, Miss Craig," I said, as carelessly as I could, "and good-bye."

"Good-bye?" she repeated.

"Yes," I said, "good-bye! It isn't a pleasant word to say, and I have put off saying it as long as I could, but Fate is inexorable. I have had a letter this morning from my colleague, whom I left to take care of my practice; and as he says that things cannot go on longer without me, I must return to London."

"But not at once?" said Eileen. "In a few days—after Christmas?"

"No, at once. Andy is busy now packing up my goods, and he will drive me into Kilsyth to-morrow morning. I confess I am very sorry to leave Ireland."

"You say that now," said Eileen, with a faint at-



"THIS IS GOOD MORNING, MISS CRAIG, AND GOOD-BY."

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tempt at a smile, "but once you are in London you will forget us altogether."

My answer was gallant.

"At any rate, I shall never forget *you*, Miss Craig."

"Then if you have not forgotten me you will come back, perhaps?"

"Most assuredly I shall!" I said. "I begin to feel quite at home in Ireland."

"We shall all miss you," she cried impulsively, "and myself most of all. What should I have done without you? Sure, I know now that God sent you that dream to bring me a friend in need!"

I laughed a little sceptically, but in my heart of hearts I agreed with her. A very short residence in Ireland had cured me of a good deal of my congenital scepticism, and made me as superstitious as the most illiterate peasant. It was high time, indeed, that I returned to London, if I was not to lose all touch with common sense and science, and to degenerate altogether.

So we parted, with renewed assurances on either side of faithful friendship. But my leave-takings were not yet done. That afternoon I drove up on the car to the abode of the Creenans, to say my last farewell to the young priest. I found him alone in the little room upstairs. His mother and his brother were away at Castlebar, transacting some business connected with the recent trial. Father Anthony sat by the window reading his breviary,

and looking from time to time out on the lonely prospect of mountain and moor.

He greeted me with a gentle smile, and when I told him that I was going away he expressed his regret in a few kindly words. I hardly knew how to reply to him, for I had a presentiment that we should never meet again; nay, it was more than a presentiment, for I had long perceived in his pale, sunken cheek, his dark burning eyes, his attenuated form, the signs which a physician dreads. As I held his thin, fevered hand I thought of what Coleridge had said after he had grasped the hand of Keats: "There is death in that hand!"

"I don't want to alarm you," I said, "but I must warn you to take care of yourself. I don't like that cough, and I wish you to promise me to remain as much indoors as you can, till the spring is a certainty."

He smiled and nodded.

"Sure I'll take good care," he said, "but I'm not so weak as you think, doctor; and for that matter I'm content to live or die, just as God wills."

I could not help saying, "Well, it is a dull life for one so young!"

"The life of a priest?" he asked. "I thought so once, but now my mind has changed altogether, and I am quite content. It is something, after all, to make others happy, is it not? And a priest can at least do that."



Our eyes met, and I saw that he realised my knowledge of his secret, of the love and self-sacrifice which had beautified his life. As I pressed his hand my eyes grew dim, and, filled for the moment with his own simple faith and trust, I murmured a "God bless you " as we parted.

\* \* \* \* \*

A year had passed away, and I was seated in my study in Wigmore Street, when a servant entered and handed me a card. I glanced at the card carelessly, and read to my astonishment the name on it:—

REV. JOHN CROLY, P.P. .

Almost before I could get my breath I was holding a plump little hand in mine and gazing into the bright, weather-beaten, honest face of the parish priest of Mylrea.

"I was on a visit to England, doctor," he cried, spreading out his broad chest and placing his head on one side, while he closed one eye to inspect me with the other, "and I thought I'd call on ye. I may tell ye, sir, that I never was in London before, and that it's a mighty big city after Kilsyth, or for that matter Dublin itself. And how's the world using you, doctor? Are ye still a bachelor? By the twinkle of your eye I'll wager you're married!"

I assured him that he was mistaken, and that I

was still untied, if not literally unattached. Not without some persuasion I made him promise to dine with me, for he seemed to think I was too busy and too great a man to have my time taken up by visitors. However, I overruled his objections, and we spent that evening pleasantly together, I questioning him about all my Irish friends, and he enlarging in his droll way on all the news he was able to give me.

"Sure they're to be married in Serapht," he said, speaking of Michael and Eileen, "and a fine pair they'll make, sir! The young mistress asked me to make you promise to dance at the wedding."

Serapht is the time of Shrovetide, when marriages are made and arranged in Western Ireland.

I laughed, and promised if possible to be present, though I feared that my professional avocations would detain me in London.

He had not yet mentioned the name of Father Anthony. Curious, and not a little anxious to hear if my fears were likely to be realised, I questioned him. In a moment his face grew sad, and sighing deeply he crossed himself as he replied:—

"The poor boy's troubles are over—a month ago we laid him in his grave!"

Then, brushing his hand across his eyes, which had grown dim with manly tears, he continued:—

"He was too good for this world, doctor, and so I tell ye. He was the stuff the Lord uses to make

saints and angels out of, and he carried the heavy load in his heart when he became a priest. Though his heart was as clean as a lily flower, and he was faithful to his vows in thought and deed, he was meant for the sunshine and not for the shadow; and sure a priest's life is lonesome, and Anthony was but a boy. All through last winter he held up boldly, and went about with a shining face, and sure none of us thought that the hand of Death was on him. When the summer came he became brighter still, and there was a new bloom on his cheek and a new light in his eye. But all the time he was pining and withering, and one man knew it—saw it all along, and my heart bled for him, and I tried to comfort him, and sure I think sometimes he loved me like my own son."

"Do you think he was unhappy?"

"No, sir," replied the little priest with decision. "He was not unhappy, but his happiness—saints rest his soul!—wasn't that of a living, breathing man; it was quiet-like and restful—a still, deep water shining up to the sky, sir! 'Twas the wind from up there was blowing on him and wasting away his substance; and when the winter came he took to his bed, for he was only skin and bone. But even when I went to him he had the bright smile for me, and the loving word, and when he passed away 'twas like a child going to sleep, tired out and weary, and glad to close its eyes!"

He was silent and tears were rolling down his cheeks. At last he said softly:—

“He’s better where he is, doctor, for he was too gentle for this hard world. I took my last look at him when he was lying all alone in his priest’s dress, in the old Cathedral of Kilsyth; and the people had come and gone, and the night had fallen, and the cold moon was looking in, and there he lay—God bless him!—his hands folded on his breast, and his eyes closed, sleeping all alone! I thought to myself how lonesome it was for the poor boy to be sleeping there—him that should have been bright and happy, and smiling out in the sunshine; and I knelt down by him and said a prayer for him, and put my lips to his brow, and the next day I followed him to his last home.”

He paused again, crossed himself, and placed his hand over his eyes.

“And Miss Eileen?” I said. “Did she see him towards the end?”

“She did,” was the reply; “but sure she never guessed, and Michael never guessed, what had been hidden so long in the poor boy’s heart—how he had given away his life for his brother and turned from the light o’ day to the peace o’ God. He’d killed the love in his heart long before, sir, but he’d killed his own happiness as well; but he never wavered, and he never repented, and he kept his faith with the Lord, and sure enough God will give him reward!”

"Poor Father Anthony!" I said.

"You may well say that!" returned the little priest.

And he repeated as if to himself:—

"Poor Father Anthony!"

THE END

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