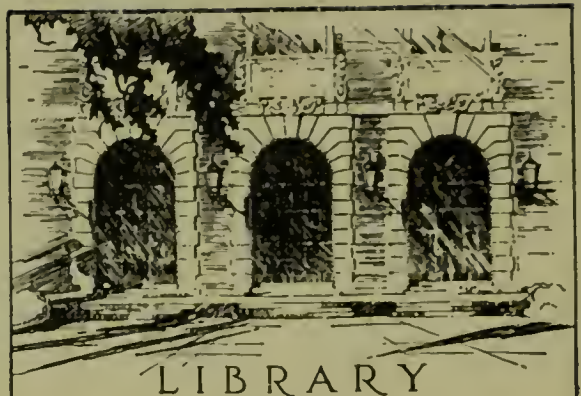
A GERALDINE



A GERALDINE

A GERALDINE

BY

RICHARD ASHE KING ("BASIL")

AUTHOR OF

"LOVE'S LEGACY," "A LEAL LASS," "THE WEARING OF THE GREEN,"
"A COQUETTE'S CONQUEST," ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. II

LONDON
WARD & DOWNEY
12 YORK STREET COVENT GARDEN W.C.
1893

CONTENTS

A GERALDINE.

CHAPTER XII.

AN UNEXPECTED PALADIN.

The more Ralph thought of Tom D'Arcy as the means of redeeming his property from a crushing mortgage, the more eager he grew for the match, and the more impatient for an immediate engagement between the young people, which would put him out of suspense. He would have asked Tom at once to dinner, if that young gentleman had not mysteriously disappeared. He was given to these mysterious

disappearances, no one knew whither, or for how long; though everyone suspected they had to do with horse-fairs, auctions, or races. Dick, who was as much in the dark as anyone, had to answer his father's daily repeated question, "Well, has your friend come back yet?" with a surly "Not that I know of;" for Dick was angry with himself for having betrayed Shiela to his father, and with his father for the gross greediness of his snap at Tom. No one would have rejoiced more than Dick if Shiela could have been induced to accept Tom D'Arcy; but no one knew better than Shiela's brother and Tom's friend that both would be disgusted by her being thrown at the man's head. Besides, Dick had a high idea of the dignity of the Fitzgeralds, which was revolted by his father's abject eagerness to secure Tom D'Arcy as a son-in-law.

Wherefore, Dick resolved to say nothing to his father of Tom's return upon that youth's reappearance, of which Dick would have, he felt sure, the earliest intimation. Of this he had the security, not only of Tom's friendship for himself, but of his love for Shiela, to say nothing of the filly, which Tom could not bring himself to return until the return of its owner. Great, therefore, was his astonishment when Shiela sought him up one evening to say, "Dick, I wish you'd send back that filly."

"Of course I shall send her back. You didn't suppose I meant to keep her?"

"But Mr. D'Arcy thinks that I mean to keep her."

"Well, really, Shiela. You *are* taking things for granted!"

"But he has just told me himself that he meant her for me," she replied impatiently.

"Why, where did you see him?" cried Dick in amazement.

"In the wood. I do wish, Dick, you had prevented him sending her."

"In the wood! In Dunran Wood?" Dick cried incredulously.

"Yes. You knew perfectly well that nothing would induce me to accept her."

"Was he coming here?" asked Dick, who had not yet got further than this surprising *rencontre* in Dunran Wood.

"No; I don't know. I think not."

"But what took him into the wood, then?"

"I think," she answered hesitatively, "that he came to see the place where the sergeant was shot."

"Did he say so?"

"No, but it was there that I met him."

"Oh, he must have been coming on here."

As she remained silent, he said presently, with a searching glance at her—

"You said something to prevent him."

"I said that if you had told me the filly was for me, she should have been sent back at once," she answered indignantly. "I cannot understand how you could allow him to think for a single moment—"

"But I didn't, and he didn't," Dick retorted petulantly. "I told him a dozen times over that you wouldn't accept her; but he bothered me so to get you at least to ride her, that I let him send her over. I don't know what he means by saying now that he sent her to you by me. He did nothing of the sort."

But Mr. Tom D'Arcy hardly knew what he had meant himself. Shiela, having forced herself at last to go to the scene of the murder in the hope of finding there some other clue to the murderer besides

that which Patsey had put uselessly into her fettered hands, was surprised to find Mr. D'Arcy there before her, examining the spot with extraordinary interest. Before she could withdraw, he had turned round and recognised her.

"Miss Fitzgerald!" he exclaimed, and then hurried on without a pause to say in confusion—"I—I hope you liked the filly."

"That you sent for my brother to try?" she asked coldly.

"I sent her to you. I meant her for you, if you would do me the great kindness to accept her," he said, with the precipitation of extreme nervousness.

"My brother must have misunderstood you. He *could* not have understood you to mean that," she answered so significantly that it was really surprising he was not arrested upon the brink of his next nervous plunge.

"I begged him to persuade you to try her, and to accept her, if she suited you."

"He did not understand you," she repeated, "or he would not have allowed you to send her."

"But I've no use for her. She's not up to my weight; and I know no one who would ride her so well," he gasped breathlessly, as though floundering in a morass, and grasping at any straw for support.

"I could not possibly accept her," she cried decisively and impatiently. "She shall be returned to you at once."

"I—I hope I've not offended you," he stammered.

"No," she answered coldly. "It was a misunderstanding of my brother's."

How this exonerated Mr. Tom D'Arcy it was not easy to see; but, on the whole, it was the safest thing for Shiela to say under the circumstances. His manner

showed such a nervous and almost hysterical lack of self-command that she might well have dreaded a proposal, if she did not turn aside from the subject of the impertinence of his presumption in expecting her to accept so compromising a present. A proposal, however, was now at all events put so completely out of his thoughts that he was evidently relieved to make his escape from her presence! With an abrupt, nervous, and stammering "Good-evening," he raised his hat and hurried away.

Shiela also hurried away in the opposite direction, eager to find Dick, come to an explanation with him, and have the filly forthwith returned to her master.

Dick, in turn, was eager for an immediate explanation with Tom D'Arcy, whose incredible idiocy in showing Shiela his hand seemed to Dick's egotism objec-

tionable, chiefly as an act of treachery to himself. Before Dick's indignation had time to cool, its object presented himself in custody of Ralph. Tom had gone but a few steps from Shiela when he encountered Ralph returning home through the wood.

"Halloa!" Ralph exclaimed joyously, "have you been to our place?"

"No," stammered Tom, guiltily, "I—I was thinking of calling, but, finding it so late, I gave up the idea."

"Late!" cried Ralph, "I don't know what you call late. You're not late for dinner, and that's the main thing. Come along; we shall all be delighted to see you—delighted. We were getting quite uneasy about you, you disappeared so suddenly and mysteriously—might have been murdered by those d—— Moonlighters. By the way, you weren't here, were you, when poor Sergeant Casey was

murdered by that scoundrel Dundas? This was the very spot—just here," taking Tom by the arm and leading him back to the scene of the murder. There he showed him where and how the dead sergeant had lain; and went then into a detailed account of what Dick had seen Dundas do immediately after the murder, and how he himself, Dick, and Constable Brady had seen him later on discharge a couple of chambers of the sergeant's revolver, etc., etc., etc. To all this Tom listened, trying the while to invent some adequate excuse for an escape from Ralph's hospitality. But, as he could think of none that would not seem insincere and silly after his declaration that he was on the way to Cahircalla but a minute before, he had to resign himself to his fate.

Thus Tom fell into Dick's hands while that young gentleman's wrath was warm.

Carrying him off unceremoniously from his father, upon the pretext of taking him round to the stables, Dick opened fire upon him the moment they were to themselves. "What on earth did you mean by telling Shiela you sent her the filly as a present? Hang it all! didn't I tell you she'd fly off the handle if you offered it to her straight out like that? After you'd persuaded me to work her round into riding her first—and I couldn't get her even to do that—you tell her you sent her as a present by me! making me out an idiot or a liar!"

"I was startled on seeing her, and said the first thing that occurred to me," replied Tom, with rare and absolute truthfulness, and with as rare humility. "I'm very sorry, old fellow, but it can't be helped; and, after all, I've dished myself with her. Eh?" looking anxiously at Dick.

"Well, you know, no girl could accept a present like that—I don't know what you could be thinking of," Dick answered, mollified by the other's strange humility.

They walked on together in silence for a little before Tom said, as if on a sudden thought and impulse—

"Look here, Fitzgerald, you may keep the filly; I don't want her."

"My dear fellow—my dear D'Arcy, I really—it's too much," Dick gasped in a transport of delight.

"You're welcome to her," Tom replied in a half-hearted, absent way, and then added, "I hope your father won't mind my not staying to dinner—I really must get home."

"No, no; do stay. Did she—was she in a temper?" he asked hesitatively.

"No; it isn't that I mean. I'm not up to much to-night. I've been knocking

about all over the country, and am dead beat."

"Oh, you'll be all right after dinner."

However, Tom would certainly have departed if Ralph had allowed him; which, of course, he wouldn't at all. Accordingly, D'Arcy had to retire to Dick's room to make himself as presentable as he could to the ladies, while Dick took advantage of their being again to themselves to say with some embarrassment—

"I say, don't let us have that murder business all over again at dinner."

"What?" asked Tom, turning sharply round.

"That Casey murder. Don't let us go over it all again at dinner. I'm sick of it."

"No. I wasn't thinking of it," Tom answered, shortly, turning back to busy himself with his toilet.

Dick, fearing he had offended him by his

dictation, hastened to explain rather shamefacedly :—"The fact is, Shiela doesn't believe Dundas did it, for some absurd reason of her own; and there's always an unpleasantness with the governor if she says so He's very hard on her."

After some seconds' silence Tom asked —"Who does she think did it?"

"She doesn't know — she suspects the Moonlighters, I suppose; but nothing will persuade her it was Dundas."

After another few seconds of silence Tom suggested—"Perhaps it wasn't."

"What!"

"Well, it might not have been; there's no knowing."

"Oh, nonsense! If I saw the fellow do it — and I nearly did see him do it — I couldn't be more certain it was he."

"You can never be quite certain upon circumstantial evidence," Tom rejoined.

Dick's advice did not ward off talk of the murder—which, indeed, was the staple of Ralph's conversation at dinner—but it seemed to suggest to our crafty friend D'Arcy an effective way of making his peace with Shiela. At all events, when driven by his host into saying something upon the subject, he doggedly maintained the view he had broached to Dick—that the evidence against Dundas, being purely circumstantial, was inconclusive.

"But who the devil did it, then?" cried Ralph, using strong language in his astonishment and disgust at D'Arcy's contrariness, and even "cussedness," as he considered doubt of what to him was evident as the sun at noon.

"I don't know," Tom answered with a shy momentary glance at Shiela. "Anyone might have done it; for a policeman is fair game for everyone."

"But, d— it, man!" cried Ralph still more hotly.

"Ralph!" remonstrated Mrs. Fitzgerald.

"Well, it's enough to make a saint swear to hear any man, not a Moonlighter or a lawyer, pretending to doubt that Dundas did it. Look here. Here's Dick," etc., etc., etc., going over the whole evidence again with such additions and suggestions of his own as certainly made it hardly conceivable that Dundas was innocent. Nevertheless, D'Arcy stuck doggedly to his guns, arguing upon the other side all Dundas's lawyer had urged—which Tom had evidently read attentively.

"Oh, well," Ralph said sulkily, "if you're not talking for argument's sake, there's no use discussing the subject. Any man who wants more evidence to convince him of that scoundrel's guilt, wouldn't believe his own eyes, if he saw him do it."

"But—"

"I really don't see any good in continuing the discussion," Ralph said to his wife's distress and dismay. To frighten away by such rudeness a suitor for Shiela, who was great with the great of the county, was unpardonable, and might be irretrievable, folly.

"Really, Ralph, Mr. D'Arcy has a right to his own opinion; and there's a good deal in what he says, besides." Ralph, upon turning to wither her, was confronted with such an expression in her face as recalled him to himself.

"I'm afraid I cannot talk coolly of a murder committed at my own door, and almost before my own eyes I might say, Mr. D'Arcy. You must, however, excuse me if I cannot see the slightest reason for suspecting those scoundrelly Moonlighters of it; though they're capable of it, of course,

and, indeed, nearly murdered both Dick and Shiela that very night."

Ralph then led the conversation to the Moonlighters, whom he and his guest could agree in denouncing as capable of any atrocity. He said that he had no doubt at all of their having intended an attack that night upon Cahircalla, and of their having been diverted from it by their spies giving them notice of the approach of the police. But this attack was postponed only. It was sure to come; so sure that he dare not stay away a single night from home. He had intended taking Dick to Dublin to choose at Rigby's a gun he had promised him for his birthday; but really he feared to leave the house either unprotected or under the protection of the police. Police protection in these times and in this neighbourhood attracted attack like a lightning conductor, etc., etc.

From this the conversation straggled away to guns, to Rigby, to the Irish Eight and the Elcho Shield, without D'Arcy taking any active part in it, or indeed attending to it at all. But when Mrs. Fitzgerald and Shiela had quitted the room, he reverted abruptly to the point from which this Rigby talk had started.

"If you thought I would be any use—any protection," he stammered, the obliquity of his eyes increasing with his nervousness, "and would put me up for the night, I should be very glad to guard the house while you are in Dublin."

"My dear boy!" cried Ralph, with the joy of a spider who sees a fly plunge headlong into its web without any preliminary and tantalising buzzing about—"my dear boy! it would be the greatest relief and comfort to my wife and daughter if you would—the very greatest relief and comfort."

"I should be only too glad to be of any service," D'Arcy murmured.

Hereupon Ralph became effusive and almost fulsome in his acknowledgments until Dick indignantly changed the subject. He imagined that his father's match-making object must have been as transparent to D'Arcy as it was to himself.

When they rose to join the ladies, D'Arcy said aside to Dick—"You might tell your sister that I gave—that I meant the filly for you, and only hoped she might ride her occasionally."

"Yes, I shall make it right, old fellow. It's awfully good of you," Dick answered.

Meanwhile Shiela was absolutely relenting towards D'Arcy, because of his defence of Dundas! He was evidently a most good-natured and even chivalrous person, whom she had cruelly misjudged; and his presumptuous present of the filly was pro-

bably but a piece of naïve boyish impulsiveness. She was just in the mood, therefore, for accepting the explanation which D'Arcy, emboldened by wine—or, to say the truth, punch—hastened to make to her immediately upon his entering the drawing-room.

"I find from what your brother says, that you quite misunderstood me to-day. I had given *him* the filly, and only hoped that you would ride her now and then, as she was more up to your weight than his."

"It was very generous of you," Shiela answered generously — but thinking the while of his defence of Dundas.

"Then you forgive me?"

"It is I that should ask forgiveness for my ungraciousness," she answered.

"Oh, you—" he said in such a tone as expressed that she could not give offence or need pardon. It so alarmed Shiela that,

saying hurriedly, "I must explain to my brother," she escaped to Dick.

She had hardly joined him before her father called out boisterously to her—

"Shiela, I've just been telling your mother of Mr. D'Arcy's kind offer to stay and guard you and her while Dick and I are in Dublin. You will be in good hands, eh? You must thank him for yourselves, for he would not allow me to do it for you."

CHAPTER XIII.

MR. D'ARCY DISTINGUISHES HIMSELF.

SHIELA'S gratitude to Mr. D'Arcy did not extend to welcoming him as a Paladin; but it was little use for her to urge that there was not the slightest fear of a Moonlighters' raid upon Cahircalla, since her wish or opinion was of no account with her father and mother, while Dick went dead against her.

"There's every fear—*every* fear," he reiterated irritably. "They all know we have arms in the house, and that rascal Patsey or someone else will be sure to let them know that we are away, so that

we could not possibly leave you by yourselves."

"But you've often been away before and nothing happened," she urged feebly.

"The Moonlighters were quiet then; but now they're out every other night. All I can tell you is this—that if D'Arcy doesn't come, we can't go. That's the long and the short of it."

Shiela was silenced. She was, of course, unable to urge that it was not to the arrangement, but to its obvious object, that she objected so intensely. For its object was made obvious to her in less equivocal ways than in her father's sudden deference to her, and in her mother's sudden anxiety about her frocks. Ralph, whose *forte* was certainly not delicacy of feeling or of expression, was broad and frequent in his hints of her coming promotion; while her mother talked D'Arcy

all day long, raving to Shiela about his personal and social advantages, and cross-examining the exasperated Dick as to his friend's tastes in eating, drinking, "frocks," etc., etc.

"Look here, mother; if you're going to black his boots, I shall put him off altogether. Hang it! He isn't the Prince of Wales; and if he was, we aren't the dirt under his feet. You'll just make him think that we never had a respectable person inside our doors before."

The only result of this rough remonstrance was to frighten his mother into indirect and furtive efforts to discover from Dick Mr. D'Arcy's wants or weaknesses.

But even from Dick himself Shiela gathered the real object of the arrangement. He also talked D'Arcy to her, though less continually and offensively

than his mother. He was "an awfully good fellow"—"awfully generous"—"awfully sensitive," and "awfully afraid of Shiela." He wasn't a lady's man, and didn't know much about girls—these sort of fellows were always muffs, and couldn't ride, or shoot, or do anything—while D'Arcy was up to everything, and a long way the cleverest young fellow in the county. But, whatever he was, he was to be their guest, and was coming to protect Shiela and her mother, and she really ought to be civil to him, if only on this account.

To these lectures Shiela listened with such an unconcealed impatience of their transparent drift as provoked Dick into showing his hand on the very morning of his departure for Dublin.

"I don't really know what you want!" he cried angrily, only to be brought to

himself by the superb scorn with which she repeated as a question,

"What I want?"

"Oh, well, I don't mean—I mean what makes you so dislike D'Arcy?"

"I don't dislike Mr. D'Arcy," she answered quietly, "but I do dislike having him preached at me every day and all day long."

"It's only mother, and you know—"

"It's more than mother," she interrupted him to say decidedly. "I've had nothing but Mr. D'Arcy talked to me, or at me, for a week, till I must have come to dislike him—if I could have any feeling towards him but a feeling of indifference."

"You flew at him so about that filly that I only wanted you to be civil to him," Dick said, with an offensive-defensive surliness.

"I shall certainly be civil to him," Shiela answered coldly: but then recollecting that Dick was going away—if only for a couple of days—she put her arm round his neck and pressed his cheek to hers, saying,

"Don't let us quarrel about him, Dick, dear; he isn't worth it. Nothing is worth that, is it?"

Whereon Dick, whose best characteristic was his love and respect for his sister, said, penitently enough—"I didn't mean to worry you."

"I'm sure you didn't," she answered, rubbing her soft cheek caressingly against his. "Dick, you really think you'll be back on Friday?" she asked doubtfully and dismally

"It all depends upon the governor. I say, Shiela, I'll make him bring you a watch. Now, you'll see. He's awfully up on you now."

But Shiela, conscious of her father's reason for being "awfully up on her," said quite urgently — "No, no; don't, Dick; I had rather you didn't, really."

"But he never gets you anything."

"I don't want anything. Now, mind you say nothing to him about it; and *do* come back on Friday, Dick."

"I don't go so often," he answered, huffily, understanding her reason for wishing him back, and thinking it at once perverse and selfish.

"No; but— It's very selfish of me, I know," she said with a sigh.

"After all, it's only for a few days at most; and I'll just give mother a good talking to; she's really too ridiculous," he said with seeming inconsequence.

However, the effects of his lecture were inappreciable; since Mrs. Fitzgerald worried Shiela the live-long day about her

looks, frocks, and manners for the evening—the net result of her "look-to-your-arms" admonitions being that Shiela came down to dinner in her everyday frock! This revolutionary act was so much more effective than Dick's lecture that it quite quelled Mrs. Fitzgerald during dinner, which passed off without Shiela being humiliated or D'Arcy bored by the fuss the good lady would otherwise have made about him.

During dinner D'Arcy, taking advantage of the absence of Ralph and Dick, was quite positive that Dundas had no hand in the murder of Sergeant Casey, which he put down undoubtingly to the Moonlighters. But though he described these Moonlighters as desperadoes of the most daring, savage, and even diabolical character, and told hair-raising tales of their fearless audacity and remorseless ferocity,

he pooh-poohed altogether the idea of a raid by them on Cahircalla.

He said, reasonably enough, that if they had intended an attack on the house, they would most certainly have carried it out that night, after they had left Dick disabled in the wood, and before there was a possibility of the police coming up in time. As they were not five minutes' walk from Cahircalla when they encountered Dick, they must have reached and robbed the house and beaten a safe retreat, before they could have heard of Shiela's escape from her assailant, who would take some time to come to. This being not only probable, but indisputable, there was no one and there was nothing to warn them of a police alarm, and therefore to divert them from an attack upon a house now nearly defenceless through Dick's having been put *hors de combat*.

Having put this before them with a clearness and conclusiveness which showed that he had gone over it all carefully beforehand in his own mind, he summed up the matter by saying positively :—"If they meant to pay you a visit, they'd have paid it that night, when your brother was lying senseless in the wood. They could not be sure of such another chance of finding you with only one man in the house ; and, if they didn't come then, they never will come."

"I never had the least fear of their coming," Shiela answered.

"And you needn't. I had so little fear myself that I haven't even brought my revolver with me."

Perhaps Shiela's expression of face seemed to ask here—"Why on earth, then, did you volunteer to come for our protection?"—for he hastened to add—

"Your father seemed so nervous about leaving you alone in the house that I could not help asking him to let me have the great privilege and pleasure of protecting you."

This gallant speech he pattered off so glibly that it smacked, like his reasoning on the Moonlighters' movements, of careful rehearsal.

"It was very kind indeed of you, Mr. D'Arcy, with all your engagements—very kind," Mrs. Fitzgerald hastened to say with effusion in her disgust at Shiela's irresponsiveness.

"Very kind of you to have me. I—I was only too glad to come," he stammered, disconcerted by the marble impassiveness of Shiela's expression. In truth, the girl was miserable in the certainty that her mother, who had now somewhat recovered herself, would deluge Mr. D'Arcy to his face with

the fulsome compliments she had been paying him behind his back for the past week. With the desperate hope of averting this she hurried the conversation back to the subject which they had just quitted.

"The Moonlighters have not been about lately?" she asked.

"Not here—in the immediate neighbourhood—but last week they broke into a farmhouse near Currinane, where they would have shot a young girl under the eyes of her mother, who was bedridden, if her father and brother had not come back in the nick of time."

This was a highly-coloured version of a family quarrel with which the Moonlighters had nothing to do. Encouraged by the horror in Mrs. Fitzgerald's face, he proceeded to give a still more highly-coloured version of a real Moonlighters' raid which had taken place in Castleisland about a

month before. This he followed up with a third story—yet more grisly—of which also Kerry was the scene, until at last Mrs. Fitzgerald was afraid to rise and retire, with Shiela for sole companion, to the drawing-room !

"I hope all the doors and the windows are fastened," she said in a frightened voice to Shiela.

"I'll see, mother," Shiela answered readily, only too glad of an excuse to escape.

"No, no ; pray allow me," D'Arcy cried, starting up precipitately.

"Thank you ; you wouldn't know your way about the house ; and, besides, you've so frightened mother that you'd better stay with her."

"But, Shiela, Kate could call Patsey in—" began her mother.

But Shiela had already escaped.

"I think I had better go with her," D'Arcy said, making quickly for the door, where, however, he was arrested by Mrs. Fitzgerald's adjuration to him to stay in the dining-room. This she insisted on, not merely because of her nervous terror of being left alone, but because of her certainty that Shiela would snub him severely for his officiousness.

Meanwhile, Shiela went serenely and leisurely about her work of inspection, which she meant to make cover at least half-an-hour's leave of absence. She first locked the hall door, which she found already bolted. She was making then for the library, when it occurred to her that she had better attend first to the drawing-room, to which her mother and Mr. D'Arcy might retire at any moment and insist on detaining her there, if she put off her inspection of it till they had adjourned

thither. Accordingly she entered the drawing-room, which was yet unlighted, put down the candlestick she carried on a small table near the fireplace, and proceeded then to close and bar the window shutters—a precaution not usually thought necessary. This done, she returned to the fireplace for the candlestick, which she held up for a moment to take a girl's survey of herself in the pier glass over the chimney-piece. She was confronted by the masked face of a man peering round a screen placed to hide an unused door opposite the fireplace. She instantaneously averted her eyes from him, took a prolonged survey of herself, holding up the candlestick in a hand that hardly trembled, and then turned and made quietly for the door. At the door she paused for a moment to try to withdraw quickly and quietly the key which was on the inside—meaning to lock the

man or men in. The key, however, was turned in the lock, which was set upside down—a peculiarity she did not know of, or remember, for the lock was never used —so that in trying to turn the key straight with the keyhole, she locked herself in. Before she could unlock the door, the man, who had been watching her narrowly, shouted, "Hould an, miss!" while he and another, both masked and armed with guns, rushed towards her noiselessly in their stockinged feet.

She faced round and confronted them, holding up the candlestick on a level with her head, and asked with a calmness which confounded them,

"What do you want?"

"We don't want to be locked in like rats in a thrap, anyway," said the man who had been watching her.

"We want arrums, miss, an' we mane

to have thim," said the othe one, savagely.

She turned towards him, glancing quickly from his masked face to the collar of his coat—which was of frieze—to see if a piece had been torn from it. No, it was whole; while the other man's coat was not of frieze. This she took in coolly, for in moments of danger she felt little of the nervousness which afterwards in the reaction might perhaps prostrate her.

"We want arrums, do you hear?" reiterated the second man, thinking that her silence came of stupefaction.

"I have none," she answered in a clear tone of scorn, "while you are both armed."

"By God!" exclaimed the second man with extorted admiration. "Ye're not in dhread of this?" he said, levelling at her

his gun, whose muzzle was now within a foot of her bosom.

There was a silence of horror for a second or two, in which she heard steps. She put her disengaged hand quickly behind her and unlocked the door, which the men did not till now know she had locked upon herself. Then, thrusting aside the muzzle of the gun, she cried "Help!" and in another moment D'Arcy had burst into the room, flung himself upon the fellow, who had brought his gun again to bear upon her, wrenched the piece from his grasp, and then turned it upon the other man, who fled headlong across the hall to the library, and escaped there by the open window, through which the two had entered. Through this window D'Arcy pursued him, leaving Shiela meanwhile to the mercy of the other fellow, who, however, also made all haste to escape through the

library window. He would hardly have had time in any case to wreak his vengeance upon Shiela, since D'Arcy, having discharged the gun without effect after the flying Moonlighter, re-entered the house almost immediately through the library window, to find the other fellow flown.

Certainly nothing more prompt and perfect in the way of an heroic rescue was ever seen off the stage. D'Arcy, though not a powerful man, was lithe and active as an ape; and the singular swiftness with which he dashed into the room, flung himself upon the Moonlighter, wrenched from him his gun to turn it upon his mate, might well account for the panic flight of the men. Shiela, who, heroic enough herself, had a high ideal of heroism, was fain to confess that no one—not Mr. Dundas even—could have borne himself better, and crossing the hall from the dining-room,

she made her a knowledgments for her rescue with all the more fervour from her consciousness of having cruelly misjudged Mr. D'Arcy.

CHAPTER XIV.

DIPLOMACY.

Mr. D'Arcy's manly modesty was hardly less heroic than his heroism. He made nothing of his own bearing in this business, but everything of Shiela's, whose cool and collected movements — even in her own modest account of them—from the moment in which she caught sight of the masked face in the mirror to the moment of her thrusting aside the ruffian's gun, seemed to rank her with Joan of Arc in her admirer's eyes.

"By Jove! It was splendid! splendid! I never heard anything like it," he kept

reiterating, not having at command a vocabulary adequate to his admiration.

All Mrs. Fitzgerald's admiration, on the other hand, was reserved for Mr. D'Arcy and for herself and Providence; for was it not to herself and Providence—share and share alike—the suggestion that they should withdraw to the drawing-room was due? If they had not withdrawn at that precise moment, the Moonlighters, having disposed of Shiela (a mere episode), might have securely shot herself and Mr. D'Arcy as they sat off their guard at the dinner-table.

It was hardly for Mr. D'Arcy to claim for himself so much of the credit of this suggestion as was not due to Providence; though it was he certainly who, by saying, "I hope you'll allow me to withdraw with you to the drawing-room, Mrs. Fitzgerald, as I do not want to smoke"—artfully in-

stigated the move. But he allowed Mrs. Fitzgerald to regard herself, as she really seemed to do, as a kind of inspired instrument of Providence. She recurred again and again and again for the rest of the evening and for days after to her opportune rising to withdraw as the point and pivot of the whole incident; while she would neither express nor listen to any praise of Shiela's collected bearing—not so much because she grudged her daughter the praise as because she thought her display of nerve unmaidenly. She would have had herself—and she was sure Mr. D'Arcy would have had—infinitely more respect for Shiela if the girl had shrieked or fainted at sight of the masked face in the mirror. Indeed, in Shiela's absence, she tried to explain away her shocking coolness as the result of stupefaction. The girl was so stunned that she

hardly knew what she was doing, and walked like a somnambulist from the mirror to the door. Poor Mrs. Fitzgerald's idea of feminine refinement seemed to be made up of nerves, whereas the coarsest-minded women are often hysterically nervous, while women like Shiela, with nerve instead of nerves, are as wholesome usually in mind as they are in body.

However, Mr. D'Arcy, to do him justice, needed no apologies or explanations to make him condone Shiela's "unmaidenliness," which, on the contrary, intensified to intoxication his passion for our heroine. On her part, poor Shiela was in the distressing dilemma of having either to avoid or snub Mr. D'Arcy, and so seem insensible of his heroism and ungrateful for her rescue and even for her life; or to express this gratitude and admiration by such a change in her bearing towards him

as might be misunderstood. For it must be remembered that there was no possibility of her misunderstanding D'Arcy's "attentions." Every ardent look of his proposed for her, or at least expressed a longing to propose for her if he dared; and he would dare most certainly if any act, word, or look of hers could possibly be construed into encouragement. She had escaped early to her room on the evening of the Moonlighters' visit, pleading naturally and truly a bad headache; but when he asked her at breakfast next morning would she ride out with him, what excuse could she offer? She had already admitted having recovered completely from the shock of last night, and any domestic engagement she might have pleaded would have been put out of the way at once by her mother. There was nothing for it but to consent with as good a grace as she could com-

mand, and even to consent to ride the tabooed filly!

She went upstairs to don her habit with a heavy heart, thinking last night's escape dearly paid for by the kind of gratitude which would be expected and exacted for it under insupportable penalties. If she did not now accept Mr. D'Arcy she would be boycotted, not only by her father and mother, but by Dick also, and would stand quite alone with her trouble in the world. Yet she could not—and would not—accept Mr. D'Arcy. That he meant to ask her his manner had made certain to a girl the least likely of her sex to make a mistake in such a matter; and that he meant to ask her to-day—to strike while the iron was hot—was suggested by the triumph in his eyes when she had consented to ride the filly.

Meditating upon all this miserably and

even bitterly, with such an acute access of dislike to Mr. D'Arcy as made her feel herself a monster of ingratitude, she lingered as long as possible over her riding toilet. Just as she had completed it her mother came bursting in.

"The police!" she cried in a fire-alarm tone. "They want to see you at once."

"To see me?"

"Yes; about last night — about those men."

"Oh!"

"You'll have to give evidence," cried her mother, at once amazed and irritated by Shiela's coolness.

"Why? Have they caught them?"

"Caught them! How could they have caught them when they have only just heard about it? They were quite rude because we didn't send word to them last night."

"But where am I to give evidence?" Shiela asked, since her mother's manner suggested a Star Chamber Inquiry at least.

"Downstairs, of course."

"Oh, I shall be down in a few minutes, mother," she cried, brightly, to the deeper bewilderment of her mother.

"You seem very anxious to make an exhibition of yourself."

"It's only to answer a few questions, I suppose," Shiela replied with so much cheerfulness that her mother felt sure Shiela was rejoiced to advertise herself as the heroine, or virago rather, of last night's encounter with the Moonlighters.

Shiela's real reason for rejoicing, however, was her reprieve from this ride with Mr. D'Arcy. She would change her riding habit for her morning dress and then decline, reasonably enough, to make a third

toilet, if even there were any of the morning left, after her examination, for a ride. To ensure that there should not be much of it left she would have taken her time, and that of the Royal Irish, without compunction, if her mother had allowed her; but that good lady, seeming to fear they would all be sent to jail for contempt of court if the police were in any way inconvenienced, kept running upstairs every two minutes to hurry her daughter down. Shiela's change of toilet, however, convinced her mother that she was not thinking of "making an exhibition of herself," since the girl never looked to such advantage as in a riding habit.

"I'm sure I don't know why you should change your habit," she said querulously.

"There will be no time to ride afterwards."

"But you might have changed it afterwards. They want keeping in their places. I do wish your father was here," she grumbled incoherently.

However, Shiela was quite capable of keeping the sergeant and his companion constable in their places without the help of her riding habit. They were prepared by D'Arcy's account of the affair for her collectedness, but hardly for the stately composure with which she replied to their questions, and yet less for the replies to those questions themselves. For whereas Mr. Tom D'Arcy could give only a vague and confused description of the Moonlighters, Shiela was positive and precise as to every detail of their dress, height, build, and colour of their hair. And her account differed from Mr. D'Arcy's not only in its precision and positiveness, but also in its substance.

While she described one of the men as above the average height and the other as very tall—certainly over six feet—Mr. D'Arcy had described both as under-sized; and while she declared that one of the two had red hair, and the other black or dark-brown hair, Mr. D'Arcy thought both were fair-haired.

However, as he had seen them only for a moment and while at death grips with one of them, it was not to be expected that he could be precise, positive, or correct in his description of them; and the police therefore accepted Shiela's account, wondering much the while how a girl in such peril could note the minutest details of her assailants' dress and appearance. Having demanded and examined carefully the gun wrested from the Moonlighter by D'Arcy, the police departed, carrying the weapon with them as a clue.

As it was now nearly lunch-time, the ride together had to be given up for the day, for Mr. D'Arcy had pressing business which would take up the whole afternoon.

Shiela also had pressing business of an incommunicable kind—to watch the men as they quitted the quarry and note if any of them wore a frieze coat with half the collar torn away. The work at the quarry had been suspended since Dundas's committal for trial, owing to Dunscombe's uncertainty as to whether the building of the new house was to be proceeded with. To-day, however, work was to be resumed—as Shiela had learned upon inquiry—and she resolved to be at the exit from the quarry (by the short road which was the scene of her intercepting Dick's gallop to death) at the hour when the men quitted work—six o'clock. Accordingly she walked past this

exit, going towards the village, a few minutes before six, and then returned at the hour, repassing it to no purpose, for the men did not appear. She had, therefore, to turn once more towards the village, and once more return past the exit—not unobserved. Two women watched her from the doors of their adjoining cabins, certain that she had made an assignation.

"It's Miss Fitzgerald."

"Miss Shiela!" cried the other. "'Tis so—there isn't her like in the country for beauty an' goodness; an' her sperrit bates the worruld! Sure, they tell me she locked the dure lasht night on thim Moonlighters, put her back agin it, an' kep 'em there till help come! An' she a shlip of a gurrl!"

"She's ould enough to be coortin', I'm thinkin'," answered the other—a sour old crone, "with udders all drawn dry" of the milk of human kindness, through ill-usage

of man and of fortune. "What's she doin' there at this hour, measurin' the road back an' for'ard?"

"It's that young D'Arcy, maybe, she's expectin—Ould Mouser's son. 'Twas him come to her help last night."

The other made no reply. Shading her eyes from the setting sun's rays with her withered hand, she watched Shiela's movements maliciously. She saw her noting the quarry men as they passed her, going on towards the village, and she observed also that the moment the girl had got clear of the workmen she quickened her pace, hurrying homewards, her errand evidently done.

"It's shpyin' an' shpottin' she's been afther, divil a thing else!" she cried fiercely. "The peelers have set her to shpot the Moonlighters."

This was put beyond doubt to her mind

later on in the evening when she heard how Shiela had astonished the police by her minute description of the Moonlighters; and she did not lose a moment in spreading abroad her certainty (with its grounds) of Shiela's being "a police spy!"—a really terrible character to get in Clare at this time.

Meanwhile, Shiela hurried home, having gained nothing but this fatal character by her inspection of the quarrymen. There was no collar torn, or that had been torn even (for her keen quick eye would have detected a patch), on any of the few frieze coats worn by the men. However, as the murderer might have been away from work to-day, or might have worn another coat, she resolved to make one more inspection of the quarrymen before giving up her suspicion of his being amongst them.

So much for Shiela's pressing business.

Now for Mr. Tom D'Arcy's, which also was of an incommunicable kind. "Old Mouser, the miser," Tom's gracious parent, had once scorned and ignored his son as Ralph scorned and ignored Shiela, and the practical result of this fatherly feeling towards him—the cutting down to the lowest possible farthing of Tom's allowance for clothes and pocket money—the young gentleman felt acutely. It threw him upon his own resources, with a result which extorted Old Mouser's admiration; for Tom seemed always to have money to spend and spare. He would even make money for his father in a superior and patronising way, which compelled Old Mouser to look up to him, and induced him to consult and confide in him. When he heard that Tom was going to stay a day or two at Cahircalla he instructed him to spy out the nakedness of the land.

"That row with Claughessy is a bad business—a very bad business. They tell me the rest of his tenants mean to strike unless he is put back; and then his property won't be worth the stamp on my mortgage. He's a d—— fool!" he cried excitedly. "He can't say 'No' to your face, but he's a Tartar when your back is turned. He makes you a present of a pound to-day and sends you a writ for it with compound interest to-morrow."

"It's a good property, though—good for your mortgage twice over. Those Dunboyne bottoms are the finest pasturage in Ireland."

"What's the good of that if he's boycotted? They might as well be the bed of the Shannon."

"There's nothing to prevent you putting the tenants back," Tom replied with a calculating cynicism which shocked even Old

Mouser a little, when he remembered his son's close friendship with young Fitzgerald. However, the idea was good, though it hardly became Tom to suggest it.

"Is there any chance of it?" he asked, beginning now to wish for what he had feared.

"Of their boycotting him? I shall know better in a day or two."

"It wouldn't do to give notice of foreclosure *after* notice of boycot."

"Of course not; but I'm sure to hear of it, if it's in the wind."

"There are only four tenants," Old Mouser said meditatively.

"Of the Dunboyne Bottoms? There are only three really, for O'Brien guarantees Killeen's rent, and pays it too, with his own, to the day Killeen married his daughter."

"How about the other two?"

"Connor is warm enough, but a bit fishy, always making a poor mouth; but Loughlin, who farms two-thirds of the whole, is as good a tenant as you'll get in Clare."

If Tom had been Ralph's agent he could not have been better up in the particulars of the property.

"Are you going there to-night?" asked his father after a pause.

"Yes."

"Well, come over to-morrow morning and we can decide then what to do."

"All right," Tom answered cheerily, and went upon his way.

Old Mouser, "a good portly man and a corpulent," of the complexion, gait, bearing, and manner of a solid farmer, looked as little as possible like a miser or usurer; whereas Tom, with his pale hatchet face, swivel and ferret eyes, and furtive expres-

sion, equally belied his character of a free-handed young gentleman of pleasure. But Tom's appearance less belied his real character than did his father's; for the young gentleman, "though on pleasure he was bent, still had a frugal mind," and made even his pleasure subservient to his business. Indeed his father hardly did him injustice when he murmured as Tom quitted the room:

"He'd throw me into the melting-pot to-morrow if he could coin me into copper." But then it must be admitted that Old Mouser had not given his son much reason to regard him in any other light than that of an impracticable copper lode. This appointment to meet his father in consultation upon Ralph's position was Tom's pressing business. He had put off the meeting from the morning to the afternoon because of Shiela's consent to ride with him, but his

schemes would not permit a further postponement.

When he appeared, Old Mouser, who was punctuality itself, grumbled and growled a good deal.

"I stayed in the whole morning, though I had important business to do with Cusack."

"I couldn't help it. The police kept me about this affair."

"What affair?"

"This Moonlighting business, as they call it. Two fellows in masks broke into Cahircalla last night, but I don't think they meant more than to frighten them."

Then Tom proceeded to give his account of the affair, from which Old Mouser learned for the first time that Ralph and Dick were from home.

"What did they mean by asking you there, if they were going to Dublin?"

"It didn't matter; I found out all you

wanted to know," Tom replied in answer rather to the motive of his father's question than to the question itself.

"Well?"

"Well, I think there's every chance of his being boycotted. He's unpopular enough, anyway, as last night's affair shows; for those fellows were tenants who meant only to frighten him."

"How do you know? Have they been caught?"

"No; but they made no fight, as Moonlighters would certainly have done."

As Old Mouser remained silent, thinking the thing over, Tom added presently:

"Anyway, a notice to call in the money can do no harm, for you can withdraw it when you like without much fear of his keeping you to it."

"I don't know that at all. He's just the sort of man to get into a fury about it and

borrow money from anyone at any interest to pay it off."

"He can't, though."

"He can't? Why can't he? Why can't he mortgage it to Cruise, or Galloway, or anyone else?"

"Because no one else would advance sixpence to a boycotted man; *and he will be boycotted if he tries to mortgage it elsewhere*," Tom said with a significance which startled, silenced, and converted his father.

CHAPTER XV.

STALKING HIS GAME.

It was characteristic of Mr. Tom D'Arcy that while with Shiela he could think only of her, but away from her he could think of the Dunboyne Bottoms and of her together —the former being well in the foreground of his mind. He had little doubt of being able by careful diplomacy to bring about such a compromise between his own father and Shiela's as would secure him her hand and the Dunboyne Bottoms as her dowry. He feared only to commit himself by a premature proposal. He would certainly have so committed himself on the morning after

his discomfiture of the Moonlighters if Shiela had ridden out with him, and he had congratulated himself almost as devoutly as Shiela had congratulated herself upon the postponement of this proposal owing to the visit of the police. A rejection—and in cold blood he could see that a rejection that morning was all but certain—would double the difficulty of winning her eventually. The fruit was far from being so ripe as to drop into his mouth, while he was not yet in a position to give the tree whereon it hung the good shake he meditated. Accordingly, he not only congratulated himself upon his escape from a false, and even fatal, step that morning, but resolved to keep out of the temptation of taking it till he had made all possible preparation for its success.

Great was Shiela's relief to find him that evening, when she had hurried home from the quarry to dinner, more deferentially

distant than ever. He spoke chiefly of "the terrible state of the country," illustrating it by the difficulties in which even his father —who was, he admitted, notoriously keen in his speculations — now found himself through the failure of "these scoundrel tenants to pay rent either to himself or to those who owed him money on mortgages."

"If you knew my father," he said to Shiela aside, with a confiding and engaging frankness, "you would understand how glad I am to escape from him at present. He's like a bear robbed of her whelps, and makes it hot for everyone that comes near him."

To this Shiela could say only something in answer to his preceding remarks about the disturbed condition of the country at present.

"It's frightful!" rejoined D'Arcy. "He

says he'll realise what he can and cut the place altogether ; and I don't wonder."

"You would go to England, I suppose ?" she asked with a sudden bright, but unflattering, interest in the subject.

"I ? *I* shouldn't, indeed. I've got too much to keep me here," he said meaningly, but at once hastened away as one who has skated, in spite of himself, on to thin ice. "But I should not be at all surprised if my father went."

Here Shiela's interest in the subject went black out, and D'Arcy turned to take her mother into the failing conversation.

"I was just saying to Miss Fitzgerald that my father's sick of this country. He's not a man that likes losing money, as I suppose I needn't tell you," he said, with what seemed to Shiela an odious grin. "And he's been losing a lot lately."

"Dear, dear!" moaned Mrs. Fitzgerald, "that Land League, I suppose?"

"That's at the bottom of it, of course, as it is of every rascality and atrocity in the country. As no one can get his rents, no one can pay his debts; and, most of the governor's money being out on mortgage, he has to suffer by the knavery not only of his own blackguard tenants, but of those of his debtors."

"They ought to be put in prison till they pay," Mrs. Fitzgerald cried excitedly.

"But you can't put a whole country in prison. The only thing to do is for all the respectable people to leave, and let these ruffians rob and murder each other when they've no one else to rob and murder. Anyway, that's what my father thinks of doing."

"Going away!" cried Mrs. Fitzgerald in

deep concern for the probable loss of so eligible a son-in-law as Tom.

"Yes, he's thinking of realising what is left and going to live in some civilised country where he can't be robbed of it."

"Oh, I hope not. We should miss him so much," cried the good lady, who saw Old Mouser only in church, and there only about twice in the year.

"But what can he do? He can't stay here till there isn't a penny to be recovered of all the money he has lent, or spent, on his property."

Mrs. Fitzgerald thought over this for a little, distressfully, before she asked, "Does he think of going soon?"

"It depends upon how soon he can get in what is left of his money," D'Arcy replied, thinking that he had at last succeeded in alarming Mrs. Fitzgerald about the mortgage held by his father on the Cahircalla

property; whereas the good lady was exercised only about the probable loss of the inestimable Tom himself. As, however, she was certain to repeat the substance of the conversation to her husband, Mr. D'Arcy was secure of effecting his object —to prepare Ralph to regard as serious and urgent Old Mouser's coming threat to foreclose.

Mr. Tom thought it wiser to filter this false information of his father's intention to quit the country through Mrs. Fitzgerald than to give it directly to Dick or Ralph, since they would be sure to cross-examine him into a corner on the subject. Besides, he could safely say afterwards that Mrs. Fitzgerald had misunderstood him to assert that his father was going to quit the country, whereas he had asserted only that his father threatened to quit it, which, indeed, Old Mouser had done daily for the last three years.

For the rest of the evening Mr. D'Arcy behaved with consummate tact, due not to nice feeling, however, but to cunning calculation. He intimated to Shiela by every word and look his distant and wistful worship of her, and was, in fact, infinitely more diffident and deferential than he had been before his gallant rescue of her on the preceding evening. What wonder that she was almost persuaded to interpret this access of modesty by her own high and fine feeling—to imagine that the obligation for her life, under which he had put her, restrained him from appearing to press for the payment of a debt? The sordid Tom was incapable even of conceiving this chivalrous idea: and indeed, he would have dunned Shiela unscrupulously for her hand, as for a debt, if he thought it was to be had by this means. But he did not — as yet. When she could pay, not her own debt

only, but her father's, by her hand, Mr. Tom D'Arcy would send in his bill with as little compunction as Old Mouser would foreclose on a forfeited estate. In fact Mr. D'Arcy was diffident and distant, not because there was too much pressure of obligation upon Shiela, but because there was as yet too little. Shiela's misconception, however, will seem only natural when it is remembered how D'Arcy's extraordinary heroism last night had contradicted all her previous ideas of his character. If he proved himself, contrary to all expectation, such a hero in act—why should he not be as unexpectedly heroic in thought? This idea will account for her chivalrous interpretation of his sudden diffidence and deference.

"I feel," he said to her timidly in the drawing-room that evening, "I feel that I am here under false pretences to-night."

In answer to the questioning look on her face he went on—"I mean that such a thing was never heard of as two moonlighting raids in succession on the same house."

"But mother would have been very nervous if we had been left by ourselves," Shiela said.

"Oh, well, I could not have resisted the temptation to come in any case," he said with the sigh of a "furnace;" and then hurried on to add, "if it was only to get out of my father's way."

As Shiela kept an embarrassed silence, he asked mournfully, "I suppose your father and brother are sure to return to-morrow?"

"I think so."

"You wrote to tell them about last night? But in any case, they would see it in all the papers to-morrow, and that would hurry them home."

"In the papers! Will it be in the papers?" she asked aghast.

"I m afraid so. A reporter came with the police this morning, and I had to give him a true account to prevent his making a fancy picture of his own."

"I hope you left me out of it?" she asked anxiously.

"Not altogether," he replied with some embarrassment, perceiving that her anxiety was unfeigned, and remembering how prominent a figure he had made her in his story to the reporter. "After all," he added, "you had a good deal more to do with them than I had."

"I'm sorry you mentioned me," she said simply, in genuine distress.

"Oh, bad as they are, they're not likely to bear malice against *you*."

"It isn't that!" she cried, with contemptuous impatience.

"I didn't mean—I couldn't mean after last night, that you were afraid; but it might prevent your going about freely, if you thought they would respect you less, instead of more, for your coolness and courage."

"I was not thinking of them," she replied absently.

"But everyone else will think you a heroine," he urged, as an irresistible argument.

"It's not pleasant to be talked about," she said only, but in a tone which suggested to him the surprising idea that such notoriety was the last thing a girl like Shiela would desire.

"What was I to do?" he asked defensively, changing his tack and tactics. "The reporter had heard about it already, as the police had (I suppose from your servants), and it was as much as I could

do to prevent him describing you as overpowering both the men singlehanded."

"I suppose it couldn't be prevented," she said resignedly.

"It couldn't, indeed. I am very sorry."

There was silence for a little, during which it occurred to him that it was probably the suggestive association of her name with his in the papers which she must dread so; for why should she object to being celebrated over the three kingdoms as a heroine? Such an objection was hardly conceivable by him.

"I made him understand that I was here by a mere accident," and indeed, he had laid stress upon this to the reporter.

"Yes," Shiela answered indifferently, not seeing the point of the explanation.

As he did not dare to indicate it to her he returned to the point from which he had started, and said with a love-lorn sigh.

"I suppose I shall be off guard to-morrow."

"I think they're sure to be home."

"Yes," he assented dismally.

"You must stay till they come and thank you," she suggested as cordially as she could.

He shook his head. "No; I think I shall go away myself for a little—"

"They will be sorry not to see you," she rejoined feebly.

"I had better go," he repeated, and then added, as though with an effort, "if it was only to escape from home."

"Could you not stay over to-morrow?" she forced herself to suggest.

"I think not—unless they put off their return. If you hear in the morning that they will be home to-morrow, I shall start at once—even without that ride together you owe me."

Shiela, relieved inexpressibly, muttered something about being "very sorry."

"I wish you would sometimes ride the filly," he said, and sighed as though he were going away forever.

"I shall be very glad, thank you."

"Thank *you*. I set my heart upon your riding her ever since I got her."

"It was very good of you," muttered Shiela, whose gratitude for his taking himself so magnanimously away was overpowering.

In this way Mr. Tom D'Arcy contrived to suggest to Mrs. Fitzgerald that his father was calling in the mortgage on the Cahircalla property because he was quitting Ireland; and to suggest to Shiela that he was himself leaving home because he felt his suit now would seem like dunning for a debt. In truth, he was leaving home to be out of the way while his father

dunned Ralph to despair, when he would return to intervene as a *Deus en machina* and to extort as the price of his intervention Shiela's hand from her father; and herself, and the Dunboyne Bottoms as her dowry from her father and his own.

CHAPTER XVI.

A THREATENING LETTER.

NEXT morning came the expected letter announcing the return of Ralph and Dick that evening. Mrs. Fitzgerald read it to Mr. Tom D'Arcy, as Ralph, the writer, plainly intended that she should, since it overflowed with gratitude to that young hero for the chivalrous courage and prowess of his rout of the Moonlighters. Of Shiela's share in the exploit there was not a word, for her father made little even of the little her mother had said about it. For this, however, poor Shiela was more than indemnified by the extravagant account the newspapers

gave of the spirit, nerve, readiness, and resource wherewith she had held the Moonlighters at bay. She had even, it appeared, locked herself purposely in with them to prevent their escape! In fact, the account suggested that Mr. Tom D'Arcy's intervention was rather unfortunate than otherwise, since it allowed an escape which Shiela unaided would have prevented. "However, if, in spite of her resource and nerve, these ruffians had escaped for a time, it was only for a time, since she had given such a minute and distinct description of their dress, height, features, etc., that their identification and arrest could be but a question of hours. Here again the young lady had shown such *nous* and nerve as put to shame our sex, and even that member of our sex who had come courageously to her relief; for, while Mr. D'Arcy's description of the Moonlighters was confused and self-contradictory, Miss

Shiela Fitzgerald's was clear, coherent, circumstantial, and consistent. If there can be no doubt or difficulty about the arrest of the ruffians after such a photographic description, there will be even less doubt or difficulty about their conviction when confronted by so courageous, collected, and level-headed a witness as Miss Fitzgerald. Such a heroine is little likely to be intimidated by dread of the dastardly vengeance of boycott by day or assassination by night."

The whole of the article, in fact, challenged with vicarious valour the jeopardised Moonlighters to put out of the way the one witness—Shiela—whose evidence could and would convict them. It was not this, however, which disquieted and disgusted Shiela upon reading the article; but her being posed as a heroine on a stage, daubed with rouge and flooded with limelight.

"This is horrid! and all untrue, besides,"

she cried indignantly, as she put down the newspaper.

"He has made a mess of it!" D'Arcy answered with sincere disgust, for he had certainly not meant the reporter to make him so foolish and feeble a foil to Shiela.

"But where did they get it?" asked Shiela.

"From the police, I fancy. Anyway, it was not the account I gave the man."

"It's horrid!" Shiela reiterated emphatically. "It ought to be contradicted."

"My contradiction wouldn't be worth much, as they would put it down to a wish to puff myself."

Shiela said no more upon the subject, having formed a sudden resolution, which she hastened to carry out after Mr. D'Arcy had taken his departure. As Dick would not return in time to send in a contradiction to the papers, she must see if the police

could be got to set right the absurd version they had sent abroad. Accordingly, she made all haste to the police barracks, which she was seen by the whole village to enter at the liveliest hour of the village day. Could there now be any doubt in any mind that she was a police spy? Not, of course, a paid spy in ordinary to the police, but one who had volunteered specially for the hunting and hounding down of the Moonlighters. In truth Shiela could hardly have done a more dangerous thing than to pay this visit to the police barracks at a time when her name was upon every lip as the heroine, or virago, of this Moonlighter affair.

Utterly unconscious of the perilous construction which was being put upon her visit to the barracks, Shiela interviewed the sergeant in charge, only to find that the police had had nothing to do with supplying the newspapers with reports of the affair, which,

therefore, they could not be called upon to contradict.

Her most natural recourse would have been to Dr. Cullinan's but for the family boycott of that suspect, and failing him she had to fall back upon the vicar, the Rev. John Medge.

Mr. Medge never wearied of protesting how immense was the amount of work he had to do in the parish; with absolute truth, since, as it never was done, it was always to do. Nevertheless he was almost always to be found in his study, in his dressing-gown and slippers, pasting into a gigantic scrap-book cuttings from *Notes and Queries*, "dry as the remainder biscuit after a voyage."

In this easy habit and at this engrossing occupation Shiela found him, somewhat to her confusion. She stammered out an apology, which was graciously enough re-

ceived but not reciprocated. In truth, the vicar had become so accustomed to his dressing-gown and slippers that it could not occur to him to apologise for receiving a lady at mid-day in such undress.

"Nothing wrong at home?" asked Mr. Medge, in a tone of not very poignant anxiety, glancing at the scrap he had just pasted and pressed.

"No," Shiela answered, with an embarrassment which made her plunge nervously *in medias res*. "But I called to ask if you'd be so good as to write to the newspapers contradicting that report."

"Report? What report?"

"About the Moonlighters."

"Eh? I have not seen it. I never read the paper till after dinner, my time is so taken up all day. What have they been saying now?"

Then Shiela explained her grievance at

some length and with creditable clearness, contrasting the newspaper account of the affair with the actual facts. The vicar, however, after he had read for himself the account in the paper, could see no difference worth a controversy between what Shiela had meant to do when she unintentionally locked herself in, and what the newspapers had described her as doing. Like Mr. D'Arcy, therefore, he imagined that Shiela simply objected to being marked down for murder as the only witness with the knowledge and the nerve needed to convict the Moonlighters.

"This is most imprudent—most imprudent," he reiterated, with a slap of his hand upon the article. "You must at once apply for police protection."

"It's not that—I am not in the least afraid; and, even if I was, I'd rather run any risk than have the police following me about

everywhere. But the whole account is wrong, and I thought that you might, perhaps, write to contradict it, as my father and Dick will not return till past post time."

The vicar was more than delighted with the idea of writing to the papers a letter whose classical style would strike cultivated readers—very different from the inappreciative bumpkins who yawned through his sermons on Sundays. He therefore undertook the task with an eagerness which Shiela mistook for good-nature, and thanked him for accordingly and effusively. He hardly heard her acknowledgments, however, as he was already revolving the exordium of his letter; and he ushered her from the room and from the house quite mechanically.

On returning to his study, he paced it to and fro, meditating his letter, which at last ran as follows:—

"Sir,—You who live in the metropolis can enjoy the Lucretian pleasure of the contemplation of the troubles and anxieties, the difficulties and dangers, of us who live in the disturbed country districts of the South and S uth-west.

"Sir, this security, however selfish, this pleasure, however malicious, we do not grudge you. But at least we may ask you not to multiply or intensify the anxieties, difficulties, and dangers you can contemplate with the complacency of security. We are living here, as you know—for you reiterate it daily in your vigorous leaders—under a reign of terror, the Moonlighters being but its hand and executive, and the Land League its 'Castle,' Cabinet, and head.

"'Hoc fonte derivata clades
In patriam, populumque fluxit.

"Assassination by the Moonlighters or

the Invincibles is but the sanction and the sentence of the law enacted by the Land League. It is not, then, with a little local band of desperadoes — 'village ruffians' — we have to do and deal, but with an organisation which, like the tree Yggdrasil, has its roots in hell, while its branches cover and darken the whole land. What, therefore, you write in Dublin, though it will certainly not be read by the Moonlighters of Clare (who see only their own organ of murder, *United Ireland*), will not less certainly be noted by their employers and paymasters — the Court Martial of the Land League. Is it, then, sir, I ask you, brave, generous, or just for you to become a *delator* to these Thugs? To point out to them a victim to be pointed out by them for slaughter! For, sir, in your position, *monstrare digito* is equivalent to *vertere pollicem* from a secure

seat in the amphitheatre, to point out any man or woman to the Land League as a witness who will incriminate it and its instruments, is to make that man or woman a mark for the assassin's bullet. And when the person so pointed out is a young lady yet in her teens, whose capital crime was a resistance nothing less than heroic to an assault by two Moonlighters, as powerful as they were relentless, your criminal thoughtlessness—to use no harsher word—confounds me. For, if the young lady was not the virago you represent her (since she certainly did not shut herself in with the ruffians intentionally, but accidentally, in a nervous attempt to extract the key that she might lock them in *from the outside*), she displayed such courage, coolness, and presence of mind as entitled her at least to the circumspect consideration of anyone not lost to all the chivalrous in-

stincts of manhood. I hope, sir, that my knowledge of the state of the country and my experience that what, according to Seneca, is true of crime generally, is invariably true of Irish crime :—*Scelere velandum est scelus*—will be an adequate apology for my troubling you with this remonstrance.—I remain faithfully yours,

"PRUDENTIS EST NONNUNQUAM SILERE.

"P.S.—I enclose my card, but *not* for publication."

I give this letter at length, not only because having been copied into *United Ireland*, and there commented upon in an acrid leader, it attracted the malign local attention to Shiela which its professed object was to deprecate, but also because it was so characteristic of the Rev. John Medge. The reverend gentleman wrote the letter without a single misgiving of its

having other than a most favourable effect upon the editor! He was too rooted an egotist to be able to put himself for an instant into another's place, and his one idea in writing this letter (or any letter) was to show himself off at anyone's expense —even at that of his correspondent. He would absolutely expect the man he cut and slashed with caustic criticism to be delighted by the dexterity and ferocity of his sword play. Accordingly, he had no sooner posted the letter than he gave himself up to day-dreams of its happy effect upon the editor—happy, of course, in his own interests, not in those of Shiela, whom he had used only as a peg to hang his eloquence from. Surely this enchanted editor would be so struck by the style, scholarship, eloquence, logic, and sagacity of the letter, that he would offer the writer a place on the staff of the paper. Con-

ceive, therefore, the vicar's fury when appended to the letter (which was printed in diamond type, and in the obscurest corner of the paper) was this sarcastic editorial note—"The above effusion is *not* by the author of *The Irish Schoolmaster*," *i.e.*, of a comic song in which the longest words and the tritest Latin grammar quotations are dragged in without any sense or relevancy.

However, before this letter appeared, a new trouble diverted Shiela's attention. The morning after his return, Ralph received from Old Mouser a peremptory demand in six months for the money lent upon mortgage of the Cahircalla property. There was, indeed, in addition to the usual creditor's excuse of being pressed for money, the explanation that Old Mouser was making preparations for immediate and final flight to England; but both excuse

and explanation were couched in the curtest terms.

"I tell you what it is," cried Ralph, who upon such occasions had always an embarrassment of suspicions to choose from, "I tell you what it is; he thinks I'm going to be boycotted; or, maybe, that he is; or he wants to carry Tom out of the way. Eh?" he said, looking inquiringly at his wife, to whom he had brought up the letter.

"It's not that, I know," Mrs. Fitzgerald replied very positively. "Mr. Tom D'Arcy told me himself that his father couldn't get his rents, and was bent upon going to live in England."

"Pooh! He's been talking of that ever since '48, I believe. Going to England! What would he get for his property if he sold it now? And, if he didn't sell it, who'd look after it?

Do you think Old Mouser ud pay an agent?"

"Perhaps his son would stay?" suggested his wife significantly.

"Oh, nonsense! Old Mouser has no more an idea of going to England than I have. And, anyway, he'd not leave his son behind here," he added; his suspicion that Old Mouser's dread of his son engaging himself to Shiela had something to do with the letter, being somehow strengthened by his habit of contradicting his wife.

"He knows nothing about it. I'm quite sure of that. I wish you'd see him, Ralph."

"I'll see him hanged first! See him! What would I see him for? To go down on my knees and beg him to persuade his father to continue the soundest investment he has! What's it to me if he calls in the money? It's his own look-out altogether. I can a hundred times more easily

raise the loan elsewhere than he can get elsewhere so safe a mortgage—a hundred times more easily." Having lashed himself into a sudden passion, he quitted the room, banging the door behind him.

Nevertheless, on talking the matter over immediately after with his adored Dick, he made to him the very suggestion he had just scorned from his wife.

"You might see young D'Arcy about it, without saying I sent you."

"He's off somewhere; no one knows where."

"Oh, well, it doesn't matter," his father said, after a pause. "I'd just like to know the meaning of it; that's all."

"I fancy Old Mouser really is going to England at last."

"Why? Did his son tell you so?"

"He told mother and Shiela so the other night."

"To prepare them for this, perhaps?" Ralph suggested with quick suspicion, pointing to the letter.

"I don't know. He never gave me a hint of it."

"It looks like it, though; and, if he knew beforehand about it and couldn't or wouldn't prevent it, it would be no good asking him to interfere now."

"It would be no good anyway, even if we could find him; for Old Mouser wouldn't mind him more than anyone else."

"But what the devil does it mean?" broke out his father, as though Dick had not already given his answer to the question. "Has he got it into his head that we're to be boycotted?"

Plainly Ralph had got this into his own head.

"Phew! Have you heard anything of

the sort?" Dick asked, turning startled eyes upon his father.

"I've had a threatening letter; but I don't want you to speak of it to your mother, or to anyone. It's probably a blackguard hoax."

"What does it say? Have you it with you?" Dick asked breathlessly.

Ralph produced it, saying, in handing it to Dick, what suggested that he did not think as lightly as he spoke of it, "I shall take it straight to the police."

The threatening "letter" turned out to be a rude drawing of a donkey reduced to a skeleton, fettered foot to foot and tethered to a stake labelled "Boycott," tantalised in front by a hand holding just out of its reach a sieve of oats labelled "Rent," and thwacked behind by a hand holding a cudgel labelled "Captain Moonlight." Underneath was the inscription—"Ned Donegan's Donkey—Boycotted."

"Infernal scoundrels!" Dick exclaimed from between his clenched teeth when he had glanced at this work of art. On examining it more minutely he added, acutely enough, "They wouldn't send a caricature like that as a serious notice."

"They'll find it serious enough, I can tell you, if the police can trace it home to them. I shall put it at once into their hands," said Ralph.

Of this resolve Dick approved heartily, and not a moment, therefore, was lost in putting the drawing and its envelope into the hands of the police.

From the barracks Ralph proceeded to his solicitor's to consult him about the mortgage, not without a misgiving as to the cold comfort he would get from Mr. Leech.

Mr. Leech was a gentleman whose ferret eye seemed to see through his spectacles

what the microscope shows to the naturalist in a drop of foul water—a crowd of loathsome creatures who spend their entire existence in preying upon each other. Every man was trying to get the better of his fellow man all the world over, however different the modes adopted, or however disinterested the motives assigned.

This was Mr. Leech's simple creed—lower than the lowest creed in the lowest circle of hell; for there goodness is at least recognised, if not reverenced.

Upon reading Old Mouser's letter, Mr. Leech said, with a sharp look over his spectacles at his client,

"He thinks he has you."

"How?"

"He knows there's no selling or mortgaging land down here at any price, and he means to foreclose."

"Do you mean that I couldn't raise the

same amount on the same mortgage elsewhere?" gasped Ralph.

Mr. Leech shook his head decidedly. "Not on mortgage, nor on sale, now."

"But the rental alone is £870," exclaimed Ralph.

"Nominal?"

"It's worth half as much again, if it's worth a farthing," Ralph answered vehemently, but evasively.

"But if it doesn't bring half as much in?" replied Mr. Leech, looking keenly up into his client's face, to find there the answer he expected.

"And here's the Plan of Campaign got to Ballydysart," he added, as though he were speaking of the spread of the cholera.

Ralph stared at him for a little in silent dismay before he asked, "You don't think, then, the money can be raised?"

"I don't; I don't, indeed."

"But Desmond O'Brien mortgaged Garrymoyle not three months ago for £4,000."

"He's never had his rents in arrear, or any dispute or difficulty with his tenants. There's where it is. He's gone in for popularity, a much more expensive thing to keep up than a pack of hounds, I can tell you."

"But one acre of Dunboyne Bottoms is worth any three of Garrymoyle."

"It doesn't bring it in, though, my dear sir," objected Mr. Leech, who, indeed, of all men living, held fastest for the Hudibrastic motto:

> "For what is worth in anything
> But so much money as 't will bring?"

"If the Dunboyne tenants don't pay, won't pay, and can't be made to pay, where are you?"

"But they *can* be made to pay—pay or quit—pay or quit!" cried Ralph, excitedly.

Mr. Leech shook his head slowly. "One Claughessy on your hands is enough, Mr. Fitzgerald. It's he that has done this," placing his forefinger on the letter.

"He!"

"Well, I think so. Your trouble with Claughessy has made a great stir, and put your property in quarantine, so to speak. No one will look at it so long as there's any fear of the Plan of Campaign or of a boycott; and so Mr. D'Arcy hopes to foreclose. He's just as clever a man as there is in the country!" he added, in a burst of irrepressible admiration.

"He's an infernal old Shylock!" cried Ralph, furious at once with Old Mouser and with Mr. Leech for his admiration of him. "Am I to understand, then, that you decline to raise this loan for me?" he

asked, with startling asperity for a man usually so suave to all except his family and dependents.

"Certainly not, my dear sir; I shall do all I can; and if it can be done it shall be done; you may depend upon that. But I thought it only right to prepare you for difficulty, and perhaps disappointment—that was all."

"Then I'll leave it in your hands for the present," Ralph said stiffly, feeling still at once wroth and wretched.

"Thank you, I shall attend to it at once, and let you know if anything turns up. Pray, allow me," he cried, obsequiously hurrying forward to open the door for Ralph, who had turned to quit the office. "Good morning, Mr. Fitzgerald, and thank you," he said effusively to the departing client, adding in the same breath, as he returned to the room, "Old Mouser

has you in his web and will suck all the buzz out of you, my boy."

Having heard nothing from Mr. Leech for three days of unsupportable suspense, Ralph called, as though casually, at the attorney's office.

'I thought I'd drop in as I was passing," he said, with an affectation of off-hand unconcern which did not impose upon Mr. Leech.

"To be sure, to be sure. You've not heard of anything?" he asked, as though their relations were reversed.

"I? I left the matter altogether in your hands, Mr. Leech, as I thought you understood?"

"Certainly; of course; only I thought, perhaps, that you might have heard of some likely party. No? Nor I, sir; though I've not been idle, I assure you. But this report is ruinous—ruinous."

"Report! What report?"

"About this threatening letter," replied Mr. Leech, looking sharply up over his glasses into his client's face. "I understand that you had a letter threatening you with the Plan of Campaign."

"Nothing of the kind," Ralph retorted.

"Well, now; upon my word this is too bad—too bad really. It is actionable. If we can trace this lying report to its author, we can make him smart for it."

"Where did you hear it?" Ralph asked sharply.

"Everywhere, my dear sir, everywhere. I never knew a report without any foundation travel so far and fast."

"It was not absolutely without foundation," Ralph said slowly after a pause for consideration. "I got by post a blackguard caricature, but there was nothing in it about the Plan of Campaign."

"You have not been talking about it?" asked the lawyer in a tone which suggested that such an indiscretion was incredible.

"I gave it into the hands of the police," Ralph answered almost defiantly.

Mr. Leech drew in his breath with a hissing sound expressive of amazement and commiseration.

"That was injudicious, my dear sir, if you'll forgive me for saying so. Crying 'Stinking fish' is not the way to sell mackerel."

"It was only a scoundrelly hoax," cried Ralph.

"Just so, my dear sir; then why make a serious matter of it by putting it into the hands of the police? You've just hoisted the yellow flag upon the property to warn every one off."

Ralph remained gloomily silent for some

moments, and then said almost fiercely, "Then you don't think you can mortgage it on the same terms?"

"Not on any terms at present, my dear sir. Perhaps in a few months, if things settle down, I might get you an offer at somewhat higher interest—"

Ralph turned and quitted the office with offensive abruptness.

CHAPTER XVII.

A DELICATE NEGOTIATION.

As Ralph strode away from the attorney's office he could not help seeing, even through the clouds of his wrath, that here was much truth and sense in what Leech had said about the imprudence of advertising as leprous a property he was seeking to mortgage.

At any rate, as it was the lawyer's interest to keep the business in his own hands, he could not be suspected of an intention to affront or estrange a client. The very last thing such a man as Leech was likely to do was to drive away a client by

exaggerating the hopelessness of his affairs. If, therefore, the lawyer could see no hope in the present and small hope in the future of mortgaging the property even at higher interest than that paid to Old Mouser, Ralph might well despair—as he did.

As he drove gloomily home he thought at first of an interview with Old Mouser, in the hope of persuading him to extend at least, if not to cancel, the notice calling in the loan on the mortgage. On second thoughts, however, he saw that such a virtual confession of his inability to get another mortgagee would but confirm the old miser's determination to have either his money or the Dunboyne Bottoms. There remained an appeal to Tom D'Arcy, who, if he were as desperately infatuated with Shiela as Dick supposed, would certainly make an effort to shield her and her people from ruin.

On reaching Cahircalla, therefore, he sought Dick up and held conference with him in the library.

"Has young D'Arcy returned yet, Dick?"

"I haven't heard."

"I've just seen Leech."

"Yes?"

"He says no one will look at it. There's some d—— report got everywhere that we are threatened with the 'Plan of Campaign,' which makes it not worth a rush in the market."

"We aren't, are we?" exclaimed Dick in consternation.

"No, of course we aren't; but those infernal fools, the police, have been blathering about the caricature all over the place. I wish to God we had flung it in the fire."

"There was nothing in it about the 'Plan of Campaign,'" Dick said defen-

sively, fearing that his father would hold his advice responsible for their resort to the police.

"No," Ralph replied absently; adding after a few moments' silence—"I think you're wrong about young D'Arcy having no influence with his father. Brennan told me yesterday that since Tom showed he could make money for himself, Old Mouser consults him about everything."

"Do you mean that Tom advised this?"

"I never thought of that," his father replied in a tone which suggested his surprise that there could be a suspicion which had not occurred to him.

"It's the very last thing he'd do," Dick said with some heat. "Besides, he was from home when the letter was written."

"I suppose he didn't," his father said consideringly, adding, "I only wish he had though."

"What do you mean?"

"He'd be easier to deal with than Old Mouser, wouldn't he?" Ralph answered evasively, for indeed this was not the real reason in his thoughts.

"He had nothing to do with it," Dick said decidedly.

"Just so; then we may hope he'll help us. He's been so exceedingly friendly about that filly and in protecting Shiela and your mother in our absence that I'm sure he'll do all he can for us with his father."

The significance of the allusion to the filly and of the mention of Shiela—of whom ordinarily her father never spoke or thought—was not lost upon Dick.

"I don't think he can do anything with his father—not about this anyhow. As likely as not it's just his friendliness with us that has put his father up to this."

In other words, that Old Mouser disapproved of his son's "intentions" towards Shiela.

"Anyway, it would be well to see the young fellow and find out what he thinks about it—eh?"

"But God knows where he is. There's no race on anywhere that I know of."

"You might ride over to-morrow to inquire about him."

Accordingly Dick rode over next day and found that his friend had been already two days returned.

"I meant to look you up to-day," he said in answer to Dick's reproaches to him for not letting him know at once of his return.

"Well, come along over now. My father is most anxious to thank you for the good care you took of my mother and Shiela."

"Pooh! That's not worth thanking for. But, I say, is it true the scoundrels have sent him a threatening letter?"

"It was only a hoax—a blackguard caricature. How did you hear of it?"

"Oh, it's all over the place; but I thought it was more serious—a notice of boycott, or 'The Plan,' or of Captain Moonlight."

"It was nothing but a stupid picture, which my father handed over to the police, who seem to have made a foolish fuss about it."

"It was a d—— foolish thing to spread about—a d—— foolish thing!" reiterated D'Arcy with an emphasis which surprised Dick.

"It has worried the governor a good deal, that and your father's notice calling in this money."

"What money?"

"The money lent on mortgage of the Dunboyne Bottoms. Didn't you know?"

"Do you mean that he's given legal notice for the repayment of the loan?"

"Yes; he said he was quitting the country for good—going to live in England."

"Not he; he's always threatening that."

"Then why should he recall this loan? It's safe enough."

"I tell you what; he must have heard of this threatening letter."

"It wasn't that, for it came by the same post as his notice."

"Then your trouble with Claughessy and this moonlighting raid has frightened him. That's it. He's always now in a blue funk of the 'Plan of Campaign;' and he thinks that if your father was put under it the Dunboyne Bottoms wouldn't be worth more than Ballinahinch Lake."

"But there isn't the least chance of our being put under it; not the slightest."

"I wish they hadn't set that d—— report going!" D'Arcy cried in a tone of extreme annoyance. "Give a dog a bad name, you know, and it's all U—P with him."

"Has your father heard it?"

"He has said nothing to me of it; but it wasn't of him I was thinking, for he's done his worst in recalling the loan. But how the deuce are you to raise it now with this report about?"

"Leech says the same thing."

"Of course he does; anyone must see it and say it. I wish your father hadn't handed it to those police fools, who talk of everything and never find out anything."

"It can't be helped now."

"No," D'Arcy answered almost distressfully.

"I suppose it would be no use to ask

your father to cancel the notice—at least for the present," Dick suggested diffidently, since it was plain that his friend had not contemplated this even as a possibility.

"My father!" he exclaimed in an amazed tone and with a short laugh. "I thought you knew the kind of man my father is. If he had an idea that you'd a difficulty in raising the loan he'd get into a panic and press all the more for his money."

"I thought that you might have influence enough with him to get us at least a little more time."

"I've only influence with him when I can put him up to a good speculation; and I'd lose that if I advised him to do anything that cost him sixpence."

"But this wouldn't cost him sixpence," Dick urged. "He couldn't get better interest anywhere on as good a security."

"He won't see it. He's ceased to be-

lieve in land; it's gone down so by the run in Ireland, and in England too, for that matter, and he doesn't think it has touched bottom yet."

"But the Dunboyne Bottoms would fetch as much again as the mortgage to-morrow."

"They might be worth as much. But—" Here D'Arcy shook his head incredulously.

Dick was proceeding to prove eagerly by the rental the capital value of the property, when his friend interrupted him to say,

"After all it isn't what it's worth, but what he thinks it worth, that we've to consider; and nothing would persuade him to give five years' purchase at present for any land in Ireland."

As there was no possible answer to this, Dick remained gloomily silent. Presently D'Arcy said sympathetically—"I hope you

know, old fellow, that if I could do anything with the governor in this business, I would ; but I couldn't, even if I wasn't deep in his black books at present. I never got such a jawing in my life as he gave me this morning for being so much from home. He has got it into his head that I have a wife or a mistress hidden away somewhere, and that this is the reason of what he calls my 'mysterious absences.' I fancy that blathering old idiot, Brennan, has been making mischief as usual."

This for a wonder was the simple truth. His father had got this idea into his head, and had got it from the only friend he had in the world, Mr. Phil Brennan of the Grove.

As Dick, who was too full of his own trouble to spare much sympathy to his friend's, remained morosely irresponsive, D'Arcy continued—

"It was no use to swear that there wasn't a word of truth in the scandal, for he said that if I'd act a lie I'd tell a lie; and that nothing but my getting married would convince him that there was no entanglement of the kind. I answered that I'd marry if I could afford to marry, and so I got and kept him in a corner till he promised he'd settle £500 a year on me if I married to his satisfaction."

Dick's attention was secured now.

"Someone of his choosing?" he asked with ill-concealed eagerness.

"That's what he bargained for at first; but I played him like a forty-pound salmon, and landed him at last, by George!"

"He'll let you please yourself!" cried Dick in breathless admiration.

"If I choose anyone respectable—that is, of course, anyone with a respectable fortune."

"Oh!" Dick said with a sudden drop to disappointment in his tone.

This, however, his friend seemed not to notice, perhaps owing to his absorption in delighted contemplation of the cleverness of his diplomacy, for he continued—"You see I was so grateful for his generous offer that I made a frank confession of an entanglement of the kind he suspected."

"I didn't know," began Dick.

"Nor I till I confessed it," D'Arcy hastened to say with a laugh of high enjoyment. "You see the old boy will give nothing for nothing—he never has all his life, and isn't likely to begin now—so I had to make up a swap. If I gave up the mistress I was so devoted to he must let me choose my own wife. He agreed at last; of course, on the condition that she had some money. I do believe he'd rather I kept a mistress, or a harem, all my life

than I'd marry a girl without a fortune."

Hereupon Dick relapsed into gloom.

Again I must pāuse to notice a noteworthy thing—that D'Arcy's whole account of this diplomatic negotiation with his father was true to the letter. To Dick, however, the announcement that his friend was pledged to marry a girl with a fortune was merely an intimation that he had given up all idea of Shiela. Whatever hopes he and his father had built upon D'Arcy's fancy for her were overthrown, therefore, by this confidence.

"Well, I must be going," he said, rousing himself at last, and rising to quit the little smoking den where they were closeted together.

"You'll stop for lunch?" asked D'Arcy.

"No, thanks."

The sudden chill in Dick's manner and

its meaning were not lost upon his friend.

"But don't go yet anyway. There's something I want to say to you if I can only say it," D'Arcy said with some embarrassment.

"Yes," Dick rejoined with surprise and interest as he reseated himself.

D'Arcy proceeded to knock the ashes out of his pipe in a deliberate and absent-minded way, and then to refill it slowly with the same air of preoccupation. Having at last lit it and taken a few quick and strenuous pulls at it to get it well aglow, he took it from between his lips to say—"Look here, Fitzgerald, you know how I feel towards your sister, and that I'd rather have her without a penny than the richest heiress in Ireland—if she'd have me," he added modestly. Dick muttered something in response about their "being honoured,"

or the like ordinary formula. "But here's this governor of mine insisting on my marrying a girl with some fortune," continued D'Arcy in a tone of irritation. "He thinks the £500 a year he gives me on my marriage ought to be met by some equivalent; and he'll certainly not allow me a farthing if it isn't." As Dick made no reply, D'Arcy took up the running again, somewhat hesitatively. "Well, then, I hope you'll not think me sordid, old fellow, if I suggest a kind of compromise that would get us all out of our difficulties—that is, supposing I had the great good fortune to win your sister. If your father would make over the Dunboyne Bottoms to her as her fortune I would be responsible for the mortgage upon it to my father. You see," he hurried on to say, "you'd lose by this only the difference between what the property would fetch in a low and falling market

and the amount of the loan. How much would that be? Honestly, I think £1,000 would cover it."

This seemed to Dick an exceedingly reasonable statement and offer. Having thought over it for a little he said, "Well, but there's your father—he'll not think £1,000 a sufficient fortune."

"£1,000! You don't really suppose the governor will cancel the mortgage? Pooh! Not he. He'll exact the last penny of the interest from me as rigidly as from anyone else. I tell you just what the old boy will do—he'll deduct the amount of the interest from my allowance of £500 a year."

"But that will hardly leave you enough to live on."

"Oh, I'm not dependent upon him for something to live on," D'Arcy replied with a significant side nod of the head. "I can

manage very well until he drops off—very well."

There was silence for some seconds while Dick went over the whole calculation and arrangement again in his mind, with the result of an increased appreciation of D'Arcy's generosity. Nothing was more probable than that Old Mouser would exact even from his son the uttermost farthing of the interest on the mortgage; and D'Arcy, therefore, was practically taking their debt upon himself. The £1,000 or so, representing the difference between what the property was mortgaged for and what it would sell for to-day, was but a small set-off against this debt and a small dowry for Shiela. An older man than Dick might have suspected that his friend never meant to pay his father a farthing of the interest from D'Arcy's continually recurring to his father being as much of a

Shylock in exacting a debt from him as from the merest stranger.

In renewing his acknowledgments to D'Arcy, Dick pressed him to dine with them that evening and talk the matter over with his father.

"Thank you; I shall be very glad," D'Arcy said, and then added with natural and becoming embarrassment—"It's your sister I fear most. I wish you'd do what you can for me there."

"I think you've done a good deal for yourself; she says you behaved like a hero that night."

"*She* was the hero," D'Arcy rejoined enthusiastically; and he then proceeded to give a lover's account of Shiela's courage and coolness in the encounter with the Moonlighters. To this Dick listened with more patience, and indeed complacency, than one would expect from a brother; but his

own admiration of Shiela had curiously enough increased since, and through their partial estrangement. Like most folk, he held cheap what he got cheap, and Shiela's devotion had become common to him as sunlight; while her fine, self-contained, and high-toned character adequately impressed him only now when he stood a little aloof from her—

> "Orbed into the perfect star,
> He saw not when he moved therein."

Besides, Shiela's character had been developed with tropical swiftness and ripeness by the events of the last few weeks, as both Dick and her father had come to perceive dimly, and were soon to realise completely and unpleasantly.

But, indeed, Dick, even as he rode home that morning, had his own misgivings as to his sister's amenability to persuasion

in this matter. She certainly had spoken highly of D'Arcy's dash and daring that night; but would she have been so outspoken and eloquent thereabout if she had cared for him? Even Dick knew that girls, however artfully or artlessly they may lead round to the praises by others of the heroes of their hearts, never themselves dare to strike the note or join the chorus. But Shiela had more than once spoken to him with warmth of D'Arcy's heroic rescue of her. Why did she dwell on and return to the subject? Was it not because the obligation oppressed her, which it would certainly not have done if she could have acknowledged and repaid it in the way D'Arcy hoped for. This Dick rather felt dimly than clearly reasoned out as he rode back to Cahircalla. Still Shiela was the last girl in the world, Dick thought, to be won at once; and though she might not

feel towards D'Arcy as he felt towards her, there was every hope of her returning his devotion in time. There was no rival in the case, and an ungarrisoned heart could not long stand a siege of such an heroic kind as D'Arcy's. For the more Dick reflected upon D'Arcy's proposal for extricating them from their difficulties, the more magnanimous it appeared. How to make it appear magnanimous to Shiela, without giving her the impression that D'Arcy counted coolly upon her hand, was the problem which Dick revolved as he neared home. At any rate he must see and sound and in some way prepare her before he made his report to his father. If his father were, without a word of preparation or explanation, to thunder his peremptory commands to her in the Sir Anthony Absolute style, Dick knew that all was lost. When he had reached this point in his reflec-

tions he was startled by a shout from his father,

"Halloa! Dick! Well? What news? He's not back yet?"

Dick had to dismount and make his report then and there to his father.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AT BAY.

It had never once occurred to Dick to doubt that—however Shiela might regard D'Arcy's offer—his father would welcome it as an immense relief. What, therefore, was his surprise when Ralph burst out vehemently—"Settle the Dunboyne Bottoms on Shiela! Does he think, or she think, that I've taken leave of my senses?"

"You would only settle on her the difference between what they'd sell for and what they're mortgaged for — which would not be much more than a thousand pounds

as land is going now," Dick urged when he had recovered from his surprise.

"I don't care what they'd sell for. I shall not settle them on her—the very finest land in the county! Three-fourths of my rental! I shall not settle them on her, and so you may tell her," Ralph exclaimed at white heat.

"She knows nothing at all of it," Dick retorted indignantly. "The idea only occurred to D'Arcy just now when I told him our difficulty."

"What difficulty? What difficulty is there in selling the Bottoms if I must part with them at all? A fine way out of a difficulty! Make a present of the property to get rid of the mortgage on it! Cut off your foot to cure a corn!"

"Well, there's no harm done. You can refuse his offer, and there's an end of it," Dick said in a tone of impatience.

"Do you mean his proposal for Shiela?" his father asked, cooling down considerably.

"That goes with it, of course. His father will allow him £500 a year on his marriage, only on the condition that the girl he marries brings him some fortune. Old Mouser would certainly not call the £1,000 he'd get with Shiela under this arrangement a fortune; and so D'Arcy, to get his consent to the marriage, will undertake to pay him the interest on the mortgage out of his allowance."

"And what will they have left to live on?" asked Ralph rather petulantly than passionately, since the idea of losing this eligible son-in-law was now replacing in his mind the idea of losing the Dunboyne Bottoms.

"He has means of his own, he says."

After they had walked on together for

a few yards in sullen silence, Ralph stopped suddenly to exclaim, "It has been arranged between them!"

"Between whom?" asked Dick in exasperation, thinking that Shiela was again being suspected preposterously of plotting with D'Arcy for a dowry. But his father, who had hitherto half fancied that Old Mouser had sent the notice with the object of breaking off his son's relations with Shiela, now suspected father and son of plotting together to secure a rich dowry with the girl.

"Did he say he knew nothing of his father's notice?"

"Yes."

"Then they arranged it between them," Ralph cried emphatically.

"What for? Can't you see that Old Mouser, if he didn't foreclose, could buy the Bottoms now for a thousand pounds

more than the amount of the loan. What's a thousand pounds as a fortune for a fellow with such expectations as D'Arcy? It will be the hardest day's work D'Arcy ever had to get his father's consent to the match; you may take your oath of that!" Dick cried, losing sight of respect and refinement in his excitement.

"My consent, I suppose, isn't worth asking," growled Ralph, feeling himself beaten upon the other point. "Your sister seems to think she can walk away with three-fourths of my property without condescending even to mention her engagement to her mother or me."

"I told you she knows nothing at all of this proposal of D'Arcy's, or of any other proposal either. He hasn't proposed to her yet, and I doubt very much if she'll have him when he does."

Then did Ralph's rage, roused by the

mere idea of the loss of the Dunboyne Bottoms, find its most natural channel. He raved incoherently and inconsistently first against Shiela's audacious precocity in thinking of such things at all, and then against her audacious fastidiousness in hesitating to accept such a man and match as young D'Arcy. Finally he wound up with an expression he seemed to think so happy that he repeated it—"If she chooses to be so independent, she had better be independent altogether. I can't afford to keep her in idleness if I'm robbed of three-fourths of my property."

As his father was in too furious a rage for Dick to object that Shiela could not at the same time decline the proposed match and carry off the proposed dowry, he kept a discreet silence until Ralph had repeated the phrase he had happened upon and fancied felicitous.

"She can be as independent as she likes when she earns an independence, and so I shall tell her."

"If you say anything of that sort to her she will certainly refuse him," Dick cried in his impatience of his father's stupid misunderstanding of Shiela's character.

"I'll say what I choose to her. I'll say what I choose to her!" burst out his father more furiously than ever. "What! I'm not to speak above my breath to my own daughter! I'm not to give her advice because she's sure to go against it! She'll certainly refuse him, if she thinks I wish her to accept him! Let her refuse him and go and earn her independence. Whose loss is it if she refuses him? Do you think I'm so anxious to be robbed of my property to enrich her? Let her refuse him, and take her

own way and make her own way; for I can tell you I shall not support her only to be disobeyed and defied by her!"

Dick, perceiving that his attempt to dam or divert the torrent of his father's fury only fretted it into fiercer rage, relapsed into gloomy silence, of which his father took advantage to hold forth upon the duties of children to their parents until they reached the house. Here they parted, Ralph going in, and Dick round to the stables. As he handed over the horse to Patsey he asked if he had seen Miss Shiela, who, he felt, must, of all things and by all means, be kept out of her father's way until his fury had subsided.

"She's gone to Brian Hurley's, Masther Dick, I'm thinkin', for she tuk through the wood. Maybe it's goin' to meet her you'll be?"

"Yes; has she gone long?"

"An hour, an' betther. Masther Dick!" he added, as Dick turned away.

"Yes?" Dick replied, facing round again.

"Miss Shiela bates the worruld for sperit; begorra, she does so! But it isn't fit for the like's of her to be goin' here, there, and iverywhere by herself. Ye might keep wid her, Masther Dick—if I may make so bould—widout lettin' an that ye're purtectin' her."

"You've heard something?" Dick cried, turning startled eyes upon Patsey.

"Me! Yerra, Masther Dick, do you think it's me they'd be afther tellin' of any plot agin Miss Shiela. Moirya!" he cried with genuine scorn. "But here's where it is, Masther Dick; the peelers an' the papers have been sayin' that she's a shpy, an' informer, an' manes to hang

thim moonlighters, an' there's thim that knows no better nor to believe it of her; an' it's a bad, black name to get anyhow."

Dick, having thought a little with knitted brow over this, exclaimed, "What an infernal country to live in!" and turned abruptly away.

"If ye, an' the likes of ye, was out of it, we'd find it aisier to live in," Patsey muttered, as he looked after Dick with a scowl, which, indeed, that young gentleman (who always treated Patsey and the peasantry as the dirt under his boots) had fairly earned.

Dick proceeded in search of Shiela, meditating in what way to prepare her at once for D'Arcy's intended proposal and for her father's furious unreasonableness. But at this very moment Shiela was being made aware of both without

any preparation. Not having gone, as Patsey supposed, as far as Brian Hurley's, she had returned to the house a few minutes before Dick and his father; and, as ill-luck would have it, was in the breakfast room when Ralph hurried there to denounce her to her mother.

"I have just been speaking to your brother about you," Ralph cried, in a tone which made Shiela look up with a frightened face. Having been from infancy snubbed, scolded, and bullied—when she was not ignored—by her father, she had come to fear him more than anyone in the world. "I have just been speaking to your brother about you, and he tells me you don't think Mr. D'Arcy good enough for you. All I can say is this, that if you choose to refuse him when he proposes for you—as he means to do—you may just make your own way in the world." As Shiela looked stupefied at this

sudden and savage onslaught, he added, "Do you understand? If you choose to be so independent, you'd better earn an independence. I can't go on supporting you in idleness when I'm being robbed of three-fourths of my property. Do you understand?" he reiterated yet more sharply.

"Yes."

"I mean it, mind you," he cried, in furious impatience with what he took for impertinent coolness. "You can do as you like, but you know now what you're doing." So saying he strode from the room.

We always get to dislike intensely those whom we have unjustly made to fear us; and this dislike is infinitely deepened if such fear does not flatter our sense of power—if the victim is at once feeble and passive; is at our mercy but does not cry for mercy. This will explain, perhaps, the brutality of Ralph's onslaught upon his defenceless daughter.

He was beside himself with rage to begin with, which indeed his harping together upon the loss of D'Arcy as a son-in-law, and of the Dunboyne Bottoms as the dowry D'Arcy was to receive with his daughter, showed. And this rage was fretted into fury against Shiela's seeming stony immovability; for he took the stupefaction of surprise and fear for the bravado of defiance.

Nevertheless, he was at least right about Shiela's immovability by browbeating—and such browbeating! To be told that she must accept a man for bread! Why, in all the whole world there was not a girl whom so gross a suggestion would more revolt than Shiela. And then the alternative (presented so brutally) of expulsion from home to earn a livelihood where and how she could! That her own father, who had had her all his life under his eyes, should think her the kind of girl to be lashed

by such a threat into a shameful and hateful marriage would be hardly credible if we did not remember that there is no such "unplumbed, salt, estranging sea" as indifference. The clouded eye of hate sees at least something of our character, however discoloured or distorted, but the stony gaze of indifference looks past us; and her father for the most part took no more notice of Shiela than he did of the picture in his study which had faced him for so many years that he never glanced at it.

As for her mother, who at least understood her a little better, she, no doubt, would have perceived dimly the injudiciousness of Ralph's furious onslaught if she had known how furious it was; but Ralph had the grace to be so much ashamed of it as to give an unrecognisably softened version of it to his wife. He said merely that he had told Shiela of young D'Arcy's intention

to propose to her, and had warned her that she could not afford to refuse him in the straitened circumstances to which they were reduced.

"You had better see her and explain that I only spoke to her for her own good," he said finally, not without a misgiving that he had overdone his "moral suasion."

Accordingly, Mrs. Fitzgerald, in high elation at the prospect of young D'Arcy's proposal (which swallowed up for the moment every other consideration), made all haste to find Shiela, which she did at last in her own room.

Shiela, who had locked herself in with her wretchedness, tried in vain to escape or postpone the visit (whose purpose she rightly guessed) on the true plea of a head-ache. As, however, her mother insisted on seeing her, she rose and admitted her.

"Your father has been speaking to you,

dear," she said immediately upon her entrance, in a tone of unusual and even effusive affection towards the future Mrs. Tom D'Arcy.

"Yes," replied Shiela in a dull, mechanical voice.

"He wishes me to tell you that he spoke only for your own good."

As Shiela made no answer, her mother added somewhat sharply, "But of course you know that."

"I really have a bad headache, mother, if you wouldn't mind letting me lie down for a little."

"You mean you don't wish to hear advice from your mother!" exclaimed that good lady.

"Well, what is it, mother?" she answered wearily and resignedly.

"Oh, if that's the way you're going to take it, I may as well say nothing."

"But what is there to say, mother? Father has spoken very plainly."

"Only for your own good, as he bids me tell you, and as you ought to know yourself. Mr. D'Arcy is the very best match in the county; and I'm sure no young man ever proved his devotion more truly and bravely than he did the other night. And what we're to do I don't know—with this mortgage and no rents coming in, and that threatening letter, and everything! I don't see where we're to turn for money to keep a roof over your head! I don't indeed. And this young man—everything that could be wished—with such prospects! So steady and successful; and Dick's dearest friend, and so devoted to you! I really don't know what you'd have."

As Shiela made no response whatever, and looked as though she hardly heard what was said to her, Mrs. Fitzgerald waxed wroth.

"You seem to have made up your mind," she cried with a toss of her head.

"Yes."

"To refuse him?"

"If he asks me; but I do not think he will ask me."

"Upon my word! And may I ask who you're waiting for? Lord Dromore, perhaps; or Sir Miles O'Malley?"

As these vulgar sneers were received with the same silent and impassive listlessness, Mrs. Fitzgerald lost all patience.

"Well, all I can tell you is this, if you wait much longer you will not have a roof over your head. There's your poor father struggling and striving to keep off ruin, and you think of nothing but eating and drinking and dressing and pleasing yourself. No one is good enough for you, if you please! and you are too high and mighty even to listen to a single word your father or mother says

to you. It's honour enough for us to support you, I suppose! But who's to support you when we're ruined? If you will think only of yourself you'd better think of that. Who's to feed you, and clothe you, and keep you proud and idle and insolent when we're ruined? Maybe you'll be sorry then for the good advice you are scorning now, and the splendid chance you are going to throw away!" So saying Mrs. Fitzgerald flounced out of the room.

It was little wonder that Shiela was sure her mother had been sent by her father to make her understand distinctly and finally that she must either accept Mr. D'Arcy or quit her home to earn a livelihood where and how she could.

When her mother had quitted the room Shiela remained for some minutes standing still as a statue, staring straight before her. Then she roused herself so far as to go to

the door, to relock it, and to return to lie down upon her bed. She could not tell how long she had lain thus, trying in vain to think out some feasible plan of immediate escape from so unhappy a home, when another knock came to the door.

"Yes. Who is it?"

"It's I. I want to see you for a minute," Dick answered nervously, as Shiela's quick ear perceived. In the bitterness of her heart she believed that Dick was at the bottom of the conspiracy, for was it not he who had informed her father that "she did not think Mr. D'Arcy good enough for her"?

However, as she felt he was the only friend she had in the world to confide in and consult with, she hastened to open the door.

At sight of her white face Dick exclaimed, "My father has been speaking to you?"

Whereupon Shiela broke down into tears. Putting both her arms round her brother's neck, she sobbed,

"Oh, Dick! You shouldn't have said that!"

"What, Shiela? What did he say I said?" Dick answered, kissing her soothingly, not without compunction.

"That I thought myself too good for Mr. D'Arcy," Shiela answered, disengaging herself from Dick and drying her tears as the fury of her father's onslaught recurred vividly to her mind.

"I couldn't help it," Dick said penitently. "He was going on so, as if it was *you* wanted the dowry."

"The dowry! What dowry?"

Dick, feeling that he had committed himself irretrievably, stammered out, "It was only in case of your marriage."

"You mean that Mr. D'Arcy bargained

for a dowry!" cried Shiela, her eyes flashing through her tears.

"No, no; not 'bargained.' It was a business arrangement meant to relieve father of this mortgage."

"But I was part of it?" persisted Shiela.

"He didn't count upon your accepting him—he hardly hoped you would—but if you had, he would have gained nothing by it—in money, I mean. In fact, he would have lost by it." Then Dick went into an involved account of the whole affair, for his consciousness of having made so false a start confused him. All Shiela could gather from it was that she was to be taken off her father's hands by Mr. D'Arcy in consideration of a dowry of three-fourths of her father's property.

When, therefore, Dick, having finished his confused account of this transaction,

proceeded to plead his friend's cause with all the argument and eloquence he could command, Shiela said only,

"You must put this out of his head, Dick."

"But I can't. He thinks of nothing else."

"It's no use," she said so decidedly that Dick was nettled into making his mother's exasperating speech,

"I'm sure, I don't know what you want."

"I want to rest, Dick," she answered gently and wearily. "I am very tired, and have a bad headache, and would be glad to be left alone to lie down for an hour or two."

She despaired of sympathy even from Dick, though she did him the justice to believe that he would have given her all he was capable of giving, if he had understood her.

CHAPTER XIX.

A BAD QUARTER OF AN HOUR.

SHIELA did not come down to lunch, but was ministered to by a kind-hearted housemaid, who, to use Mary Malony's own phrase, "thought the world and all of her."

And from this housemaid, curiously enough, our heroine got the hint for which her mind had been groping confusedly and in vain. Mary had brought her up the unfailing feminine nepenthe—a cup of tea—which with many soothing words she coaxed her to take.

"It's on the nerves it is, Miss Shiela—it is so," she pronounced with a sage and

decided nod of her head. "It's the shake ye got, miss, savin' Masther Dick, an' thin thim murdherers an' moonlighters—bad luck to 'em!—it's thim that's done it. Ye'd not be afther feelin' 'em at the time, for yere sperrit kep' ye up, miss; but thim kind of things always waits till they gets ye down, an' thin they're all an to ye together."

"There's something in that, Mary," Shiela answered with a wan smile.

"Sorra a thing else it is, Miss Shiela. There was my ould masther, Captain Creagh, as fine a man as iver sthepped—rest his sowl!—an' he was in a railway accident in England—more betoken he was on his way home from Agypt an' Roosia wid medals for ivery black man he kilt as thick as thatch on his red coat, an' sorra a scratch he got himself, barrin' a bullet through the back of his busby, till

he come home an' tuk the thrain for Ireland, an' there was an accident, as I'm tellin' ye, miss, an' many's the poor cray-thur had his sowl tore out of his body wid their tryin' to pull him from under the smashed carriages—glory be to God!—but there was the captain widout a hair on his head hurt, as ye might be afther thinkin'; for he was here and there, an' in an' out, busy as a barber; liftin' this wan, an' carryin' that, an' risin' the weight of a smashed carriage off the other—an' whin he'd done all he could he telegraphed home to Miss Kitty—his eldest daughter, miss, who kep' house for him—an' a fine girl she was too, Miss Shiela, but awful particular about her hair—he telegraphed to her, as I'm tellin' ye, miss, to say that he wasn't a penny the worse, an' would take the next thrain to Ireland; an' so he did, an' come home an tould us all about

it, an' how he eshcaped wid a bit of a shakin'. 'Nothin' can hurt me,' he says laughin'. 'It's a charrumed life I bear, I'm thinkin',' he says. 'All thim bullets in all thim battles could only make a hole in the back of me busby; an' a hole in me coat is all I've got by that accident,' he says; 'an' more betoken,' he says, 'I'll be afther suin' the company for a new suit of clothes; eh, Kitty?' he says jokin' like, an' little thinkin' that Miss Kitty would have to take the law on thim for his' death. For thrue as ye'er lyin' there, Miss Shiela, he was in his coffin widin six months! Ay! he was so, glory be to God! For ye see, Miss Shiela, he was hurted widout his feelin' it at the time, an' it come back an him—an' his nerves—an' he lay paralysed for months an the broad of his back, wid Miss Kitty nursin' him night an' day till he died—an'

thin she took to nursin' for a livin', an' she a born lady, Miss Shiela!"

"Did she get nothing from the railway company?"

"She got what was left afther thim lawyers had their bite at it—the thieves of the wurruld! It's little pickin' the hounds lave the huntsman off the bones of a fox. Anyway, it was little she got for what she had to do wid it an' wid the bit of insurance money; for ye see, miss, there was two sisters to be sent to school an' a brother to get into the army, an' what money there was went to that, an' the little she could save out of her salary as a nurse besides. She had a good heart an' a sperrit that bate the wurruld! 'Mary,' she says to me, she says, 'Mary, I'll have to give up housekeepin'; I'll have to give ye notice,' she says. 'Sure an' there's no hurry, Miss Kitty,' I says as well as I

could wid the cryin' ; but sorra a tear she had, Miss Shiela, for her heart had run dhry wid trouble. 'There's this hurry,' she says, 'that I can't afford to sthay another day idle, Mary. I must go out an' earn my livin',' she says. 'As a governess, miss?' I says. 'No,' she says, 'I'm not clever enough for a governess. I'm goin' out as a nurse, Mary,' she says. 'As a nurse?' I says. 'Lord bless us! Miss Kitty, an' ye a lady born an' bred!' 'Oh, lots of ladies take to nursin' now,' she says. 'They goes to a hospital an' gets thrained, an' is sent out where they're wanted.' 'Oh, Miss Kitty, Miss Kitty,' I says, 'if your poor father—' But at that wurrd she turned away, an' niver sphoke to me no more about it, Miss Shiela. But she done it, miss ; she done what she said before her poor father was a month

in his grave. Ay, she done it, for she had a sperrit pasht everything."

"And how did she get on, Mary?" asked Shiela, with an interest which surprised and flattered the girl.

"Finely, miss. Just before I come to ye, when I was stayin' at home a bit wid me sick mother, Miss Kitty pays me a visit, lookin' beautiful in her nurse's dhress, for all the worruld like wan of the holy sisters. 'An' how are ye gettin' an, Miss Kitty?' I says, an' she says, says she, 'I'll tell ye nothin', Mary, till ye sit down. Ye're not my sarvant now,' she says, 'an' anyway,' she says, 'it's a sarvant I am now myself,' she says, laughin'. 'Ah, Miss Kitty,' I says, 'I seen how it would be. It's a governess ye should have been, if ye had to go out at all,' I says. 'A governess!' she says, 'I wouldn't change places wid any governess in Ireland,' she says,

'no, nor wid no wan else either,' she says. 'Nursin' is the grandest worruk in the worruld,' she says, 'for ye know ye're doin' nothin' but good, an' ye can see the good ye do growin' undher yere eyes ivery day,' she says. But sorra a much of it I seen, Miss Shiela," Mary added dryly, with a twinkle in her blue eyes, "for she was nearly the death of my poor mother wid her new-fangled an' fidgety ways. She come twiced agin to larn me how to nurse her—for she'd a heart of goold, had Miss Kitty; she had so — but if there was a crumb in the bed it must be made over agin, an' she'd have a dhraught blowin' through the room that 'ud turn a windmill, miss. An' when she'd go, mother ud say wid her teeth chatterin', the crathur, ''Tis she's the kind young lady, Mary. Is she comin' agin?' 'She is, mother,' I says, shuttin' the window. 'Och-

hone!' she says, 'pity of the worruld the poor captain died,' she says. 'It's now ye're beginnin' to feel for him, mother,' I says, laughin', 'but Miss Kitty manes well,' I says. 'She does so,' she says; 'she's a kind young lady. An' she's comin' agin? Well, we must all go when our time comes,' she says."

Mary's inimitable humorous mimicry of her mother's tone of resignation tickled Shiela to laughter—which, however, came from a far lighter heart than she had before the girl began her rigmarole narrative. For Mary had suggested to her a possible path of independence — the one thing of which Shiela's mind had been for hours in confused and vain search—why should not she also take to nursing? She had neither the knowledge, taste, nor experience to qualify her for teaching, but the art of nursing was surely not beyond her acquisi-

tion. Of the details of this disgusting, if divine, calling she never thought distinctly, or she would have turned from it in unconquerable repulsion; but what was heroic in it seized upon her imagination, and "Miss Kitty's" commendation of it as the one calling in the world in which you could do only good, and in which you could see the good you did daily grow under your eyes, kindled her enthusiasm. Above all it was a practicable path of immediate independence.

But how get your foot upon this path? What was the first step? She must see and consult Dr. Cullinan without disclosing to him the reasons of her resolution to adopt at once this strange calling. As for the family boycott of the doctor she had no scruple, under the circumstances of her own boycott by her parents, in breaking through it for so paramount a purpose.

Having come to this resolution she was all impatience to carry it out. She contrived to get rid of Mary, to steal unobserved from the house, and to reach the doctor's before the grey February afternoon had darkened towards evening. It was not until she had knocked timidly at the doctor's door that she had a misgiving about finding him at home at so unlikely an hour. Before she could make up her mind whether in this event to write and leave a letter for him, or to take her chance of being able to call again to-morrow, the door was opened by the self-important and inquisitive housekeeper, who insisted upon her coming in, though the doctor was from home. In truth the good lady was on fire with curiosity to discover the business which had brought Shiela in the teeth of her father's proscription of her master: though, therefore, she was absolutely cer-

tain that the doctor would not be home before dinner, she induced Shiela to come in by the assurance that she expected her master back every moment. Having once got Shiela in she proceeded to pump her with the most unwearied, unabashed, but unproductive persistence. To all her questions Shiela, less from caution than from preoccupation of mind, made such monosyllabic answers that her inquisitor gave her up in despair and in dudgeon. If the young lady was so high and mighty she might wait for an hour or two; that would do her no harm; it might, maybe, bring her down a peg. Accordingly she left Shiela to herself till the darkening room warned her at last to hurry home. Having rung the bell and left word with the maid who answered it in default of the affronted housekeeper, that she hoped to call early to-morrow morning on the

doctor, she then quitted the house in haste.

Having got well clear of the village she quickened her pace, only in fear of her absence from home being noticed and inquired into. Of no other danger had she thought until she reached the skirts of Dunran Wood. At this point her quick ear heard a voice exclaim in a suppressed tone, "Miss Fitzgerald!" Thinking herself addressed, she was on the point of stopping, when another voice answered, also in a suppressed tone, whose ferocious triumph, however, there was no mistaking, "By G— it is so!"

"Hould an! Hould an!" cried the first man.

"Let go, d— you!" shouted the other in furious excitement.

Shiela, though now flying on the wings of terror, could hear the snapping and

rustling of branches caused by a short, slight struggle between the men. In another second she heard the heavy thud of a man's feet in landing from a leap upon the road, and then steps behind her in swift pursuit. Just at this moment, in rounding an elbow of the road, she perceived a cart empty and unhorsed, with its shafts resting on the grassy margin of the track; and quick as lightning the thought struck her that here was her sole chance of escape. Upon springing into the cart she found a frieze coat lying upon the straw strewn on the bottom, and under this she crept. As she pulled it well over her head she noticed that there was a piece out of the collar! A horrible certainty that it belonged to the murderer of the sergeant stopped for a moment the loud beating of her heart. Perhaps—probably—to this

very man now in murderous pursuit of her! Quick as the thought occurred to her he had reached and passed her hiding-place in headlong pursuit. She waited till his heavy footfall sounded fainter, when she started up to fly back to the village. Just then the ring upon the hard road of a horse's hoofs approaching from the direction of her home gave her courage in the certainty of an escort. As she was about to spring from the cart to await beside it the approach of this escort, the horse stopped —within twenty yards of her—and enabled her to hear the harsh voice of her pursuer.

"It's in the wood she is, thin.'

"She didn't pass me, anyway."

"D— her! She's shlipped me agin," the ruffian cried savagely.

"We've enough to do to-night widout

botherin' wid a shlip of a gurrl," answered the man with the horse.

"D— her!" reiterated the other, with redoubled ferocity; and then added impatiently, "Come an wid ye out of that."

As they started, Shiela almost instinctively clambered back into the cart and cowered down again upon the straw and underneath the coat. What if the man stopped in passing to take the coat from the cart? She ought to have attempted to clamber over the fence into the wood. She might possibly have had time to do it unseen. It was too late now. It was. Yet it seemed rather an hour than a minute to Shiela before the slow paced horse reached the cart; and many times before it reached it she fancied it was just passing it. But there was no mistake about its having reached it when it came at last, for it stopped.

"Hould up the shafts," cried the man who was leading it.

She felt the cart tilted up into a horizontal position.

"Where's Mike? Back, will ye? Where's Mike?" asked the man as he backed the horse in.

"He's in the Crow's Nest by this.

"It'll be a dark night."

"'Twill so."

"Will the boss be down?"

"He will."

"He's coortin' that gurrl, they tell me."

"I'll coort her if I catch her!" cried the savage furiously. "It's a police shpy she is, an' she'll hang me if she shpots me."

"It's he that'll be afther hangin' ye if ye hurt her, I'm thinkin'."

"Will he? *Will he?* Two can play

at that game, an' I've the thrump, by G—."

"Begor, I'll back the boss agin ye, an' agin all Ireland He's as many turrns as a fox, an' more holes. They tell me he does a finer thrade in Kerry an' in Galway nor in these parrts."

"Who does the thrade, an' runs the rishks, an' is dhruv by him, like that horse there, wid a halter round their necks? It's us, an' the likes of us. He gets the money, an' we does the worruk an' takes the rishks."

"Oh, begor, he get's the money, anyway; an' shpinds it, too, they tell me. He'd be as rich as his father if he could hould it as fasht as he grabs it—like Ould Mouser. Hup!" he cried to the horse as he led it into the centre of the road.

As the cart lurched and jogged along

Shiela ventured to lift a corner of the coat and to raise herself slowly and stealthily to see if the men were sufficiently far in front to give her a chance of escaping unperceived to the back. Just, however, as she got her eyes above the level of the side of the cart, a frightful curse in Irish from her pursuer flung her back half-fainting with the horrible certainty that she was detected.

"What is it?" asked the other, startled by the violence of the exclamation.

"Hould an! Shtop," cried the savage excitedly.

"Woa! Hike! Hike!" the other shouted to the horse, which stopped. "What is it?"

"That d— gurrl!"

"Where?"

"Where! At the barracks by this, where she'll raise hell."

"If she got into the wood, it's home she's gone."

After thinking upon this for some seconds the savage said, "Well, an' if she is, she'll be sindin' on worrd from there, an' thin it's all over the counthry the peelers 'll be to-night."

"I wish to God ye'd have let her alone!" cried the carter bitterly. "A shlip of a gurrl agin the likes of ye! Faix, it's a proud man ye ought to be to-night!"

"I'd be prouder if I'd knifed her! A shlip of a gurrl! If a shlip of a gurrl could hang ye, an' meant to hang ye, an' was coorsin' ye all over the place like a greyhound afther a hare, maybe ye'd be for lettin' her go if ye wanst got a grip of her? Moirya!"

"Ye've made the divil's own mess of it, anyway, if ye've ruz the peelers on us."

As this was not to be denied, the savage remained silent for a little, and said then :

"I tell ye what it is. Ye must cut an to the barracks—as she doesn't know ye —an' see if she's been there—annywan will tell ye, as all the place has an eye out for her now whin she goes there wid her sphyin' an' sphottin'. An' I'll go anto the gap wid the cart, an' wait there an' watch the road from Cahircalla till ye come back."

"Hould on where ye are. If ye shtop at the gap an' are shpotted there, they'll shmell a rat maybe, an' folley up the scint."

"Well, don't be long. It's mortil cowld sthanding here."

"Where's the gran' coat the boss gave ye? It's pawned be this, I'm thinkin'."

"Mike tuk it to cover the new ma-

chine. Begor! he's left it in the cart, maybe?"

This idea occurred to him only as an afterthought when the other man had gone out of sight and hearing. He stepped back from the horse's head to the side of the cart, looked over it, saw the coat, put his hand out, took hold of it by the tails, as it happened, and lifted it up to get it clear of the sides of the cart. As he lifted it Shiela felt a sharp blow which crimsoned her blanched cheek. Putting up her hand instinctively she touched the chill barrel of a revolver which had fallen from the breast pocket of the coat upon her cheek. Gripping it by the handle, she sprang up and stood in the cart confronting the ruffian. He staggered back, letting fall the coat into the cart, and stared at her with dropped jaw as though she were a ghost.

During the few seconds of his stupefaction, Shiela—now all herself—had time to reflect that to make sure of escape she must drive home at all speed in the cart. If she left the horse and cart with him and sought flight on foot he would drive after the man who had just gone to the barracks, and, returning at full speed with him, would overtake her before she could reach home. Now more than ever he would feel it to be life against life, and would strain every nerve to intercept and silence her by death.

Keeping her eye fixed on him and holding out the revolver towards him with one hand, with the other she groped, stooping, for the rope reins, which, however, she could not find.

"Hand me the reins!" she said imperatively.

As he hardly seemed to hear her she

reiterated the command yet more imperiously.

"Yes, miss; I will, miss; hould aff of the thrigger, miss, in the name of God; it may go off widout yer manin' it."

She took care, however, to follow his every movement with a pointed revolver, as it was quite possible that he had another in his pocket. He handed her up the reins with trembling fingers.

"Turn the horse round."

"I will, miss; I will," he cried in great relief to find she was not going to drive direct to the barracks. When he had taken the horse by the bridle, and before he began to back the cart a bit to turn it round in the narrow road, he said in an oily, whining tone:

"Ye wouldn't be afther informin', miss? Maybe it's him ye'd be hangin'."

"Who?"

"The boss, miss; Misther D'Arcy, I mane. Sure it was him that made us take a rise out of ye that night; an' begor! that's the laste of the throuble ye'd be gettin' him into; it is so."

"It was he that made you break into the house that night?"

"It was, miss. But sure it was only a joke it was. He wanted to show off a bit afore ye, miss. He worships the ground ye walk on; an' if you shplit, miss—"

"Turn round the horse."

"I will, miss."

When he had turned the horse round, Shiela cried, "Let go!" and was just about to start when a sudden thought stayed her.

"Whose coat was this?"

"The coat's mine, miss; but the six-shooter that was in it belongs to—"

"Who gave you the coat?"

"Misther D'Arcy, miss. He thinks the worruld of me, miss. Ax him, miss; ax him an' he'll tell ye there's no one he'd be so sorry to see in throuble as me-self."

"When did he give it to you?"

"The coat, miss? Betther nor six weeks since."

Without another word Shiela started the horse at a foot pace, keeping her face turned and the revolver pointed towards the fellow until she rounded the elbow of the road. Then she urged the horse into a gallop, which she forced him to keep up until she reached by the backway the Cahircalla stables.

Patsey, hearing the thunder of the heavy cart upon the paved entrance to the stable-yard, hurried out—

"Miss Shiela!"

"Yes, Patsey; do you see this?" she cried, holding towards him the coat where the piece had been torn from the collar.

CHAPTER XX.

PATSEY'S DIPLOMACY.

"Oh, begor, you've got it, Miss Shiela," Patsey said, after a minute examination of the torn collar.

"Is it—is it—?"

"Who's Patsey?" Shiela asked quickly.

"Sorra a wan of me knows who's is it, miss," Patsey answered with sudden reserve, scratching his head perplexedly, but stealing a sly, observant look up into Shiela's face the while.

"I know who's it is, and whos it was,' Shiela said decidedly.

"See that, now!" exclaimed the admiring Patsey.

"Patsey! You must help me to fit that coat on the right man!"

Patsey, having first looked round him cautiously, said in a hoarse whisper, "Look at here, Miss Shiela, it's helpin' ye to dig me own grave I'd be doin'."

"I must do it by myself, then," she cried, so determinedly that Patsey was lost in admiration of her and somewhat ashamed of himself.

"How did ye get hoult av it, miss?" he asked, in the hope of seeing light somewhere.

Then Shiela told him the whole adventure, to which Patsey listened with rapt attention, and with, towards the end, a kind of adoration of Shiela.

"Miss Shiela," he cried, this time with his whole heart, "there isn't yer like in

Ireland, nor in the worruld, nor in the worruld; there isn't, so!"

"Patsey, you must let me put that torn piece with the coat itself into the hands of the police."

For a few seconds Patsey remained silent in deep thought, the result of which was almost a shout of exultation.

"By G—! I have it, Miss Shiela! I have it, miss! Ye needn't say nothin', an' I needn't say nothin', an' sorra a hair of our heads will they hurt."

"How! What are you going to do?"

"Yerra, whisht, wid ye, miss," Patsey answered jocosely, so high had his spirits suddenly risen. "Ye must know nothin, nor say nothin', nor do nothin' till to-morrow mornin'."

"But"—began Shiela.

"Lave it to me, Miss Shiela, an' I'll go bail—"

At this moment the sound of a horse's hoofs entering the stable-yard interrupted them and called off their attention.

"Is that you, Patsey?" cried Mr. Tom D'Arcy, who dismounted and was about to fling Patsey the reins, when he discovered Shiela.

"Miss Fitzgerald! I was hoping so to see you for a moment. Here, Patsey," handing over the horse to him. Then turning again towards Shiela he repeated, as he held out his hand to her, "I was hoping so to see you by yourself for a few moments."

Noticing that she did not extend her hand in response, owing, as he supposed, to the heavy garment with which she was embarrassed, he said, "Allow me to carry this for you."

"Your coat," she answered only, turning so that a stream of light from a lower

window should shine upon the torn collar, to which she pointed.

The thrilling intensity of the tone in which she uttered the two words startled and almost prepared him for the terrible significance of her gesture.

"You are mistaken," he stammered after a pause. "It is not mine."

"It was yours up to the night on which the sergeant was shot."

"What do you mean?" he faltered with a husky voice from a throat gone dry suddenly.

"You then gave it to one of the two men you hired to break into our house."

"My God! That d— scoundrel! He has—Patsey, my horse."

But Patsey, who had overheard Miss Shiela's desperately imprudent disclosure of her whole case, was equal to the emergency.

"Hike! hike! Woa! Oh, begor, he's

gone!" he cried, as the horse clattered out of the yard; Patsey, having, however, firm hold of the bridle, with which he stopped him presently only to mount him and to ride in hot haste towards the village. D'Arcy, in his distraction, rushed from the yard after his horse, which, however, he despaired of recovering when he found the park gate open. At the gate he stood for some minutes trying to collect his thoughts and to realise his position. What was it? How did he stand? That at all risks he must discover before he could decide upon action of any kind. Why not see Dick, who would know what Shiela knew, and be more his friend than this Jael. How he hated the girl that but now he thought he loved! But coarse love, like coarse cider, turns sour easily, and there is no sourness so acrid as that from the sweetest liquor, according to the Italian proverb—*Guardati*

d'aceto di vin dolce. Yes, he hated her—hated her—hated her—as he repeated to himself with set teeth.

But Dick—could he trust him? At least he was weak, and might be appealed to with some hope. At any rate he could be pumped, and pumping would not put him more in their power. Having come finally to this conclusion he turned and walked slowly up the avenue, gathering, as he went, what courage he could for facing the scene he feared. Finding the hall door open as usual, he entered without knocking, and stood for a moment in the hall, hoping that some servant might appear casually and send out Dick to him, without letting anyone else know of his presence. As he stood there, looking nervously about him, he perceived the coat which Shiela had a few moments before hung up in the hall. Having assured himself by a nervously

furtive glance all round that he was unobserved, he stole on tiptoe to the coatstand, unhooked the coat, and with another fearful look over his shoulders, hurried with it to the door and away. Instead of going down the avenue he made straight for Dunran Wood, and even for that very part of the wood where the sergeant had been shot. As he approached the spot he moved very slowly and stealthily, stooping again and again to listen. Encouraged by the absolute stillness, he advanced till he stood where, or nearly where, the body of the murdered man had lain, and here he proceeded deliberately to put on the overcoat. Having donned it he walked on a few steps to the bank of the former bed of a stream which had run through part of Dunran Wood more than a generation since—before the great drainage works of the famine years had drunk it dry. Now, almost the entire

woodland course of this old waterway was covered with a luxuriant growth of brambles of extraordinary density and of considerable height. Where D'Arcy stood these brambles looked absolutely impenetrable; but upon his pulling at one, which was indistinguishable in appearance from the others, it came away at once, disclosing a pathway down which he crept on all fours. It was plain now why he had donned the overcoat, which he could not otherwise have taken with him. When he reached the bed of the old waterway he pulled back the bramble into its place by a string, which was attached to it for that purpose, and proceeded then to crawl up the well-made and well-worn boring through the brushwood till he approached the arch of a bridge which once had taken a road across the old stream near Brian Hurley's cottage; this road itself, however, had long

been disused, and was now for the greater part of its woodland course, almost as much overgrown with bramble and brush-wood as the waterway it crossed here. On approaching this bridge D'Arcy stopped to listen intently for some seconds; but not hearing a sound, he proceeded till he reached "the distillery." In truth, the size of the chamber they had here excavated under the arch, and the perfection of its appointments for its purpose, almost deserved the name of "distillery." D'Arcy was surprised upon looking round to find work in progress and yet no workmen. However, though the absence of the men was surprising, and even alarming, it was convenient for his immediate purpose, the destruction of the overcoat. He would cut it up and burn it without the smoke attracting attention; since the still flue led into the chimney of Brian Hurley's cottage,

whether with or without the knowledge and connivance of the cripple, deponent sayeth not.

Taking off the overcoat, he proceeded to cut it into strips—rather a tedious business, as the cloth was uncommonly thick and strong. When he had cut up nearly enough for burning upon the still fire without smothering it, his ear, quick and alert as this of a hunted creature, caught the sound of someone approaching. Letting the coat drop from his hands he crept to the orifice he had just emerged from, put his ear to the ground, and listened intently. Presently he heard a loud imprecation, which was followed by another voice saying, "Whist, wid ye. Maybe it's in it he is." Recognising the voices he started up, seized a can of recently-distilled spirit, poured it upon the coat, flung that on the fire, and made all haste to escape by an exit which

followed still the old waterway to the verge of the wood.

Let us now follow Patsey for a little, in order to explain this ominous interruption of D'Arcy. As Patsey rode off on D'Arcy's horse he reflected that nothing could have been more pat to his purpose than the conversation he had just overheard between that gentleman and Shiela.

"Begor! I'd niver have thought of it, niver!" he muttered to himself, meaning that not even his fertile faculty for falsehoods would have hit upon the invention of this conversation.

"Miss Shiela 'll be out if it now intirely, intirely." He then set himself to develop this suggestive conversation to the size and shape required to work upon "that big blaaguard, Terry O'Loughlin."

A minute later he was challenged by Terry himself, who, at the sound of the

horse's hoofs, had slouched down into the ditch by the roadside.

"Patsey!" Patsey pulled up. "What are ye afther?" Terry asked in great trepidation.

"Ye, begor!—I'm afther ye—it's all up!" Patsey said as he dismounted.

"What—what do ye mane?" faltered Terry.

"Young D'Arcy has just met Miss Shiela at our hall doore; an' as I was goin' to take his horse round to the yard I heard him say—'Miss Fitzgerald,' he says, 'I want a worrd wid yerself,' he says, 'an' by yerself,' he says. 'An' I wants a worrd wid ye,' says she mighty shtiff like. 'An' what have I done,' says she, 'that ye'd be afther spakin' to me, like that?' says he. 'Done,' says she. 'Maybe now you didn't hire that man, Terry O'Loughlin, with another villain of the worruld, to break into

our house? An' maybe you and him together,' says she, 'didn't shoot Sergeant Casey?' says she. 'Good God,' he shouts, 'who tould you this?' 'Himself,' she says 'Terry O'Loughlin, himself.' 'The d— schoundherel; he'll shwing for this, or my name isn t Tom D'Arcy,' he shouts, foamin' at the mouth wid fury. 'No,' she says, 'I don't wan't to hang no wan, nor to get no wan into throuble,' she says; 'but I don't wan't thim to be hung for it that didn't do it,' she says. 'Oh, that's it, is it?' he cries wid a shneer. 'It's Misther Dundas ye've been shpyin' for, an' bribin' and corruptin' that infernal villain O'Loughlin for,' says he. 'I'm no shpy,' she says, 'an' O'Loughlin is no informer,' she says; 'whatever else he is, he isn't that."

"'I'll take good care he isn't,' he says. 'Two can play at that game, an' the man

who gets the lead wins the thrick. Patsey! Patsey!' he shouted, an' begor! ye might have heard him from here. 'Patsey! bring back that horse, I'll bate him in the race to the barracks,' he says, 'an' he'll bate me in the race to the gallows. Patsey! my horse!' and thin I purtinded that the horse got loose an' had to run afther him, to give ye the shtart of that mane shpalpeen.'"

O'Loughlin, who was naturally of the stuff of which informers are made, shot off like a deer, without a word, leaving Patsey amazed, amused, and rejoiced at the complete and instantaneous success of his move. Presently, however, it occurred to him that O'Loughlin was in too abject a fright to think of anyone but himself. Remounting the horse, he rode after O'Loughlin, to that creature's intense terror; for, of course, he imagined that D'Arcy was racing him to the barracks on one of Ralph Fitzgerald's

horses. Intense was his relief to hear Patsey's voice—

"Hould an!"

"What?"

"Are the boys there?"

"They are. Begor! I forgot. Tell Mike—he's in the Crow's Nest," he answered breathlessly.

As Patsey turned the horse, O'Loughlin called after him—

"Tell him I was dhruv to it, as the boss was goin' to sphlit."

Patsey, having tied the horse to an overhanging bough, crossed into a field which skirted the road, and walked along the intervening wall till he came within hail of the "Crow's Nest"—a coign of vantage for "looking out." He then imitated the curlew's plaintive whistle, a signal which was answered at once by an imitation of the cry of the plover. Hereupon

Patsey approached, and repeated hurriedly to Mike the tale he had just told Terry, with the difference only of emphasising and elaborating Shiela's protest that she had no wish to hang or hurt anyone.

Mike lost not a moment in hurrying to the neighbourhood of the old bridge, itself unapproachable through brambles. Here he imitated with wonderful skill the startled cry of the blackbird—a signal answered appropriately from below by a scream like that of a rabbit with a weasel at its throat. Mike then hurried off to meet the men at the exit of their burrow and explain his alarm signal. Meanwhile O'Loughlin made such haste to the barracks that he said only in passing and without stopping, to the carter—whom he met returning from them—"It's all up; hurry an' home wid ye!" Before the carter had recovered from his surprise O'Loughlin was out of

hearing; and in two minutes later he had burst into the barracks and told his breathless story to the sergeant in charge. As an earnest of the truthfulness of his information he offered to lead the police at once to the distillery, and to show them on the way how and where Sergeant Casey was shot in attempting to seize D'Arcy as he emerged from the secret passage.

Again and again O'Loughlin protested with suspicious reiteration—

"I was wid him, but sorra a hand I laid on the sargint. 'I arrest ye,' says the sargint, saisin' hould of him by the collar of the coat. 'What for?' says D'Arcy. Let go of me, d—n you!' he says, wrinching himself free. 'Shtan' or I fire,' cried the sargint, pullin' out his revolver; but afore he could rise it he was a dead man. 'Lord save us! ye've killed him, sir,' says I. 'Maybe ye'd rather h'd killed me,' says

he, 'an' thin yerself an' the boys 'ud all be thransported together,' says he. 'I've done wrong, sir, I know,' says I, 'an' I've bruk the law,' says I, 'an' sorry I am for it,' says I; 'but a man I've never killed, I can say that afore the worruld,' says I. 'It's only a peeler he is,' says he. 'He's a man,' says I, 'an' a married man, an' a father of a family; an' me heart's sore this night for his wife an' childer,' says I. 'Well, it can't be helped now,' says he; 'an' anny way,' says he, 'it wasn't yere doin', Terry.' 'Thank God for that,' says I. 'If I had laid a finger an him I couldn't rest aisy night nor day; nor couldn't, as it was, sergeant'—(he protested turning to that officer)—'I couldn't so. Though I didn't lay a hand an him, an' wouldn't have laid a hand an him if he'd ruz the revolver agin meself, yet I was onaisy in me mind an' in me conscience, an' couldn't ate an' couldn't

shleep till I tould the truth.'" In this strain he continued again and again to protest his innocence of Sergeant Casey's death, as he accompanied the police to Dunran Wood.

When the police reached the spot where Sergeant Casey's body was found and saw how near it was to the brink of the bank which led down into the secret passage, they had no doubt at all of the substantial truth of O'Loughlin's story, though the sergeant was not absolutely convinced of the infantile innocence of the informer's bearing in the business. O'Loughlin protested too much, to begin with; while, besides, in the sergeant's experience, no informer ever told either the simple truth or the whole truth. They invariably embellished some parts of the truth, and suppressed others—not always or necessarily to their own advantage, but simply from

an apparent incapacity to deliver a plain unvarnished tale. Of course this natural tendency to the suppression or embellishment of parts of the truth becomes irresistible when it seems to the informer to be to his advantage. The sergeant, knowing this, and knowing, besides, some of Mr. O'Loughlin's precious antecedents, turned on him, as he stood on the spot where Casey had fallen, to ask sharply—

"And what were you doing?"

"Me? Begor, I run for it, I did; when I seen the sergeant, me hearrt lep up into me mouth, an'—"

"You said you were the first to see the sergeant, when you crept up out of there?" pointing to the opening of the secret passage.

"I was, an' when I seen him, I whispers, Misther D'Arcy, 'Peelers,' an' I ran."

"Where did you run?"

"I run for the road, till I hearrd the shot."

"And you saw all that happened with your back turned, and heard what passed between them, from here to the road? That will do, my man; lead on there," pointing down to the secret passage.

"Sure I looked back whin I harrd the scrimmage betune 'em. An' whin I seen the sergeant take hoult of him by the collar, 'there'll be murdher,' I says; an' I turned agin to run, but I hadn't run a perch whin I harrd the shot. 'Holy Mother!' I says, 'he's done it now,' I says; an' I come back."

The sergeant, thinking time too precious at present to cross-question the fellow further, motioned him impatiently to lead the way down the secret passage, which O'Loughlin proceeded to do, not without

trepidation. He feared that D'Arcy would shoot him down like a dog upon his emerging into 'the distillery,' if the 'Boss' happened to be there. As it was, the informer nearly died a dog's death of suffocation, for, as he reached the entrance of 'the distillery,' the spirit-saturated coat blazed up and then sent out dense volumes of smoke. Fortunately for the informer and the police, and also for D'Arcy, the draught drove both flames and smoke in the direction of the exit, thus protecting the fugitive's retreat. O'Loughlin and the police had to retreat backwards as quickly and as far as they could, and to wait for more than an hour before they dared venture into the burned-out 'distillery.' Curiously enough the strips of the thick frieze coat, which D'Arcy had cut up, but had forgotten in his hurry to fling into the fire, showed least of the effects of the conflag-

ration ; and among these strips were the incriminating remnants of the collar, which, of course, were the first that he cut off the coat. There was also a large recognisable fragment of the coat itself, which had been wet and had not been saturated with spirit.

"Begor ! 'twas the coat he gev me, an' he burned it because Sergeant Casey tore a piece out of the collar," O'Loughlin said at sight of the fragments, which the sergeant accordingly collected and treasured. The fire, however, if it did not destroy the fatal evidence against D'Arcy, was of supreme service to him in delaying police pursuit. As the draught had driven the flames down the exit passage, the underwood and brambles which covered it cracked and blazed up into so fierce a fire that it was not possible for the police, even when it had died down, to make their way

out in that direction over the scorching embers. This, and the time it took to get the necessary warrant for his arrest, gave D'Arcy more than three hours to go home, procure money and another horse, and reach Limerick. In Limerick he managed to dispose to advantage of the horse, to procure an admirable disguise as a drover, and to catch the eleven o'clock night mail for Dublin, where he arrived about four the next morning.

Between his escape from "the distillery" and his arrival at the North Wall, Dublin, he was challenged only by Mike, who thought it was his duty to give the "Boss" the warning he had given the others, and who, besides, was curious to hear D'Arcy's side of the story. From Mike, D'Arcy learned to his disgust that O'Loughlin was driven

to inform by the fear that the "Boss" himself was on the point of selling the pass.

CHAPTER XXI.

SHIELA'S STORY.

Upon parting from D'Arcy, Shiela hurried into the house, hung up the overcoat in the hall, and went at once to her own room, whither she summoned Dick to her by a message entrusted to Mary Moloney.

To Dick she gave a circumstantial account of everything that had happened from her first encounter with the men to her meeting a few minutes since with D'Arcy—omitting, of course, her conference with Patsey. Dick stared at her thunderstricken with astonishment. "You've been dreaming!" he exclaimed at last. "The coat is not a

dream; it's in the hall," she said, just at the moment that D'Arcy was carrying it off.

"He shot the sergeant and hired the men to act as moonlighters!"

"Yes; he did not even deny it just now."

"Well, of all— But why should he shoot the sergeant? Do you mean that he's a moonlighter himself?"

"I don't know what he is, or why he did it; but he did it."

"Good Lord! Has he gone back home?"

"He ran after his horse, which broke loose."

"I must go down and tell them—if you've not dreamt it all," he added still doubtfully.

Shiela shook her head and said, "The coat's not a dream; you'll find it in the

hall. And Dick," she added, as he turned to go down, "excuse me to them for not going down to dinner, as I feel rather done up."

"Of course you are. Lie down a bit and I'll bring you up something myself presently."

However, he returned immediately.

"There's no coat in the hall," he cried.

"Then he's taken it," she exclaimed, starting into a sitting posture.

"But he'd gone after his horse," objected Dick, with a questioning, perplexed, and even incredulous look into his sister's face.

"He came back and has taken it. I've not gone out of my mind, Dick," she added almost petulantly in answer to his look of bewilderment. "There's the horse and cart in the yard, if that will convince you."

Dick really did reassure himself by going forth to look through a lobby window upon the horse and cart standing still in the yard; and, as he looked, admiration of Shiela's pluck and presence of mind, which had heretofore been submerged by astonishment at D'Arcy's treachery and villainy, came to the surface in his mind.

"Well?" she asked, as he re-entered her room.

"You're just the pluckiest girl in the world," he answered, stooping to kiss her.

"That's better than being hysterical or insane," she replied smiling.

"I won't let them worry you," he promised, as he quitted the room to tell the amazing tale to his father and mother. His father and mother were naturally more inclined than he to believe the whole bewildering story either an invention or an hallucination of Shiela's; but D'Arcy's non-

appearance, Patsey's return with his horse, and finally a visit from the police, vindicated beyond question Shiela's sanity and truthfulness. Will it be believed that the result to Shiela was deeper disgrace than ever with her parents? Several causes combined to bring about this unreasonable result. In the first place Ralph and his wife were furious at being fooled by D'Arcy; and their fury was by no means softened by the consciousness that Shiela was as right as they were wrong about this suitor of hers. Again, Dick, through want of tact, gave them the impression that Shiela was sulking stubbornly—putting them, her parents, in Coventry! For Dick carried out his promise to Shiela to prevent her being worried by saying in so many words that she didn't want to see either of her parents. When, however, next morning she did see them, and was sourly cross-examined by her father,

and had to account for being out at such an hour by the confession of a visit to Dr. Cullinan, and of the object of that visit, her disgrace culminated. Her father, knowing so little of her as to believe her capable of inventing a false account of her visit to the village (if she cared in the least to conceal its real object), took her confession for bravado and defiance. His own conscience charged him with having been brutal in his offer to her yesterday of the alternative of marrying D'Arcy or of earning her own living; and he set down her "sulk" of last night and her present declaration that she thought of going out as a professional nurse to be her childish and defiant retort to his ultimatum. The only way to treat silly and stilted nonsense of this sort was to take the girl at her word. Accordingly Ralph received her confession with stinging derision. "A very good idea! A professional nurse!

Really an admirable notion! And what did your doctor say to it?"

"He was not in."

"Ah, that was a pity! You must call again with my full permission. You understand; you have my full permission to ask his advice, and to take his advice, too, if he recommends you to adopt this noble calling."

"Very well," Shiela answered, with white face and quivering lips; and, without another word, she turned and quitted the library, to which she had been summoned for examination.

Then Ralph, more convinced than ever of his daughter's defiance, and of the hollow bravado of this nursing resolution of hers, hurried off to command his wife to take his own tone with this silly and insolent girl.

But, indeed, Mrs. Fitzgerald needed no urging upon this point. She had not yet

digested her extreme irritation with D'Arcy; for no one was more bitter against the young gentleman than this erstwhile worshipper of his. It was not the shooting of the sergeant which so disgusted her with him, but the "vulgarity" of his manufacture of poteen and the atrocity of his hiring moonlighters to terrify her out of her senses. But, if she was irritated with herself for having been imposed upon by "that man," she was still more irritated with Shiela for not having been imposed upon by him—an odd attitude of mind, which yet in such a woman was as natural as it was illogical. In truth, she took it for granted that Shiela must be feeling herself a most superior person to her duped parents; and to this feeling her mother attributed in part the intimation Dick curtly gave them last night that "Shiela didn't want to see them." Mrs. Fitzgerald, therefore, was

thoroughly prepared to take Ralph's view of Shiela's outrageous resolution. Having no notion of any other kind of nurse than either a Gamp or a children's maid, her rage at hearing that *her* daughter threatened to go into "domestic service" may be imagined. It was only a threat of the girl's, of course, but it was a threat specially designed to wound her mother in her tenderest part—family pride. The threat, therefore, did not sound to Mrs. Fitzgerald the less outrageous and insolent because it rang hollow in her ears.

When she heard of it from Ralph she fell in at once with his idea, that the one way to bring the girl to her senses was to take her at her word. Instead, however, of employing Ralph's mordaunt sarcasm—of which, indeed, she was intellectually incapable—she poured out upon the girl a torrent of incoherent vituperation, saying

over and over again in many forms, that Shiela in taking to domestic service, was seeking and sinking to her natural level; and that in such service she would be sharply and wholesomely taught to show a mistress the deference she refused to show a mother.

The astonishing ignorance she showed in this tirade of a daughter, from whom in her whole life she had not been parted for a day, will seem hardly credible; but Mrs. Fitzgerald's mind was too narrow, shallow, and commonplace even to understand—not to say divine—such a character as Shiela's.

It is true that at the close of her tirade, on looking to Shiela for an answer, she had some misgiving as to the wisdom of the onslaught upon sight of the silent girl's white, set face. When, however, she mentioned this misgiving immediately after-

wards to Ralph, he at once pooh-poohed it with a reassuring scornfulness.

"Really means it?" he cried. "She means it as much as you do. Now, just let her alone, and you'll see she'll learn her place and our place, when she finds we are not all on our knees to her to stay at home."

Meanwhile Shiela was bewildered. What had she done? She had declined to accept Mr. D'Arcy, and had proved herself right by proving him the villain he was. For this, and this alone, she was assured by her father in words of the most withering scorn that she was welcome to become a professional nurse; while her mother could not tell her too often or too abusively that it was the only thing she was fit for. What had she done? Shiela, of course, had no suspicion that she was supposed to have been in a stubborn and disrespectful sulk with her parents last night; or that the

confession extorted this morning by her father—of her visit to the doctor and of its object—was construed and resented by him as bravado. She could only conclude therefore that money troubles and straits had exasperated her father into showing more plainly than ever before his repulsion to her ; and that he had stirred up her mother's fury against her by representing her as intending to disgrace the Fitzgerald family by entering domestic service. Anyway, they had both made their impatience of her so unmistakable and the idea of her continued dependence upon them so intolerable, that not even Dick, if he had been at home, could have dissuaded her from taking at once the first steps towards carrying out yesterday's resolution—a conversation with Dr. Cullinan. But Dick (with Patsey)—let me say in passing—had accompanied ten police into Dunran Wood to search

there for the missing piece of coat collar, and any other evidence that might corroborate Terry O'Loughlin's information.

Shiela, therefore, set forth without the loss of a moment to consult the doctor, who, however, was again from home. But his housekeeper, who was abjectly conciliatory this morning, would not hear of her quitting the house till his return. Indeed, in the midst of a life and death adjuration to Shiela to wait a few minutes, the good lady broke down into tears! It seemed that the doctor was so furious with her for keeping Shiela last night on and on to the edge of dark, thus endangering her life, that he gave the good woman notice. She implored Shiela's intercession—chiefly, it appeared, for the doctor's sake; since his linen would never again in this world be aired properly if he kept to the suicidal

notice he had given her. Shiela was not long in discovering that the housekeeper's anxiety to keep her till the doctor's return was simply anxiety to have this notice cancelled by her intercession. However, she was too anxious herself to see the doctor not to be glad to wait "a few minutes," though that probably meant an hour or more. Indeed the housekeeper presently let out that the doctor had gone off early this morning by rail, and that the first return train was not due in till 11.10.

Meanwhile, Mrs. O'Flanagan improved the precious minutes by explaining to Shiela that the doctor must stop going altogether, if she, who alone understood how to wind him up, set, and regulate him, was sent away. For this disinterested demonstration, Shiela was grateful, since she had no doubt that Mrs. O'Flanagan would have spent the time pumping her about last night's adventures,

if she had not been so absorbed by concern for her ill advised master.

As it was, the relief to be rid of Mrs. O'Flanagan when the doctor arrived at 11.30 was so great that Shiela hardly thought it Christian to ask her master to re-impose her upon himself. Having promised her intercession, however, she had to employ it, much to the doctor's amusement.

"Do you suppose she's the slightest intention of going? No such luck. I gave her notice, just as I give old Henessey a prescription for the rheumatism—which he'll carry with him to his grave, all the same. Talking of prescriptions, it's nothing of that sort brings you here, I hope?" he asked, with an anxious look into her pale face.

"Oh, no, thank you."

"Well, I forgive you, and am even more glad to see you than if you were a patient. There!"

Before she could make acknowledgment of this magnanimity, he asked,

"Do you know where I've been this morning?"

"Where?"

"To jail, to see Dundas, and tell him the happy turn things have taken for him—thanks to you." ("She doesn't look ill now," he thought, at sight of her crimson face.) "And a big fool I was for my pains," he hurried on to say. "Instead of thanking me for my good news he grumbled because I could not tell him how you had got through such an hour of horror."

"How did you know about it?" Shiela asked, in confusion.

"I'm not sure that I do know about it, as I believe it was to that brilliant romancist, Patsey, the village is indebted for the version I heard everywhere. What really did happen?"

Shiela gave a detailed account of her adventure with O'Loughlin, of her encounter with D'Arcy, but said nothing of her conference with Patsey.

"By George!" exclaimed the doctor, looking his admiration of her readiness and courage, "I *shall* have a story to tell him to-morrow, though nothing that will surprise him. And that fellow! his grand affair with the moonlighters a sham—a piece of stage heroism! His real heroism lay in shooting the sergeant and letting another man hang for it! For, mind you, but for you, Dundas would have been hanged, as sure as you are sitting in that chair. Did you hear O'Loughlin tell the other fellows how the sergeant was shot?" he asked, after a moment's consideration.

"No, he said nothing at all about that."

"Then how did you know D'Arcy did it?'

"There was the coat with the piece out of the collar, which Mr. D'Arcy gave the man."

"But how did you know about the piece out of the collar?"

"Oh, I—I know; I can't explain," she stammered.

"Phew!" exclaimed the doctor, with a eureka air; "that's what you have been doing all along, and what has got you the name of a police spy—trying to find the owner of an overcoat with a piece out of the collar!"

"I could say nothing about it, and I hope you won't."

"But it will all have to come out now."

"Oh!" she answered distressfully.

"How can it be helped? It's a most important piece of evidence. Have you got it?"

"I could get it."

"I'm afraid it must be produced."

At this point the doctor was called out of the room to see an unfortunate patient whom he had already kept waiting for twenty minutes. On his return he said with a humorous twinkle of the eyes—

"After all, you will not be troubled to produce that piece of coat collar."

"Why?" she asked, seeing some humorous meaning in his face.

"Why? Because they found it themselves an hour or two since, with Patsey's assistance."

"Oh!"

"Patsey didn't find it; but I doubt if they could have succeeded in finding it without his help."

"How did you hear of this?" she asked evasively in her embarrassment.

"From that patient. The whole village is cackling over it."

"I wish he hadn't," she said simply.

"Well, it's done now, and we must let it alone. After all, as it was Patsey's secret, he thought himself justified in hiding it in his own way."

"Yes," she answered doubtfully.

"Don't worry about it. It's as good a way out of the wood as any."

She shook her head.

"But it isn't true; and, besides, if it had been there all along, Mr. D'Arcy would have found it. He must have looked for it before he gave the coat away."

This shrewd remark impressed the doctor, though he thought it judicious to make light of the objection and to change the current of her thoughts.

"Patsey probably considered that when hiding it — he's as cunning as a pet fox. What a strain it must have been upon your nerves all these weeks. Are you sure you don't want a little doctoring?"

"I want advice," she answered; "but not of that sort."

"Yes?" he asked, as she hesitated.

"I wanted to ask you about learning to be a trained nurse," she stammered.

"Why, who in the world are you going to apprentice to that business? Not Mary Moloney?"

"No; I was thinking of taking to it myself. I mean I'm tired of doing—"

"Yourself!" he exclaimed. "Why, of all the unlikely and unsuitable things!—If there was a war now— Florence Nightingale kind of thing— But—" Here the doctor could only look his speechless amazement.

"I'm tired of my idle life at home," Shiela explained in much embarrassment.

The doctor, after a quick and searching glance into her crimson face, said with a suspicious suddenness of conversion to her

view—due to his certainty that home had been made unendurable to her—

"It's a dead slow place certainly, and you'd be happier, I daresay, where something was doing and where you could do something; but—but nursing!"

"I am not fit for anything else," she pleaded, pathetically as it seemed to him.

"You're not fit for anything of the kind—for any sort of drudgery, nursing, or teaching, or doctoring—no more fit than that is fit for a coal-scuttle," pointing to an exquisite china vase that stood on the table. "However, if you really think you'd be happier away from home—doing something, I mean"—he hurriedly corrected himself to say—"perhaps nursing would not be a more unpleasant business than any other, while it would certainly be much more independent."

"I'm glad you think so," she cried in great relief.

"I'm not sure that my opinion is disinterested, because nursing is the only thing in which I could hope to be a help to you," he said, smiling down upon her with a tender and protective kindliness. "Tidd, who is the leading man in St. Columba's Hospital, is a fast friend of mine, and I shall write to him to-night about you."

"Oh, thank you," she said from the bottom of her heart—more grateful for his tact in affecting a sudden conversion to her view, without further show of amazement or of curiosity, than even for his eager offer of help.

Upon her departure the doctor gave free play to the curiosity he had refrained from expressing. Whence this sudden and astonishing resolution? From some exceeding unpleasantness at home. But this unpleasantness—what was its character? Probably it arose out of that of which the whole

countryside had been talking for some time —the addresses Mr. Tom D'Arcy had been pressing upon Shiela, with the approval of her parents, but to her own distress and disgust. This, through the indiscretion of the Cahircalla domestics, had been county gossip for a fortnight. Tom D'Arcy's flight from justice removed the cause of quarrel? Yes, but the quarrel must have preceded the exposure of his rascality, since it was last night that Shiela had come to consult him. That she had proved herself right, and that bull-headed old fool of a father of her's wrong, would not make things pleasanter for her at home, thought the doctor, who had some reason for his contemptuous estimate of Ralph.

Thus the doctor came to make an accurate diagnosis of the case even before he went the round of his patients. From all of them, from some even who were almost

in articula mortis, the doctor heard one version or another of the sensation of the hour ; and among these versions were accounts—ultimately traceable, probably, to Mary Moloney—of a violent quarrel between Ralph, his wife, and Dick, on the one part, and Shiela, upon the other, anent the latter's rejection of Mr. D'Arcy.

All this, together with a glowing account of Shiela's heroic attempts to identify, at the risk of her life, the real murderer of Sergeant Casey, the doctor recounted to Dundas.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE COURSE OF TRUE LOVE.

No sooner was Tom D'Arcy's flight from justice known than every other man you met assured you that he had all along suspected him of making his money by illicit distillation. Indeed, there were some who seemed to have all along suspected him even of Sergeant Casey's murder! They had, however, kept this suspicion with exemplary discretion to themselves till now, when every tongue in every town, village, hamlet, train, tram, steamer, market, fair, or meeting of two or of two thousand, of business or of pleasure, casual or concerted,

talked only of this singular and flagrant scandal.

No one had, or at any rate expressed, a doubt that it was D'Arcy who had shot Casey, except Sergeant Kennedy, who strongly suspected O'Loughlin of the crime. Even when the piece of coat collar was found, trodden well down into the soft ground where the dead sergeant had lain, Kennedy, as he fitted it to the fragment picked up in "the distillery," shook his head.

"He'd have shot him to free himself—not torn himself free—if it had been D'Arcy. O'Loughlin was the man that done it." And from this dogged conviction—deduced from O'Loughlin's own confession and bearing—nothing could dislodge him.

Three days later some startling news which was given prominence in every newspaper in the three kingdoms brought almost

everyone round to Sergeant Kennedy's opinion.

D'Arcy, in the disguise of a drover, had eluded the watch for him kept by the police upon all Irish ports, and sailed for Liverpool in the steerage of a cattle boat, and in mid-ocean had flung himself overboard! Such was the sensational news which appeared in every paper in the three kingdoms, and which was commented upon in every Irish paper with more or less moral unction. It must be said to the credit of the discrimination of those who knew the young gentleman intimately that they asked for better evidence than was forthcoming of his having had the courage to cut the knot in this way. What evidence was alleged for his suicide? A hat, coat, and waistcoat found by a sailor, where he had sometime before seen a man, answering to the description of D'Arcy, lean-

ing over the side of the ship. In the pocket of the ragged coat a tobacco pouch, afterwards identified as D'Arcy's, a pocket handkerchief marked with his name, and an empty purse. A man who had embarked at the North Wall, Dublin, was certainly missing on the arrival of the boat in the Clarence Dock, Liverpool. Lastly, the following letter from D'Arcy to his father, announcing his desperate intention, which had been posted in Dublin before he sailed—

"DEAR FATHER,—I write to ask your forgiveness for what I am going to do. Before this reaches you I shall be at the bottom of the sea. But I did not do what they say; I mean Sergeant Casey; I never laid a finger on him. It was Terry O'Loughlin shot him that night. The sergeant having hold of me pointed his

revolver at him, telling him to stand or he'd fire; but O'Loughlin was too quick for him and shot him dead, just as I had got free, leaving a piece of my coat-collar in the sergeant's hand. That is how it happened. But there is no chance of a fair trial, and I had rather die in this way. Good-bye. Pay Luke Hanlon the £2,000 I owe him. I was very unlucky lately. The good things do not come off often enough to make life worth living. It is the last thing I ask of you to pay this debt of honour (two thousand pounds). Good-bye for ever, dear father, and forgive,—
Your unfortunate son, TOM D'ARCY."

This was the whole evidence for the suicide. Those who knew D'Arcy intimately and considered him, therefore, incapable of an act of such desperation, asked why the purse found should have

been empty. Why take off a ragged coat and waistcoat, and yet carry with him to the bottom of the sea a fat bundle of better clothes, which the disguised criminal had certainly brought on board? Was it not (considering these things and the character of Tom D'Arcy) more than probable that he had bribed some sailor to conceal him as a stowaway until everything was quiet at the Clarence Dock, when, under cover of night, he might steal unnoticed away to take passage to America or Australia?

Old Mouser's opinion, which was worth, and should weigh more in such a matter than that of the whole detective force, may be gathered from his curt interview with Luke Hanlon, when he came to demand the £2,000.

"I'll not give him a lump sum; tell him I'll pay any agent he chooses to name £100 quarterly."

"Who?" asked the astonished Hanlon.

"Who? you know very well who I mean; and he'll know very well that I mean it. Good-morning!"

Let me take leave of the D'Arcys by acknowledging that Old Mouser's wisdom was justified by an application within six weeks for the first instalment of the £100 allowance made by an agent, who, as he satisfied Old Mouser that he was duly accredited, must be held by the reader to have had unquestionable credentials. Indeed, by this time not even the police affected to believe in Tom D'Arcy's suicide, though they could not discover to what part of the world his cunning ruse had helped him to escape. The mere cleverness of the ruse had by them become an argument in its favour with the force, since their discovery that this young gentleman had been for some time and with much profit

carrying on no less than three illicit "distilleries" in three different counties gave them an extravagant notion of his astuteness. To this astuteness they owed, as they discovered, the moonlighting alarms which had harrassed them on those nights when "the smugglers" wished to keep the coast clear.

Tom, too, I must add, was as clearly acquitted of murder as of suicide, since the quarryman, who had stolen Dundas's revolver and parted with it to O'Loughlin, was induced to inform against the informer. Indeed, he had the same motive as the original informer himself—the fear of being anticipated. Now that O'Loughlin had begun giving information and was in the hands and under the press of the police, he would probably incriminate Mr. Tim Kerans before long, and even more deeply, perhaps than he deserved; wherefore Tim

anticipated him by the confession that he had taken the revolver out of Mr. Dundas's overcoat and had bartered it to O'Loughlin for a gallon and a half of poteen. Hence internecine war between the families of the rival informers, in which Shiela happened to play a part of importance to herself. It was on this wise—

Fierce was the fury of Ralph, his wife, and even of Dick, and absolute their boycott of Shiela when they realised that her resolution to become a professional nurse was serious. Ralph and his wife had not the least intention to allow her in the last resort to adopt a calling so "degrading" to the family; but they could not yet bring themselves to say so after their sarcastic encouragement to her to carry out her resolution. For the present, therefore, they simply put her in Coventry, and this, with Dick's boyish sulks, made her life utterly

miserable. As even Dick left her severely alone for the most part, she lived chiefly in her own room when at home, and, when out, took solitary walks in unfrequented places. She was forbidden even to see Dr. Cullinan, and her sole comfort in these forlorn hours and walks was the remembrance of what he had said on that morning—about nursing? No, not about nursing exactly. The doctor, it may be remembered, said that Dundas, so far from being grateful for the news that his life was safe, grumbled that there was no news of her who had saved it. How she had got through her encounter with O'Loughlin seemed to be of more interest to him than the momentous result to himself of that encounter. Did not this justify to her pride all the thoughts, during all these weeks, she had given, and had blushed to give, to him. For during

these weeks everything—his unjust imprisonment, her efforts to find the real criminal, the odious addresses of Mr. D'Arcy, and the growing estrangement from her of her father, mother, and even of Dick, had given Dundas a larger and yet larger place in her thoughts, in her day dreams, and (as she was now realising with hope and fear, with pride and shame) in her heart. He was now free. In to-day's paper, which she had with her as she walked through Dunran Wood to Brian Hurley's, there was an account of his having been set free, with apologies from the Crown prosecutor and compliments from the Bench. Would he persist in his intention of making Ireland his home; or would he return in disgust to the States? Would he come to see her to make his acknowledgments for the service she had accidentally rendered

him? Would he be permitted to see her? Would she be permitted even to speak to him? As for further intimacy—Here her outlook was hopeless. She sat down on a fallen tree, which crossed and blocked the old bramble-grown road not far from the bridge which had roofed "the distillery," and took out the newspaper to read again for the fourth time yesterday's proceedings in court. She had hardly found the place of the report, however, when she dropped the paper to rise and hurry forward at the sound of lamentation, shrill, poignant, and prolonged. Ever since the discovery of "the distillery," Dunran Wood had been infested by trespassers of all classes at all hours, who were curious to see the historic spot, and even to crawl along the secret passage. One such pilgrimage usually satisfied grown people, but boys

were never tired of traversing the secret passage and enacting therein all kinds of imaginary and sanguinary scenes, until Ralph set a special keeper to warn or drive them off. This morning, however, an odd thing had happened. The village boys, who usually contented themselves with calling the children of the two informers — O'Loughlin and Kerans — vile names, were exasperated by the appearance and evidence of these worthy gentlemen yesterday in court into stoning their hapless offspring. A hulking O'Loughlin and a little Kerans, being hot pressed, had fled into the wood, fearing the keeper much, but their pursuers more, and knowing that these pursuers could certainly not risk arrest by the keeper and arraignment before a magistrate on the double charge of trespass and of assault.

It happened, however, that the keeper

was not on duty at this early hour, as Master Malachi O'Loughlin was quick to discover. He had no sooner assured himself of this than his first impulse was to turn upon his fellow fugitive, little Billy Kerans—whose father had informed upon his father, and to give the youngster a ferocious licking. No one could feel more acutely than Malachi the monstrous injustice of being stoned for a father's iniquity; but no one could feel more furiously than he that Tim Kerans' son deserved as severe a thrashing as could be given him—with impunity. This impunity was the all-important point, and as to it Malachi had made a miscalculation. He had knocked down the boy with a blow so severe that it cut his lip against his teeth, and made his nose bleed, and was giving him some brutal kicks as he lay on the ground, when as

sound a box on the ear as he had had for a long time made him turn round to see a young lady—a girl—Shiela, white with excitement and anger. The sight of the boy's face, bathed in blood, and of this young ruffian kicking him as he lay on the ground, put Shiela beside herself with anger and pity.

"You great hulking coward and bully," she gasped, trembling with excitement and seizing him by the collar. "What's your name? What's your name?"

He stared at her in blank stupefaction for a moment, and then—being nearly as tall and quite as strong as she—he freed himself with a sudden wrench from her grasp and fled.

She did not turn even to look after him, but kneeled down at once beside Billy, whose cries had ceased suddenly at sight of her. In fact, he feared for a

moment that he had fallen out of the frying-pan into the fire, as Miss Fitzgerald might have him prosecuted for trespass. Next moment he was reassured, as she said in a voice, soft and soothing as the sound of a far-off fall of water, "Poor little chap! Poor little man! Are you much hurt? Wait a minute. There!" slipping from a kneeling into a sitting posture, and then lifting the boy gently till his head rested on her lap. Next she proceeded with her handkerchief to wipe away the blood from his face, cooing over him the while words of pity in a tone of inexpressible tenderness. There was no sweeter picture in all Ireland at that moment than the lovely and love-lit face of the girl as she bent over the child. There never was or could be in the world so sweet a face, Dundas thought, as he stood at a little distance watching

her, while he held an iron grip of Master Malachi. He had seen the sounding box on the ear she had given that young ruffian, had admired it then and understood it even better now. Gentleness itself lent weight to that box on the ear; for her wrath with the bully was but the measure of her pity for his small victim. No one knew better, or had better reason to know than Dundas, that in men such courage as Shiela's often goes with a tenderness like hers; but to find the two united in a girl amazed and enchanted him.

He stood still, as a man stands who fears by a movement or a breath to disturb and dissipate a vision of enchantment; and he could, therefore, hear the motherly murmurs of pity and comfort she was cooing over the child in a voice soft as an echo in a dream. In truth,

Shiela, thinking the child horribly hurt, because he bled so profusely, let her whole heart go out to him. The little chap himself, however, was too much consumed with amazement at Shiela's compassion to be conscious of what hurts he had received. He stared up at her with his large, round, grey eyes, until they caught sight of her handkerchief soaked through and through with blood, when he lifted his head off her lap quickly.

"Yere dress, miss," he began, but was gorgonised at sight of Malachi in charge of a gigantic keeper. Shiela, following his alarmed look, was even more startled and disconcerted. She sprang quickly to her feet as Dundas advanced towards her with his prisoner.

"What's his punishment to be?" he asked smiling, as he held out his hand to her.

"I've punished him already," she answered, returning his smile. "I'm afraid he's hurt the child badly."

"He informed on me father," O'Loughlin whined; and Billy retorted, "An' yere father informed on ivery wan."

Whereupon Dundas was sufficiently interested to question them, till he discovered what he had suspected; that Malachi's father had committed the murder of which he had been accused with the revolver stolen from him by Billy's father.

"'The wheel has come round full circle,'" he said to Shiela; and then, being only too eager to be rid of the youths, he dismissed Malachi in one direction with a cuff, and Billy in the opposite quarter with a half-crown. Probably Billy's heart stood still at sight of so much money, for his blood ceased to flow; and Shiela was thus reconciled to his being sent home by himself.

"He's not much hurt, really—a cut lip, a swollen nose, and, perhaps, a black eye to-morrow," Dundas said, as Billy ran off, perfectly happy. "I've just been to Cahircalla, and was sent this way in search of you by Patsey," he added. "It's an early call, but I could not wait to thank you till the afternoon."

"There isn't much to thank you for. It was a mere accident," Shiela answered in embarrassment.

"What? Your trying to find the right man all these weeks at the risk of your life!" he exclaimed.

"But there was no risk at all till that night, and then it was only by accident I found it out."

He walked beside her in silence for some seconds, and said then in a voice that shook a little with an agitation which he had not felt when his life was in the balance—

"I think if you knew how dear to me is the thought that I owe you my life—dearer to me than that life itself—you would not try to make little of what you have done for me."

"I did not really know I was running any risk," she said; and added then, in a low voice, "but if I had known it would have made no difference."

"You would willingly have risked your life for mine?"

"I owed you my life," she answered demurely.

"Ah, if you would only pay me all you owe me! You'd have to give me every other thought. Even in jail, with this horrible charge hanging over me, I was thinking always of you."

"I paid you something of that, too," she said, almost inaudibly, with crimson face and downcast eyes.

"You thought sometimes of me?"

For answer she gave him one swift, shy, upward glance which turned him dizzy with the intoxication of sudden, overpowering happiness.

"Oh," he said, only with a kind of groan of transport from the very depth and bottom of his heart. And then, taking both her hands in his, he added, "Sit down and let me try to tell you how I have worshipped you—if mere worship could deserve this."

She sat on the fallen tree from which she had started up at the sound of the child's cries, while he flung himself at her feet and poured out a passionate and incoherent palinode of adoration — palinode it might best be called, because he had never forgiven himself the flippant disrespect of his boast at their first meeting, that he meant to marry her. Had she also remembered

it and still resented it, she must have been the most implacable of her sex, if the worship of his words and of his looks had not effaced the offence forever. But, indeed, she remembered neither this nor anything else in what would have seemed to her that far-off past; nor yesterday, nor to-morrow, nor all her home troubles, nor all the difficulties of her engagement. In all time only this moment existed for her; only this green spot in all the world; in all life and nature only her love. If but a god would make such a moment eternal, what happier heaven could one seek or conceive? But this is the moment which is always the swiftest and brightest of our lives.

"Shiela," cried Ralph, in a tone of furious amazement. She withdrew her hands — both of which Dundas was holding as he sat at her feet, still uttering and looking his

worship—rose and turned round to face her enraged father. Dundas sprang to his feet at the same moment—

"Sir, you're—you're trespassing: I shall send for the police!" Ralph cried, with no idea of the bathos of the charge, or of the absurdity of the threat. Indeed, he hardly had an idea of what he was saying.

"I called at Cahircalla to see your daughter," Dundas replied with perfect coolness, "and was directed to seek her here, where I found her and—and ventured to propose for her," he said hesitatingly, with a painful consciousness of the baldness of this declaration.

Ralph merely stared at him with savage insolence for a moment, and then turned to say furiously to Shiela, "Come!"

What was Dundas to do? He could not dispute her father's authority over Shiela;

while remonstrance, or further intervention, of any kind, would only provoke a scene still more distressing to her. He stood still, looking after them, paralysed, bewildered, dismayed, and despairing.

"So this is what your nursing scheme meant?" cried Ralph, beside himself with rage, as he walked away with Shiela. "Clandestine meetings with that American adventurer and jailbird!"

"It is not true," Shiela answered, speaking tremulously from white lips, but with unfaltering heart.

"What!"

"It is not true. He is not what you say, and I did not go to meet him."

"Do you know to whom you're speaking?"

As Shiela walked on in silence he said furiously, "You shall not quit the house in future without asking my permission and

telling me where you are going. Do you understand? I cannot trust you, and I shall not trust you."

CHAPTER XXIII.

FINIS.

Poor Shiela, in the cloistral seclusion of her own room—for, of course, she could not stoop to ask permission to quit the house—at least escaped the storm of her father's much-tried temper. For all Ralph's troubles seemed to come together upon him. The very day after he had surprised Dundas at Shiela's feet a deputation from his tenants waited upon him to demand 30 per cent. reduction upon their rents under threat of a resort to the Plan of Campaign. Now, upon the payment of these rents Ralph relied for the payment of interest on the mortgage

held by Old Mouser, to say nothing of the heavy and pressing bills that were showered upon him always at "gale" day. If he gave the 30 per cent. reduction demanded he would receive less rent than would suffice to pay interest on mortgage, and would have nothing for current expenses and for bills. He tried, after his feeble fashion, to temporise with the deputation, but, being prepared for this, they were peremptory.

Thirty per cent. abatement or "The Plan" was their ultimatum; and either meant absolute ruin to Ralph. He shuffled and hesitated, and said he would see about it. and see his lawyer about it, and left them (with their knowledge of the man), naturally and almost necessarily under the impression that he would make no concession.

Accordingly, two days later appeared in the local papers "an item" that the Plan of Campaign was about to be adopted upon the

estate of Mr. Ralph Fitzgerald of Cahircalla —a disastrous announcement.

While Old Mouser rubbed his hands, rejoicing in the certainty of foreclosure of the mortgage and the cheap acquisition of the Dunboyne Bottoms, every other creditor of Ralph's swooped down upon him clamorously. The vulgar insolence he had to endure in these days so completely cowed and humbled him that he was glad of the civility even of Patsey.

Meanwhile Shiela's black darkness was lit up with one star due as dawn each day—a letter from Dundas, conveyed through Mary Moloney—she felt wretchedly conscious of committing the clandestine meanness with which her father had charged her; yet she could not deny herself this one sole, intense, intoxicating pleasure. Nevertheless, she was unhappy in her happiness. She could not escape the sting and venom of the

thought that this clandestine correspondence was an acted lie, degrading at once to herself and to her lover, and her remorse growing keener rather than duller from day to day, drove her at last to express timidly to him her miserable sense of a loss of self-respect.

Was she then happier next day when Mary returned empty-handed from the post —the mossgrown fork of an oak in Dunran Wood? Her blank and black misery was as intense as that of the opium-eater whose conscience had cut off the drug for a day. To Mary she tried to assume the air of having, to speak Hibernically, expected her disappointment. Having, however, as soon as she possibly could, got rid of the sympathetic maid, she gave herself up to her despair. Oh! if she had only known—if she had only known how much this letter meant to her, could she have been so insane as to give it up? For what? What was this morbid,

mad scruple? Deference to the wishes of a father, who had been to her all her life only a harsh master, and was now simply her jailor. Had he no duties to her? His only idea of duty to her was to darken her whole life himself, and to keep out any ray of happiness that might come to her through others! And this idea she must needs help out and carry out herself, to the extinction of the last spark of hope and happiness, from a sense, forsooth, of her duty to him! And what would *he* think of her fine scruples? What did he evidently think when he sent not a single line even to approve of them—not to say combat them? He had taken them, as she well deserved that he should take them, for coquetry, or prudery, or Pharisaism, or prigishness.

Thus poor Shiela, being constitutionally run down from all the excitement of these weeks past, raged in her despair against

her father and against herself. Her furious rebellion against her father, which was the measure of her misery, was uncalled for, at least in this, that her scruples were really due rather to her self-respect than to respect for her father. It was her horror of anything underhand which drove her to write as she did to Dundas. But in the madness of her misery she struck out blindly in all directions. She was, in truth, plunged in unfathomable misery, due chiefly, as I say, to pure physical depression, which made her at the moment absolutely believe that she would never hear again from *him;* never again see him; that all was over between them, and life was over for her. While she was thus prostrate, Dick knocked, entered, and suggested a last ride together. "Everything's to be sold up, horses and all; it's a frightful smash!" he said bitterly.

Smash? What did it matter? What did it mean to her now? "You know very well I'm not allowed outside the door," she answered, with still deeper bitterness.

"Oh, it's all right; I said I'd take you."

"That's very good of you," she rejoined, with what seemed, naturally enough, to Dick, most ungracious sarcasm.

"Oh, if that's the way, you may sulk as long as you like. *I* shall not trouble you again, never fear," he cried, with boyish petulance.

"I'll go," she said, starting suddenly up, without taking the slightest notice of his petulant rejoinder, which, indeed, she had hardly heard.

"That's very good of you!" he sneered in turn.

She looked at him for a moment or two as though recollecting herself, and said

then—"I know I'm cross, Dick, but you must make allowance and not mind. I shall be ready in a few minutes."

Dick retired sullenly and in silence. Not even Ralph had been so much surprised and enraged as Dick at her acceptance of Dundas, which seemed, indeed, to him almost a piece of insanity, and he had said so to her in so many words, with the result of a violent quarrel between them, which he had come this morning to make up; and he was now, naturally enough, affronted by her ungracious reception of his advances.

However, her plea that allowance ought to be made for her went some way towards conciliating him, since both parents had certainly made her life intolerable to her of late.

While he went to get the horses saddled, Shiela donned her habit with feverish haste,

thinking that a gallop might take her out of her miserable self, but hoping also with a faint, far-off, forlorn hope that she might, perhaps, catch a passing glimpse of *him*.

When, however, she suggested as carelessly as she could to Dick that they might go by the quarry road through the village to Rahinch, he curtly answered that he had promised his father not to take that road.

"We'll go across country, then, when we get to Dunlisk," she said decidedly.

And go across country she certainly did, from Dunlisk to the Dunboyne Bottoms, taking everything recklessly, like one possessed, and leaving Dick to follow as he could through gates and gaps when the leaps were too formidable for him to face.

Shiela had always been at once a more spirited and a more accomplished rider than he, but she had never before led him such a breakneck chase and pace. In

truth, she had for the moment forgotten him altogether, having abandoned herself to the intoxicating excitement of the steeple-chase; and she was recalled to herself only after she had taken in a masterly style the stiffest leap of all.

"By the Lord!" exclaimed Mr. Leech.

"Shiela!" cried Ralph, but Dundas's eyes alone spoke for him. As Shiela wheeled her horse round, she found him looking up at her with an intense glow of worship in his dark eyes. "Where's Dick," Ralph asked, not harshly at all, but with a kind of compelled courtesy.

"He's coming," she answered, as in a dream, for at the moment she was stooping to take Dundas's offered hand.

"Well, if you *had*, as you thought, to sell your horses, that's the young lady to do it for you!" cried Mr. Leech, who had the unhappy knack of saying the vulgarest

things when he most wished to seem polished. "But there'll be no more talk of that now, eh?" he added, with the air of having generously come himself to Ralph's help.

"You had better go back by the road," Ralph said sharply to Shiela. "He's had quite enough of that work for to-day.

"Allow me to open the gate for you," Dundas hastened to say, and to her amazement he was permitted unchecked to walk beside her horse to the gate. "I didn't write, because I had intended calling this morning; but I found that the lawyer had arranged our meeting for here."

"But, but father—what *has* happened?" she asked breathlessly, trying not to believe it all a dream.

"We've been brought together on business, and he finds I'm not as black as I'm painted. But your letter—it was like

you," he said, his face aglow with adoration rather than admiration.

"But I was sorry I sent it," she confessed in a low voice, blushing up to the roots of her hair.

"It is like you, too, to confess that," he answered. "I ought not, though, to have sent *you* a clandestine letter. It was a sort of sacrilege."

"I had only that," she pleaded almost piteously, partly in defence of her having permitted him to write to her clandestinely, but partly, also, it must be admitted, in fear of his ceasing so to write to her.

At this point they reached the gate, which he opened for her, and then proceeded coolly to walk on still beside her upon the road. If she could have heard what Mr. Leech was saying at that moment to her father she might have understood how this

audacious proceeding was allowed to pass uninterrupted and unrebuked.

As Dundas walked away beside Shiela, the lawyer said with an air of intense self-complacency, "Well, that's settled! As neat a piece of work as I've done for many a day. And he's no fool, mind you; but just about as cute as they make 'em. He consulted me yesterday about investing £30,000, and, by Jove! to hear him you'd think he'd been born and bred in the London Stock Exchange!"

"Do you mean £30,000 besides this loan?"

"Pooh! this loan, my dear sir, is a flea-bite—a flea-bite."

"But he's not going to spend more than £7,000 on this new house."

"I don't know anything about that, but I'll tell you in confidence what I do know—and not from himself only, mind you—

he has £30,000 hard cash, sir, hard cash, lying in the National Bank at this moment!"

It was while this confidence was being imparted to him that Ralph saw without remonstrance, or the slightest inclination to remonstrance, Dundas continue his walk beside Shiela along the high road. Very different, however, were Dick's feelings, when, at a sudden turn in the road, he confronted the absorbed lovers.

"Shiela!" he almost shouted.

"Yes," she cried in a startled tone, and then made all haste to add—"Father has just been asking for you! He's in the Horseshoe Field with Mr. Leech,"—for she feared that Dick would say something outrageously offensive, unless she suggested that she had her father's assent to this interview. Dick would have said something outrageously offensive, notwith-

standing this suggestion, if the expression of Dundas's face had not cowed him. As it was, he simply stared stupidly at them for a few seconds, and then rode past swiftly, to ascertain if this really was permitted by his father. He reached the gate of the Horseshoe Field just as his father and Mr. Leech approached it from the other side, and shouted, "Did you want me?"

"I? No," Ralph answered.

"Shiela said you were asking for me."

"I was asking if you were with her."

"I have just met her with Mr. Dundas," Dick said, putting all the significance he could into his voice.

"Yes, they have walked on together," Ralph replied with some embarrassment. "By the way, though, I do want to see you," he added. Was it possible that he

wished to keep Dick from rejoining Shiela and spoiling the *tête-à-tête?*

"Well, Mr. Leech," he turned to say to the attorney, "I am very much obliged to you, but I must not take up more of your valuable time. Good morning!"

The lawyer had been growing more and more odiously familiar on the strength of his great achievement of that morning, so that Ralph was only too glad to dismiss him, apart from his desire to explain matters to Dick.

"Good morning," the lawyer answered sulkily, and turned abruptly away.

When the lawyer had passed out, Dick dismounted, secured his horse to the gate, and joined his father in the field.

"What a low cad that Leech is!" his father said. For having yesterday in his despair abased himself before the attorney, he therefore hated him now.

He proceeded accordingly to abuse Leech in good round terms, partly to let off this feeling against him, but partly, also, to put off his embarrassing explanation to Dick. Dick, however, was too impatient for it to be put off long.

"But what about Shiela and that infernal American fellow?" he asked angrily.

"He has acted most generously—most generously, I must say. He will not only take up the mortgage, but he offers a large loan at low interest on the security of the rest of the property."

"You mean *you* have sold Shiela to him?"

"You forget who you're talking to, sir," Ralph answered, in an angry tone, in part sincere but in part assumed. "There was no mention of Shiela between us. But since you choose to mention her, I may tell you that she may please herself

in this matter. I can't shut her up all her life, and, as she's sure to take her own way sooner or later, it will save your mother and me a lot of worry to let her have it now."

And this preposterous tone he took henceforth in talking directly of the engagement, not to Dick and Shiela only, but also to his wife. Indirectly, however, both Mrs. Fitzgerald and Dick gathered that his sudden conversion was due, not to a sense of Shiela's obstinacy or of Dundas's generosity, but to a knowledge of the latter's vast realised wealth—vast, that is, from a Clare standpoint. This wealth was the indirect means of reconciling Mrs. Fitzgerald also to the match, since it gained for Dundas the inestimable privilege of intimacy with Lord Something-or-Other, a star of the first magnitude locally. Dick, who was the last to

come in, was the worthiest of the converts, since he came in time to reverence, with a boyish hero-worship, Dundas as the manliest of men. In time Dundas made something of a man of him too, stiffening and strengthening his character, raising his ideals, and widening his horizon.

Dundas took Patsey into his service solely because of his fealty to Shiela. For himself he could not do away with the cringing and incurable insincerity of the man, which inspired him with that sort of shrinking, nervous repulsion that one feels towards creeping creatures which have long been crushed and kept in darkness under a stone. That the Irish peasantry had been so crushed and kept in darkness for centuries accounted and apologised for Patsey, but could not reconcile a man of Dundas's uncompromising sincerity to his sinuous servility. "Men

like that," he often said to Shiela, "make tyrants quite as much as tyrants make men like that. They seem, like footballs, made to be kicked, and they are kicked accordingly." In Shiela herself nothing so excited his wonder and worship as the steel-like fibre and fineness of her character—at once soft and strong, trusty and flexible. "She was an Ugly Duckling," Dr. Cullinan, his fastest friend, said once to him. "You can't account for how she came out of such a nest; but the rest is easy enough accounted for. Not being a bird of their feather they misunderstood, snubbed, and neglected her, and so made her self-contained and self-reliant, without making her proud."

But when the Ugly Duckling developed swan's port and plumage it was surprising how cordially her lineage was recognised. Shiela, as a woman of wealth and position,

was "discovered" not by the county only, but by her own father and mother; who, had she allowed them, would have shown her a respect as unbecoming as their former contempt. Her parents' conversion, however, was not so wholly sordid as it seemed; since such virtues of Shiela's as they could appreciate were brought out by happiness, as flowers open to the sun—

> "The primal duties shine aloft, like stars;
> The charities that soothe, that heal, and bless,
> Are scattered at the feet of Man, like flowers."

Ralph and his wife were not by any means star-gazers, but flowers they could appreciate; and these—which had heretofore been chilled and checked by frost or closed by night—sunshine brought out in Shiela's nature.

"Well, I owe them no grudge anyway," Dundas said to her long after their honey-

moon. "If they had learned your value, or taught you it, I shouldn't have had a chance; and indeed if I had known it all myself, shouldn't have had a chance either —'Faint heart,'" etc. Howbeit Shiela always believed the balance of good fortune to be on her side.

THE END.

Printed by Cowan & Co., Limited, Perth.