

IRISH WAYS





WARWICK GOBLE

THE HAUNTED BOREEN

IRISH WAYS

BY

JANE BARLOW

AUTHOR OF "THE MOCKERS," ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS
IN COLOUR AND BLACK AND WHITE BY
WARWICK GOBLE

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TO
JAMES WILLIAM BARLOW

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P R E F A C E

THE contents of this volume may, I hope, justify the ambiguity of its title. For in "Irish Ways" the setting of the sketches and stories will be seen to have considerable importance as a kind of commentary on their incidents, often furnishing explanatory notes on traits of character displayed by the actors. Indeed the scenery through which we pass while travelling on Irish ways, in one sense, must never be left out of account when contemplating those other Irish ways found among the people with whom we meet. Thus, for example, to the loneliness of many a country-side, traversed by bog-road or boren, may be traced peculiarities developed in the inhabitants, who are by nature sociable, pleasure-loving, keen-witted people, and, also by nature, prone to melancholy and mysticism. Their situation, scattered thinly over barren places, where the villages, few and far between, are all more or less deserted villages, cannot but influence both their lives and characters. It is for them a day of very small things. Scanty opportunities and

resources constrain them to exercise their ingenuity on trifles, to plan and scheme, perhaps for gains most petty in the view of the more affluent, or perhaps simply for the sake of employing their idle brains; while, on the other hand, they sometimes turn in a different direction, and grasp at things from beyond this tangible universe to fill up the deficiencies in their share of life. Hence its narrowly circumscribed circle is now and again intersected by one of indefinite vastness.

Nobody who turns over the following pages will fail to perceive how vividly these chapters from the history of some Irish country folk have been lit up by the artist, whose pictures bring before the reader's eyes the wild bog-lands and misty hills, the quaint cabin-interiors and out-of-door gatherings, the solitary labourer and the farmer among his homely beasts, which are the subject of unadorned narrative.

JANE BARLOW.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
OURSELVES AND OUR ISLAND	I
UNDER THE HILL	23
JOANNA'S TWO FORTUNES	39
AN UNFINISHED ROMANCE	60
MR. WILLIAM'S COLLECTION	85
JOHN THE GHOST	116
A WOMAN EVER VENT	126
THE LOAN OF A PENCIL	151
THE FIRST DRIVE	168
A TRANSFER	175
JULIA'S BORROWING	189
A STORM OF TERROR	206
AND NO THANKS TO THEM	217
MICHAEL THE MEDITATOR	236
A CORNER OF A COUNTY	252

ILLUSTRATIONS

IN COLOUR

THE HAUNTED BOREEN	<i>Frontispiece</i>
MOSS-GREEN AND APPLE-GREEN SLOPES	<i>To face page 4</i>
AN OUT-OF-THE-WAY COUNTRY ROAD	12
IN THE LITTLE HOUSE UNDER THE HILL	24
AT THE FIELD-GATE	52
LISCONNEL CHILDREN	60
MR. WILLIAM AND BRIDGIE KIRBY	112
A CALL ON MRS. MAGARITY	118
“WHAT DELAYIN’ HAVE YOU?”	150
THE CALENDAR IN THE SHED	154
THE NEW YELLOW CAR	172
“AND IS IT YOURSELF, ALEC GOWRAN?”	180
JULIA GOES A-BORROWING	194
THE STORM BEGINS	210
“I’LL GET A HOLD OF IT YET”	220
MEDITATIONS	248

ALSO HEAD PIECES TO EACH CHAPTER



IRISH WAYS

OURSELVES AND OUR ISLAND

“It’s twenty pities,” an elderly Donegal peasant said to me one day—he was standing on a step-ladder to darn his thatched roof with strakes of straw—“that people can’t put up with other people’s notions.” The remark stated a broad general principle, which seems to become particularly applicable when things Irish are the subject of notions. Resentment is so easily, and sometimes so unaccountably, incurred. Often it proceeds from those who are dissatisfied unless Ireland is mentioned in much the same tone that kindly persons use when speaking of the departed, able

no more to defend or retrieve their own characters.

“ Bear, bear him along
With his few faults shut up like dead flowerets.”

Certainly the feeling is in itself a generous one ; but then Ireland is not dead at all, nor, be they few or many, are Ireland's faults. Other malcontents would insist that of Irish matters a predominantly humorous and pathetic view must always be taken. Rainbows may vanish, but the tear and the smile must never leave Erin's eye. Failing humour and pathos, indeed, they show an unfortunate readiness to admit comic and sentimental substitutes. In one of his stories Thackeray asks, anent a preposterous Irishman, whether it is better to be laughing-mad or crying-mad in this world, and they seem inclined to accept these suggested alternatives ; which is absurd. A third party, again, will have none of an Ireland that is not steeped in Celtic glamour, spell-bound by Druidical trances, murmurous with Gaelic incantations. Its inhabitants are exiles belonging to magical regions, far remote from this workaday world, and are more concerned about the exploits of ancient Heroes than the doings of their contemporary neighbours. To possess some sort of

uncanny gift is a proof of nationality almost as indispensable as the proverbial "O" or "Mac"; not to believe in, at least, fairies, argues you a west-Briton, if nothing worse. The existence of a shrewd, matter-of-fact Irishman, with a keen eye to the main chance, cannot be recognised as by any means possible.

These, and many more somewhat unreasonable requisitions, seem to be, in a great measure, the result of our attempts to imprison in definitely worded statements what is really an atmosphere, elusive, impalpable, with the property of lending aspects bewilderingly various to the same things seen from different points of view. No doubt every country breathes such an atmosphere of its own, and Ireland's may perhaps merely seem to us peculiarly distinctive. But even its "casing air," one fancies, is unlike the air of any other land. Its wild west winds sweep into its vast-vaulted skies larger clouds and more fantastically piled up than are elsewhere adrift. They fling down portentously dark shadows over already scowling boglands; they let fall on clear-brimmed lakes many a slanted gleam of silver fire; the sunsets kindled among them are of an unsurpassable splendour. Hence all parts of Ireland, though

especially the west and south, give much scope to the study of vapour in rapid motion, with its miracles of light and shade. This it is that so often transfigures, for instance, the lonely Connemarese plains and mountains. In the serenest weather they have a high beauty, albeit austere, and, as it were, half-reluctantly responsive to untempered sunshine. When the riftless grey curtains of the rain are gathered closely all round them, there is a sublime simplicity in their dreariness that fascinates and soothes. But only beneath changeful skies do their utmost charms appear. Then many a little glen may be seen as full of iridescent mist as if a whole rainbow had melted there, and through it the water of some pool or tarn will tremble like a fallen star drowning in dew. Far across the sombre floor of the bog a mountain range will hold stains of deepest pansy-purple in its hollows, and lift up peaks dipped in wild hyacinth blue; on hills somewhat nearer, the burning gold of gorse blossom, and dim pallor of ling, and smouldering ruddiness of heather, mingle themselves into one apricot-coloured glow under the sun. Close at hand, wide moss-green and apple-green slopes suddenly glitter all over with a network of crystal rivulets, flickering down as the last filmy strands of a shower trail off

MOSS-GREEN AND APPLE-GREEN SLOPES



them. High up on its track, here and there, a foam-white banner seems to shake out ampler folds, so that the country people remark: "There does be a powerful weight of water above in it to-day." Everywhere, spread abroad in unstinted measure by the acre or even the mile, lie the pure and vivid hues that are prized when doled out thriftily in precious stones, and flower-petals, and fragile wings; and everywhere their brightness is enhanced by quickly recurrent gleams and glooms as the clouds pass floating double.

Nevertheless it is partly to what must be considered a defect in Irish landscapes that they owe their capacity for receiving and recording skiey influences, making the most of the play of shine and shadow. For more scope is given thereto by the absence of woods and groves, those looms that weave a shadowy-shining fabric of their own, with some variations from the frowns and smiles on the face of the sky. Possibly the present destitution of Ireland in this respect has sometimes been exaggerated, though she undoubtedly is now among the most treeless of countries. Probably, likewise, the strongly contrasting descriptions of her former state are not to be taken quite as matters of fact. We can hardly accept as historical the accounts of

how her earliest colonists found the "Isle of the Yellow Woods"—the first of her score of names—all a dense forest from sea to sea, save one small bit of the north-eastern corner of what is now the county Dublin, which they called Moynalty, from the flocks of birds there basking in the sun, everywhere else obscured by interwoven boughs; and how a certain Nemedius, eleventh in descent from Noah, "designing to improve the soil of the country, cut down twelve woods of very large extent, and laid the land open." Still, the vast tree-cemeteries of our bogs furnish much corroborative evidence; and in authentic Elizabethan days, there yet stood unravaged the great Desmond Forests, and Spenser the poet could speak of Eiré's "goodly woods, fitt for building of howses and shippes, so commodiously as that yf some princes in the world had them, they would soone hope to be lordes of all the seas, and ere long of all the world."

To-day it seems as if we might really be drawing near to the fulfilment of a hope less immoderately ambitious, but of no trivial importance: the hope that Ireland will cease to be a gap in the garment of tree-clad mother-earth, and once more will wave all over with branches in what we call our Big Winds. Because new plantations are not only in

the air ; the roots of no despicable beginnings are already in the ground, so that the possessors of even rather short second-sight may well foresee the spreading woodlands, and fore-hear the rustling of their multitudinous leaves. Doubtless, if we expected to look upon their maturity with our bodily eyes, most of us would share the feelings of Horace Walpole when he remarked that the deliberation with which trees grow was extremely inconvenient to his natural impatience ; but to picture the improvements wrought by restoring something of our primitive sylvan scenery is a pleasant and not extravagant flight of the imagination. These modern forests will, of course, harbour a population differing in many respects from that of their predecessors. The wild red deer, and swine, and wolves, to say nothing of the giant elk and mammoth, will not return to associate with our tamer flocks and herds ; and the people are changed at least in their outward aspect. Discarded are not only the men's saffron shirts and their great mantles, so dreaded and decried by Spenser, but after them have gone the swallow-tail coat, knee-breeches, and high-crowned caubeen, with a pipe stuck in the band for comic parts, which still form the conventional costume of the stage Irishman. In real life

they are practically extinct, appearing rarely on the person of some very ancient, remotely dwelling farmer, who has qualified for his old age pension with a dozen years to spare. Grey homespun suits and caps to match are now the wear of father and son. Wives and daughters in their attire show a more conservative spirit, their woollen skirts and shawls having come down unaltered through indefinite generations. It is true that new-fangled finery makes an entrance among them, penetrating into unlikely places now and then, so that a picture hat of the largest size may be seen going to Mass beside a starched white-frilled cap. But this does not happen often enough to vulgarise the general appearance of a really country crowd. One fine summer day, not long since, in the far-western Isle of Achill, I met a troop of some twenty broad-backed, cream-coloured Connemara ponies, strong, sturdy little beasts, and was struck by the quaint medieval aspect of the cavalcade, as the peasant folk jogged on, nearly all of them riding double, the women and colleens in their many-folded, dark blue or white cloth, hooded cloaks, gay shawls and kerchiefs, and richly hued, home-dyed skirts. For a moment one might have imagined that a party of Canterbury pilgrims had suddenly ambled out of the misty past.

They were on their way to a fair, and fairs are fairs in Ireland. We can indeed hardly overestimate the blank that would be left in the people's lives if from them were subtracted the fair-days and market-days which are so large a factor in the sum of their business and pleasure. Ruskin has suggested that the irrigation of the earth could be managed "if once in three days, or thereabouts, a great, ugly, black rain-cloud were brought up over the blue, and everything well watered, and so all left blue again till next time;" with no need for the ever-varied pageantry and pomp of drifting vapours, lights, and shadows. And in like manner we can imagine some future time when Irish peasants may adopt more strictly scientific methods of buying and selling, and dispose of their farm produce and purchase their household requisites at fixed prices in a great co-operative store, without any of the haggling and chaffering which is now an indispensable part of such transactions, and a source of agreeable interest to many onlookers not at all personally concerned. But should this come to pass, it seems as if something must vanish from the gaiety of the nation, and a monotony settle down upon it, corresponding to that of an unrelieved blue overhead.

Nobody, however, can regret one cause of

excitement, which within the last half-century or so has ceased to enliven our fairs : the faction-fights, namely, a highly uncivilised institution, finally suppressed by Dan O'Connell. An old Tipperary Fenian, to our grief no longer among us, told me that in his youth it was the custom on the afternoon of every fair-day, when business was over, for the shopkeepers to put up their shutters, and all the women, children, and non-combatants to retreat indoors, just as if the town were besieged ; whereupon the two hostile "factions," whose ostensible cause of quarrel would probably be the disputed age of a long-deceased heifer, or some such absurdity, would come and fight fiercely in the streets until nightfall ended the fray. Seeing that the weapons they used were the same as those wielded by their forefathers eighteen centuries earlier, huge sticks and clubs of blackthorn, oak, or ash, with iron or lead ferrules, it is not to be wondered at that these violent delights had violent endings, loss of life or limb commonly resulting from the encounters. Nowadays there is none of that deliberate disorder. War-like episodes do naturally occur from time to time, usually originating in some public-house ; for Father Mathew's crusade against intemperance has unluckily had less permanent effects than O'Connell's

against faction-fights. But, as a rule, friendliness prevails ; while herds of cattle poking their foolish horned heads into the most inconvenient places ; drovers shouting and flourishing sticks ; flocks of sheep trotting along in a compact formation enforced by sagacious collies ; pigs and calves plunging hither and thither, or mounted on carts behind the wooden bars of tall cage-like creels ; horses and ponies exhibiting their best paces before studiously disparaging critics ; small droves of dark turf-coloured donkeys, the property, most likely, of wandering tinker-people, acquired by means best known to themselves ; hand-barrows piled with crockery, boots, tinware, and vegetables ; market-women with baskets of fowl and eggs ; stalls hung with garments, chiefly second-hand ; tables covered with fruit and confectionery—all these things, accompanied by the strains of two or three fiddlers and pipers, make up a scene which has continually repeated itself time out of mind. And towards evening the crowd melts away along the roads which converge upon the fair-green, and which have through the day been lined with ranks of empty side-cars, their erected shafts bristling like some queer growth of thorny hedgerow.

It would be impossible to spend much time in

rural Ireland without recognising the importance of "jaunting-cars," more especially in their humbler form, that most commonly seen. Though they are all built upon the same general lines, there is no kind of vehicle the individual specimens of which more widely differ from one another as to matters of detail; none is more modifiable by cushions, springs, and tyres; none responds more sensitively to the asperities and amenities of the surface over which it rolls, or to the peculiar paces of the beast by which it is drawn. A drive along deep-rutted *boreens*, perched on a high, ill-balanced, unpadded seat, with unequal, iron-shod wheels, and a lolloping horse, prone to stumble, if not come down outright, is an experience that might well remind sporting people of a stiff run across country. If we wished to fix the opposite poles of travelling modes, we might set at one of them the sixty-horse-power, ninety-miles-an-hour projectile, the transits of which make every highroad a way to dusty death, and at the other the leisurely, jolting car, with its single jog-trotting nag, and its load of passengers, whose number may run into two figures.

Extreme elasticity in this respect is indeed very characteristic of our national conveyance. Not only do occasions such as funerals, weddings, and fairs

AN OUT-OF-THE-WAY COUNTRY ROAD



WARREN COUNTY

tax its capacity to the uttermost, but daily emergencies make incessant demands upon it. In fact what with "the loan of a lift" recurrent on the way, and the doing of commissions for stay-at-home neighbours, a car, however moderately laden at the outset, seldom reaches its journey's end with an unoccupied cranny to spare. All sorts of things hitch themselves on to it as it proceeds. A firkin of butter and a spinning-wheel may be sitting waiting for it at some wild, heathery-bordered cross-roads; and a bit farther on it may pick up under a hedge a rush-cased salmon and a couple of equally silent geese, or perhaps an old woman with some less fortunate fowl cawking and fluttering beneath her cloak. For along out-of-the-way country roads, where communications are as fitful as infrequent, persons and property are carried from place to place by extemporised systems of make-shifts, ever subject to unlucky delays and inconvenient breaking down of connections, so that their progress is chequered by as many unforeseen pauses as if they were sticks and straws travelling on the capricious current of a stream, which strands them here and there against some stone or jutting ledge; or were winged seeds wafted at the wind's haphazard will, crossed by intercepting briars.

In the homes at which they do ultimately arrive—I am supposing districts entirely rural, and therefore peopled mainly by farming folk, “stronger” or “weaker”—the ordinary course of life often has some analogy to the progress of such a conveyance, that is to say, if we understand by life anything beyond the mere fact of continuing to exist. Where neighbours are few and far between, and occupation is monotonous or scanty, the flow of interest becomes intermittent and all its breezes drop down “as sad as sad can be.” Then time hangs heavily in and about the small whitewashed dwellings, slated farm-house or thatched cabin. Events seem to have ceased happening, nor are there any at all definitely in prospect. This is a state of things against which the young people in particular impatiently rebel, as forecasting a future which promises them little. They are always disposed to ask: “And what good is one’s life without chances?” In the endless, empty-handed winter evenings, when the last word has been conned in the borrowed newspaper—for the dearth of literature is inconceivable—and when the lamp screening the window, and the fire flushing the walls, seem no longer to light any purpose of profit or pleasure, the hours must lag leadenly indeed. It appears quite

possible that we have herein one reason for the exodus of our youth so steadily proceeding from the country, if we may conjecture some of the emigrants to be scared from their father's door, not so much by dread of the grinning wolf poverty, as by disgust at the crawling slug dulness. That same impulse, intolerance of tedium, which sends the inhabitants of English villages crowding into the great cities, drives Irish lads and lasses farther off across the Atlantic.

However, it must not by any means be imagined that amusements are wholly lacking in our rustic life. That were much to underestimate the capabilities of the will in dealing with the way. Certainly the will to seek diversion is strong enough here, and found it has been sometimes in far from likely quarters. A "burying," for instance, with its accompanying "wake," is often for most of those who attend it an enjoyable social gathering, at which extremely lavish hospitality will be shown. This is a sign of the national propensity for laying an exaggerated and ghoulish emphasis on funereal affairs. Of late years matters have improved, what is called, rather pretentiously perhaps, the Irish Renaissance, appealing to a more commendable and really more characteristic taste. Just as the Gaelic

word *socraid*, which originally signified any sort of procession, is now used to denote a funeral one, the word *feis* (pronounced "fesh"), properly speaking any sort of festival, has come to be understood as short for a festival of music. These *feiscanna* have grown into a recognised institution and a prominent feature in country life, greatly to its enlivening, as well as to the safeguarding from oblivious neglect of many beautiful old songs and melodies. And there are dances for the soon-dark winter nights, when the fiddle quits its hook on the wall ; hurley and football matches ; patterns and stations ; hunting and horse-races, with, it must unluckily be added, not a little gambling and drinking, in response to the ever-effective demand for excitement by any means good or bad. Still, in a country so thinly populated as Ireland is to-day, there will always be many scattered households living well-nigh beyond reach of such distractions, and consequently passing days "remote, unfriended, melancholy, slow," as did long since, in different circumstances, a roving compatriot of their own. No remedy, perhaps, could more effectually mend their case than the administration of a few samples from the works produced by him or his fellow-craftsmen. It is not easy for those who have lived among a

superabundance of literature to realise what the possession of even one single volume may seem to the dweller in a parish where all the other books could be counted on his fingers. The number of such parishes is not small. Nay, there are fair-sized country towns, whose shops might be thoroughly ransacked without bringing to light any literary wares of more account than a dream-book or a couple of antiquated sixpenny novels. As this extreme dearth exists among a quick-witted people, who for more than a generation past have been practically free from illiteracy, we may safely assume that it is chargeable with much *tedium vitæ*, and much waste of time, for which, therefore, a cure should not appear so very far to seek. Extend a service of well-equipped travelling library vans, and relief will forthwith be at the door of many a lonesome abode, whose inmates will have reason to date from the arrival a marvellous increase of their store. It is pleasant to think that circumstances are smoothing the way for the passage of these vehicles. There is, for instance, the handily compact form of the innumerable cheap classical reprints, which would allow a few square inches of space, quite within the resources of the least commodious cabin, to contain a twelvemonth's

treasure of poetry and prose ; and there is the small price which puts them within reach of anybody who can command a few pence, certain not to be grudged here. Again, the present enthusiasm for the study of the Gaelic language has a like tendency, because it stirs up, through patriotic sentiment, some minds that would not spontaneously have turned to literary pursuits ; and, the reading habit once acquired, they will never restrict themselves to Gaelic lesson-books. In short, it is not an altogether extravagant conjecture that among these scattered dwellings, thus safely isolated from all the allurements of rubbish-laden stall and counter, bestrewn with worthless snippets and the newest brewage of fiction, “ a tun of bulk, a kilderkin of wit,” there may spring up and spread widely an unperverted taste for real literature. But at least it is in any case reasonable to predict with confidence that much lasting pleasure would be brought to individual households. The art-loving Celt, put into possession of the only artistic work that circumstances make fully accessible to him, would experience something like a return of the good old days, when poets and minstrels roamed through the land, while the Shanachie sat by the hearth, weaving his romances in the light of the turf-fire.

Turf and the bog whence it came—they seem essential features in Irish country life, which failing them could hardly be carried on at all. Indeed, where would we be without our bit of good turf? is a question common among the peasantry. Happily the speculation has no very practical bearings, since nearly three million acres of turf-beds, averaging twenty feet in thickness, may well be considered to leave little room for fear that supplies will run short, whether or no they have the power of growing, which is still a disputed point. Nature when sweeping away our coal-measures, decreed that we should yet have an ample provision of fuel. Not that this is the only, or even, it may be, the most important product of our bog-lands. In life on our flat-bottomed barge of an island, whose bulwarks of sea-fronting mountains perhaps suggested to Bishop Berkeley the lofty brazen wall behind which he thought the Irish could subsist so prosperously on their own resources, those vast level tracts, dim and dusky hued, where no beast grazes and no plough grooves, count for much besides merely peat. By their defiant infertility and obdurate unchangeableness they bring into the heart of the country something akin to the ocean. Living on the edge of a bog is

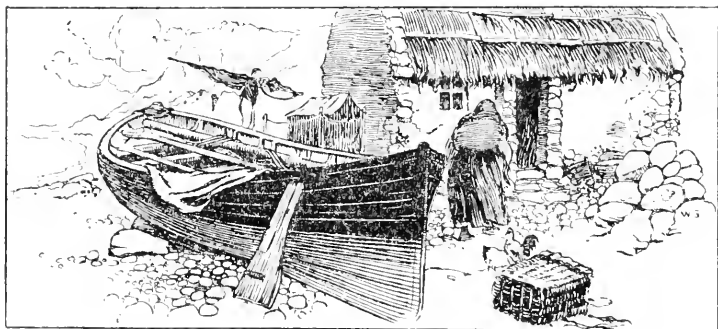
in many ways like living on the shore of the sea, perpetually confronted with the "great opposeless wills" of elements which we must never think to control. Also like the sea, bogs have their tales of perils and sorrows. Ever and anon, half a mile or so of one will begin to move, more tragically than Birnam wood, amid shrieks and groans weirder than the sounds made by breaking ice-fields, and sliding along, a wave horribly crested, will blot out with oozy black mire all that lies in its path, green meadow, white cabin, its helpless prey, not sparing their ill-fated inhabitants, if taken by surprise or over-slow to flee. Though such catastrophes seldom happen, there are less obvious dangers, which, always lying in wait, probably entrap many more victims. Quagmires with innocently masked faces are ready to swallow piecemeal the owner of any unfortunate foot that unwarily approaches. More frankly open-mouthed bog-holes, murky and steep-walled, do not lack opportunities for gulping down bodily the benighted passer-by.

But despite all disasters and mischances, it must be admitted that bogs have a charm of their own. The air that travels over them grows singularly pure and wholesome, and is often fragrant with aromatic herbs. Their sad-coloured mantle is

here and there resplendent with fiery gold of furze and paler gold of broom, silver white of tall ox-eye daisies, and crimson and purple of loosestrife and heather. On a closer view it is seen to be embroidered with diminutive blossoms and berries that glow like jewels. A border of emerald green osmunda fern sometimes marks the course of the clear brown streams that cross them. Even the grey boulders among the gorse-bushes are encrusted with scarlet-cupped lichen. They are haunted by flocks of wild birds, amongst which the snowy gulls shine conspicuously ; they make the home of many small, lowly-dwelling creatures, some of them quaint and unpersonable enough, but pleasant to the eye of those who have a turn for natural history, which like love can " transpose to form and dignity " things base and vile ; and beneath their surface lie hidden relics of by-gone ages, dear to the antiquarian's heart. And all these things, with many more, are over and above the long-shaped turf-sods, which play so indispensable a part in Irish rural life that we can hardly dissociate it from the odour of the transparent blue smoke.

Yet we must not confuse this with the distinctive Irish atmosphere of which mention has been made, and which is far less material, far more

pervasive. It may be felt amid the broad grasslands of "Meath of the pastures," or the rich grain fields of Tipperary's Golden Vale ; in the hawthorn-scented Glens of Antrim, and the embowering woods that have lingered round Killarney. By virtue thereof, one imagines, though he were set down in the most solitary region, an exile from Erin, wafted hither on his wishing-carpet, would know that he had reached his Land of Heart's Desire. And small blame to them, as our people say, if for him and his she seem "the first flower of the earth and first gem of the sea." Only to hold the belief sanely they must admit that the flower has not yet blossomed in perfection and that the gem is not absolutely without flaw.



UNDER THE HILL

THE old widow lived in the one cabin that was to be seen afar on a silvery rim at the Atlantic end of a Donegal valley, the many-syllabled name of which is locally shortened into "Glen." Her postal address was : *On the Sandy Strand*. This little house under the hill stood low down by the water's edge, with footslopes of a haughtily crested promontory rising behind it, and the shallow, shoal-baffled tides ebbing and flowing between sandbanks and shingly bars a stone's-throw from its front door. A bit up the hill was a holy well, consecrated to Saint Brigid, with close by a fairy thorn-bush, the special property of the unsanctified Good People. The old *banati* herself, her son, her daughter, a shaggy-

coated, large black terrier, a yellow-and-white cat with two small kittens, and an indefinite number of poultry—these composed the household one showery August afternoon, when its mistress entertained company strange to Glen.

Rain blowing about in dim grey sheets had led to an offer of shelter, and hospitality barred the way against egress as long as a desultory drop could be pointed out in proof that it was “too soft yet a bit altogether.” There was no lack of conversation to beguile the time. Seated beside the hearth, the visitor kept warily to the middle of a low, home-made form, which had a tendency to tilt up at the vacant end; the hostess occupied a short creepy-stool opposite. A dresser, and a bed in a recess, were nearly all the rest of the furniture; but then the rafters contrived a very manifold debt to pay, serving as cupboard, chest, and wardrobe, accommodating sundries that ranged from rosaries to boots, dangling by the laces. On either hand a smaller chamber opened out of this living-room. Everywhere cleanliness and order were triumphantly attained, and a few brightly coloured prints on the wall aimed at decoration.

But the jewel of the house was the fire on the hearthstone, a pyramid of blossom-like white and

IN THE LITTLE HOUSE UNDER THE HILL



pink, with a ruby-glow throbbing at its core. The sods it was built of had been well-nigh as hard and black as coal, for the quality of Glen's turf is excellent, to the great benefit of all the neighbours, who unanimously praise it as the chief comfort of their lives. Nevertheless the widow thought it necessary to apologise for her fire on the grounds that the sods were not yet thoroughly dry. Their stack was only a-making; in fact her little boy was just then away cutting peat on the bog up over the hill, beyond the holy well, whither his sister would presently be setting out to bring him his dinner, of brown-jacketed potatoes and slender, sardine-like fishes called *sheen*. These are really young glossan, but the visitor wondered whether they were mackerel-fry, a speculation which to the Glen fisher-folk seemed, no doubt, something equivalent to conjecturing that kittens might grow up into sheep. "I do be throwin' the full of a couple of creels on it of a cold winter's day, bedad do I," the turf-cutter's mother said with satisfaction. "Glory be to God, it's a very pleasant thing to have one's plenty of turf."

Information to the effect that the people who lived about Dublin had no turf-bogs, and must be paying shillings for little sacks of dirty grimy coal,

came upon her with a shock, jostling against some long-cherished prejudices. For it soon appeared that the city of Dublin was her Yarrow Unvisited, and to get there her desire and dream. Scarcely her hope any longer, since in all her threescore years and odd she had never travelled more than fifteen miles from Glen, and had never "set foot on board of a train," so that she felt it growing rather late in the week for the chance of any such unprecedented enterprises. The possible intervention of an even farther journey was evidently on her mind. "There's a many oulder than I am, strong men, workin' in their fields this minyit," she said, appraising probabilities, "but it's the winter I'm afeard of. I do be very bad wid the cold on me chest somewhiles, and a small thing's big to an ould body."

Hoping to obtain some near views of Celtic eschatology—for it is off this very coast that Hy Brasil the Blest has been descried among the wild waters—her visitor introduced an allusion to the *Tir-na-n-Oge*, the Land of Youth, where all these evil spells of old age are undone. But the reflections called forth were more philosophical, or at any rate more sombre, than suit with an outlook of that kind. "Sure now, no matter what len'th

of time you may live, you've no call to think bad of it, for you'll have long enough to be dead ; dear-oh, you'll have long enough to be dead. There was a very ould woman died here in Glen this summer ; upwards of a hundred she was, and a good ould woman, and very sinsible in her mind. And the day she was dyin', me daughter and meself went to bid her good-bye. And says she to me : ' Ah Katty, *achora,*' says she, ' if I could bide in it here wid yours only two days more,' says she, ' I'd be contint.' For when she seen it draw on to quittin' away from us all, sorry she was to be goin'. So you see she wasn't satisfied wid livin' that great while itself. But indeed now it's a very pleasant thing to be just puttin' day after day over you, and year after year, wid no harm happenin'. And sure even supposin' you was livin' to the age of the crows in the field, you'll have long enough to be dead ; no fear, but you'll have long enough to be dead."

Seated on her rickety little stool, with a gay-bordered kerchief bound tightly over her frilled white cap, and her short woollen gown covered with a bluish cotton *praskeen*, or wide apron, the stuff for which her daughter had run up and bought at the shop for ninepence last spring, because " she

didn't like to see her mother carrying the seed gathered up in her skirt, when they were putting down their potatoes," this old woman looked the part of some tragic personage in an ancient Greek Play hardly so successfully as one might have expected judging by these sentiments.

Her conversation was interrupted now and then by the necessity for sweeping out with a heather besom a clamorous cluster of intrusive chickens, whose quarrels were waxing too vehement. Shaggy black Watch should by rights have performed this duty, but he had comfortably assigned himself the much easier task of guarding the visitor's umbrella, which was in his mistress's opinion likewise an important and valuable piece of property : " a wonderful convenient contrivance for hinderin' a body from gettin' drownded on a wet Sunday goin' to Mass." There were some families in Glen that kept an umbrella, she added, careful to vindicate the civilised character of her neighbourhood, though, like its other inhabitants, she frankly admitted that it was, on the whole, " a terrible backward place." The umbrella would be safe enough with Watch, she said ; he had a great notion of minding things, though he was grown a bit old in himself, the same as his betters, and not much use

out of doors, except for driving the ducks off her bits of sowings, when “they did be flattenin’ down the green oats wid their feet streelin’ through everything, as bad as a shower of hail. But Watch would head them off, and set them for a swim away on the tide.” Sure enough, the visitor had just met a drake-commanded squadron afloat on the channel that meanders among the sands close by; and had also noticed that the geese of Glen, doubtless to discourage such destructive streeplings on their part, wear a hampering leathern circlet round each ankle—if geese have ankles—a precaution which may seem new to us, but which is probably of very ancient origin, as it was enjoined by the Brehon Laws, wherein hens, furthermore, are ordered to be hooded, and to wear rag-boots over their claws, tied on with twine. Certainly it was no light responsibility to be a poultry keeper at that period of great-grandmotherly legislation. The simpler plan of clipping geese’s wings is not adopted nowadays in Glen, the consequence being that ever and anon somebody’s flock will “take off with themselves and fly out to sea on” their aggrieved owner, to return no more.

“And sometimes,” the widow continued, “the lads goin’ up to the well yonder do be leavin’ their

wheelers wid me down here—Aye, to be sure, cycles yous call them, but *rohar* we say in the Gaelic, and that's a wheeler—so then Watch gets the job of mindin' them. Finely set up wid it he is; he consaits he's somebody. For the childer do be comin' about, and standin', and gazin', and it's apt to try twistin' the handles they'd be, or spinnin' round the wheels. But as long as Watch has his eye cocked on them they needn't trouble themselves to make an offer at that. He won't raise hand or foot agin them, but he won't let them lay hand or foot on the wheelers. Sure they're the grand inventions entirely. You'd be no time gettin' anywhere you wanted, if you could studdy yourself rightly on a one of them." Considering how short a while it seemed since a well-to-do farmer's wife, living within half-a-dozen miles of Dublin, had inquired with awe of a cyclist: "And are you after comin' over atop of that *little wild thing*?" the visitor thought that Glen was really not so terribly backward after all.

Evidently the widow was quite accustomed to harbouring the weather-bound, and she spoke of how on inclement Sundays and fair-days her room would often be crowded with strangers as well as neighbours, waiting until some sudden *polthogue* or

“plump” of rain abated. Many of them would have a long step to go, for “wide is the parish, and houses far asunder,” extending from Malinbeg, half-a-dozen miles away at one end of it, to Strabwee, equally distant at the other, a hamlet up among the hills, whence the people, coming down to Glen for Mass or market, travel walking in single file along narrow, trodden footpaths, with bracken and heather shoulder-high about them. “And in soft weather you might as well be goin’ every step of the way between a couple of waves of the sea, by reason of the wet drippin’ off them. Finely drenched the craturs do be, goodness may pity them,” declared the widow.

During this afternoon’s prolonged shower she entertained her guest with, among other things, an anecdote about a former refugee, which threw an instructive light upon the business transactions of Glen. Very modest, it must be admitted, is their scale. There were once—this is not the widow’s anecdote—some Irish folks, who having become possessed of a little Iceland pony, their sole live stock, bespoke from a neighbouring farmer several *stone* of hay, an order which they considered somewhat magnificent. But the farmer replied by their messenger that as he had unluckily mislaid all his

ounce weights, he could not send them the quantity required. Now, this sarcastic agriculturist, had he migrated a bit north-westward, and taken up his abode in a certain Donegal valley, might have learned anon not to despise the day of small things. For the business done in Glen involves much use of ounce weights. Even lesser ones would be needed to appreciate the pennyworths of so-called tea, wraith-like, unsubstantial wisps, much in demand at the couple of shops. It may well be that neither of them has ever sold so large a quantity as half a pound at a time to any single customer. Yet they are the emporiums of a whole countryside.

The hero of the widow's story was the Tea-man. A Tea-man is a person who drives about the country on a car, and persuades the wealthier people to buy his wares. This Tea-man can by no means have supposed our widow a likely patroness, when one rainy summer morning he sought shelter in her kitchen. But by chance he found there another visitor, a very poor, old, Irish-speaking neighbour, who had nobody in the world left her except her married brother, and who, infirm and half-blind, saw beclouded days, "livin' under the sister-in-law that wasn't very wishful to have her at all." On this wet day, however, great good-luck was to befall her.

“ For what does the Tea-man do, but takes a half-pound parcel out of his pack, and gives it to her in a present. Aye, bedad did he, and wrote down the price of it against himself in his little book, the way he wouldn't be robbin' his employers. And after that, says he to me, would the ould woman be able to get herself the sugar to be drinkin' wid it. And says I to him : ‘ Well, now, me lad, tellin' you the truth, she would *not*.’ So wid that he takes out fourpence, and gives it to her to buy the bit of sugar. And then the crathur went down on her two knees in the middle of this floor, and said to Almighty God that he was never to want for the price of what he had given her to the last day of his life. And the Tea-man was in stitches of laughin' that she should be makin' such talk over a grain of tea and sugar. But sure 'twas no laughin' matter to ould Molly, that does often be lyin' sick, and when they bring her the bowl of pitaties, ne'er a hand she'll put out to it. 'Deed that's the way it does be wid the ould people many a time. They can't be eating the pitaties, and then all they can do is, if they're able, they get themselves a trifle of the yellow meal. Aye, to be sure, they'd liefer have the oaten-meal, but the other does be somethin' cheaper, and it's that they do be buyin', when

they can. Dear-oh, the crathur's to be pitied. But there's a good few of the *girsheachs*"—young girls—"doin' the spriggin'"—white muslin embroidery, a common cottage industry—"that a lady takes and sells for them off away somewheres. So when they're paid their money for it, they do be gettin' ould Molly her bits of tea and sugar, and the snuff, that helps her weak eyes, so she says. 'Deed, they're expectin' news of a parcel of their work every day the now."

It was regrettable to learn that this benevolent Traveller had lately gone to America, the very usual ending to the traceable history of anybody connected with Glen. The chances were that some of those charitable, embroidering *girsheachs* might have followed his example before the year was out, leaving old Molly all the poorer. And the worst of it was that, things being as they were, no disinterested observer could wish, even less counsel them to remain. "The place is terrible backward; there does be no earnin' in it, and ne'er a chance for the young people." On the fishing they cannot count, for "some seasons sorra a shoal will come next or nigh the coast, whatever ails them;" nor on the harvest, for "you couldn't tell the day or the minute when the blight may be blowin' in on a

wet wind from the sea, and witherin' up the pitaties as ye look at them," while an oat-field gone to hopeless wrack is at least no rarer spectacle than one safely lined with stooks. So the boys and girls say to themselves that only the width of the water after all will lie between, and over it they go, hardly realising, maybe, what a chasm they are crossing. Their departure leaves parents forlornly lonesome, and brethren restlessly discontented. The money-orders that come over by mail—emigrants call a remittanceless letter a "dry" one, and send it apologetically—are useful, no doubt, but cannot fill up the blank made by the absence of Paddy or Rose, and waken in the minds of Kitty and Jack a perilous eagerness to be off in quest of dollars for themselves. Moreover, the circumstance of the most capable and energetic being usually among the first to go, has naturally begun to create an impression that the mere fact of keeping at home does imply homely wits, and this of course adds the prick of pride to the many other urgent motives for setting out. Our old widow's household had been shrunken thus, for of her ten children, emigration to the States—"and no talk of comin' back"—as well as death and marriage, had left but the one son and daughter at home. To keep them content there

was evidently her anxious wish, mingled with what she recognised as a vain desire for the transference of herself and her family to the marvellous city of Dublin.

“Your brothers, now, will be gettin’ plenty of jobs, livin’ up there near the town,” she said half-enuously. “But this is a poor country to be bringin’ up childer in, and little chances they have compared wid the likes of them. The crops off our wee bits of sowins, and me few hins, and the sheep up above on the mountain—me wheel’s away mendin’, or else I’d be spinnin’ to-night—that’s the whole of it, unless the good black turf, glory be to God.”

How many acres had she in her holding? “’Deed then, that’s more than I can be tellin’ you. Himself that was the man of the house used to know, but I never thought to ask him while he was in it, and now he’s away this ten year.” The rent was fifteen shillings, that she knew, and the rates—she called them *tocsi bochttha*—were very high. Perhaps her little boy, that was out again on the bog cutting turf, could tell what land they had.

But when her little boy, who was apparently a well-grown young man, soon afterwards came in, driven from his work by the persisting rain, which makes mud of peat, his views about their acreage

were as vague as her own. The man of the house had taken his knowledge with him out of reach. Then, Larry having learned with a kind of joy, for *Schadenfreude* does at times form an element in local patriotism, that no salmon are caught in Dublin Bay—herrings, he remarked slightly, weren't any great things—the conversation shifted from business to literature.

Larry supposed that it was easy enough to come by the newspaper up in Dublin; and his mother mentioned as a memorable event that she had brought him home a *Belfast Herald* from Carrick a month back. "And sure if that evenin' we weren't all of us sittin' up wid it till goin' on for twelve o'clock at night. 'Tis the grand way to be puttin' over the time. You'd scarce notice it slippin' by, when otherwhiles you'd be thinkin' 'twas quare and long before you were gettin' e'er an atom sleepy. . . . Me son made them yesterday, after he comin' in from his work," she said, pointing out two huge balls of coiled hay-rope stowed away in a corner, "but it's only of an odd while he has a *suggawn* to be twistin'." And Ellen, the daughter, observed that she had "got th'ould grey goat makin' an offer to nibble a one of them just before it settled to rain."

Meanwhile the chickens scuffled on the earthen floor in contentious knots, and the terrier blinked at them placidly by the hearth, and the tawny cat was spending a rather anxious afternoon, because her two kittens would constantly slip in and out under the closed door of the right-hand chamber, and she, being too portly to follow them through the narrow crevice, could only wait in a helpless hen-with-ducklings fashion on the wrong side of it. Recent experiences might well have made her feel uneasy when they were lost to sight. For : " Sure it was about drowndin' the one of them we were last week out there in the sea. For what would we do wid three cats growin' up in the little house ? But if we did, the crathur went swimmin' in herself after it, goodness may pity her, and fetched it back to shore in her mouth, wid ne'er a hit on it. So then we hadn't the heart to be takin' it away from her again." As she cannot, of course, have understood this change of purpose in her ruling powers, she was still prowling distractedly, when the rain intermitted, and her mistress from the threshold watched their " strange company " away across the silvery sand, pricked through with grey-green bent-grass and many-tinted sea-holly.



JOANNA'S TWO FORTUNES

I

MARTIN BYRNE wished to goodness that the young rapscallion had kept out of Clonowen ; he might have gone anywhere else at all, so long as he had done that ; and in this wish several of Martin's neighbours shared. The occasion of it was Tom Clancy, who had lately come to stay with a great-aunt, old Mrs. Finny, up at Knockree. If you said that Tom was good-looking and agreeable in his manners, you would have honestly reckoned up all his best qualities ; but the worst of them was that they were of a sort which will often dispose people to credit their possessor with a variety of other

merits, wherein he may be almost entirely deficient. And amongst those who entertained such a delusion about Tom Clancy was Martin Byrne's only sister Joanna. This, for every reason, was a serious annoyance to Martin. Ever since their parents' death he had been managing Joanna's affairs, which had prospered so well under his six years' guardianship that the few head of cattle originally left to her for her portion were now quite a goodly herd, worth near a couple of hundred pounds on any market-day. Moreover, he had every penny of the profits, which had accrued from the milk and butter and sold-off calves, put up for her in the Ballyraheen Bank. So that Joanna was a really considerable heiress, fully entitled to have a brilliant match made for her among the well-to-do bachelors of the neighbourhood.

Now, to such an alliance Martin had long looked forward with satisfaction and confidence, the other party to it being his friend Fergus Moore of Mangastown. Fergus was a thriving farmer, and a very decent man. The latter consideration weighed heavily with Martin, for he did not at all approve the custom, too seldom broken by his neighbours, of appraising a husband's merits solely by the

amount of his worldly gear. "Much good," he used to reflect, "a girl 'ud get of a bit of land, and a bit of stock, if there was to be some ill-conditioned, drunken young reprobate, or some cross-tempered ould naygur, walkin' in and out of her house on her all the days of her life. She'd be better stoppin' where she is."

Nor was he indifferent to the fact that his sister and his friend were well inclined towards one another. "For," as he reflected again: "there's some good enough things I never could abide the thoughts of meself. Parsnips, now, is no harm for e'er a body that likes them, but I wouldn't be aitin' them for sixpence a bite. And it might aisy ha' happint that way wid them two; only it didn't, by good luck. Sure Fergus thinks there isn't the like of her in the Kingdom of Connaught, poor man; and Joanna herself was frindly wid him ever since she could run on her feet." As affairs were in this propitious state at a time when Joanna was going on for nineteen, and when Martin Byrne had begun to think about Rose McGowran in a way which made it appear all the more desirable that his sister should be provided with an establishment of her own, everything tended towards the speedy making up of one match at least.

Therefore no cow's horn certainly can ever have been much crookeder than was the chance that must needs bring Tom Clancy just then into the parish of Clonowen. Keenly and quickly did Martin rue it, for he noticed, or fancied that he noticed, from the very first appearance of the new-comer at Mass, an inclination on Joanna's part to look down on Fergus Moore, to flout him to his face, and behind his back to speak of him disparagingly. And the cause of this untoward change soon became evident. It was Christmas time, when a round of festivities among the neighbours gave the young folk many opportunities for making the acquaintance of old Mrs. Finny's great-nephew; and on these occasions Joanna clearly showed her readiness to accept the marked attentions of the handsome stranger, who offered them with more than equal readiness to the most handsomely dowered girl in his company.

Of these things Martin Byrne was a profoundly dissatisfied observer, for they seemed to threaten him with a brother-in-law altogether undesirable. Tom Clancy was not simply poor, but a ne'er-do-weel and a loafer, if not something more reprehensible. Kilkearns, where he had lately been living in an uncle's household, was not so far from

Clonowen but that certain rumours had travelled thither. There could be no doubt that he had quitted Kilkearns under a cloud, which involved his character for honesty. The fact was that the coming to light of some underhand transactions with respect to the sale of hay at Moynish fair had been the immediate cause of his departure. "So now," Martin said to himself, "me fine gintleman's landed himself here to get what he can out of his unlucky ould aunt, that has little enough at all. But if he thinks to be gettin' a hould of Joanna, and her fortune as well, let me tell the young scamp he's mistook, for as long as I have the conthrol of them anyway, and that 'ill be till she comes of age—better than two year off yet. Agin that time, plase the pigs, she might get a trifle more wit than to be takin' up wid a fellow that hasn't so much as a penny to his name, unless by raison of some schemin' tricks."

After a while Martin did take leave to hint at this determination of his to Joanna, and also to a third person, who would, he thought, probably pass it on to young Clancy. The result was, he considered, satisfactory, for he perceived that Tom and Joanna became thenceforth less demonstrative in their manner to one another. Yet,

notwithstanding his favourable inferences, a more acute onlooker might have been disposed to doubt whether his communication had in reality proved as efficacious as he believed in averting the peril of an imprudent marriage from his sister, and of a disappointment from his friend.

II

One bright, soft-aired April afternoon, Joanna Byrne was standing in the cow-lane, and looking over the wooden gate into a very green, long-shaped field, where cattle were grazing. With her was a girl of about her own age, smaller, slimmer, and prettier too, as she might rather easily be, for Joanna's broad, fresh-coloured face had in truth no pretensions to any special beauty. Likewise the other wore her dark hair elaborately puffed and waved, and was clad in much frilled and furbelowed pink ; while Joanna's dull-brown locks were twisted up in any way, except a becoming one, and a coarse linen bib covered her plain bluish calico. This companion of hers was Fanny Fitzpatrick, the eldest of the village schoolmaster's many children, and an old acquaintance of Joanna's.

The two girls stood for a while silently watching

the beasts at their leisurely and perpetual repast. Several glossy black Kerries, a couple of pretty strawberry cows, and of sedate shorthorns, with one delicate fawn-coloured Alderney heifer, and sundry promising calves, made up a herd which no farmer need have scorned to put on his land.

“Sure it’s well to be you, Joanna,” Fanny said at last. “Grand they are. But if it was me that owned them, or the worth of them, it’s not much longer I’d be stopping in this little doleful place ; ’deed and I wouldn’t.”

“Well, now, Fanny,” said Joanna, “it’s just the other way round wid me ; for if it wasn’t only for them, I’m thinkin’ I’d have a better chance of gettin’ out of this.”

“And what might be the raison of that at all ?” said Fanny.

“They’re the plague of me life,” Joanna declared. “Many’s the time I hate the sight of them, when Martin does be blatherin’ about the short step down this road that’s the farthest way he’ll need to drive them one of these days. It’s my belief he thinks all he has to do is to be drivin’ them, and meself off after them, whenever he—and other folk—take the notion into their heads. But if it wasn’t on account of the crathurs, I might go

where I liked for aught he'd care, and along wid—" She broke off abruptly, looking somehow not reluctant to be urged to continue.

"If I was you, then," said Fanny, "I'd be very apt just to take and sell the whole of them cliver and clane out of that, and get the bit of money when you want it, instead of to have them streelin' about in the field there, and no manner of good to you, only harm."

"But they don't rightly belong to me till I'm one-and-twenty, another couple of years yet, and that's the worst of it," said Joanna.

"Sure what matter?" said Fanny. "Once you'd got the price of them safe in your pocket, there you'd be, and off you might go as soon as you plased. Couldn't you find some respectable, knowledgeable man, who'd undertake the job of sellin' them for you at one of the cattle fairs? Unbeknownst to your brother, of course. That's what I'd do."

Though Joanna only replied disconsolately: "It's aisy talkin'," she was evidently struck by the suggestion, and seemed, Fanny thought, to be meditating deeply about something when they soon afterwards parted at the end of the cow-lane. And on her homeward way, whom should Fanny meet but

Tom Clancy, and what should they stop to discuss but the sale of Joanna Byrne's cattle? No doubt they both had her interests much at heart.

By this time Tom had become very thoroughly tired of his residence at Clonowen. There was little, he found, beyond merely board and lodging to be had in his old great-aunt's poverty-stricken abode, and lack of opportunity alone kept him from seeking more comfortable and profitable quarters. As he considered the question of ways and means, two things impressed themselves strongly and clearly upon his mind. The first was the easiness of winning Joanna Byrne; the second, the difficulty of coming by her cattle—which were what he wanted. In point of fact, though he would rather have had both conjointly than neither, he would vastly have preferred to acquire the latter without encumbrance. This, however, seemed at the outset altogether impossible, and would perhaps have remained so to the end, had he not made the acquaintance of Fanny Fitzpatrick, whose pretty face set his tolerably sharp wits working busily, while her own were alertly active and full of resource.

III

Not many days after Fanny's visit, Joanna had a long interview with Tom Clancy in his great-aunt's kitchen. Deaf Mrs. Finny could be hardly more than a spectator at a conversation, and when her caller took leave, said: "Ah, me dear, if talkin' could cure the crathur, ye should have it well mended between yous; but 'tis past prayin' for I'm afear'd entirely." For she had gathered from fragments of sentences which had reached her that their discourse was about the serious indisposition of one of her calves. The subject under discussion was, however, far more important, and Joanna returned home pledged to a large and daring enterprise. Tom had pointed out to her that as there was absolutely no prospect of obtaining her brother's consent to their wishes, and as he could by law keep her fortune in his hands for the next two years at least, through a stratagem only could she hope to gain immediate possession of what was by rights her own property. Joanna having assented to this, Tom proceeded to unfold, partially at any rate, a carefully-thought-out plan, and as she listened while he glibly explained his various arrangements, she felt both pleased and proud at

the notion that he should have taken so much trouble to devise such ingenious expedients, all just for the sake of herself. It was in a flutter of gratified vanity and exultant admiration for his cleverness that she had agreed with little or no demur to the carrying out of his design.

Next week brought Easter, when, according to his custom, Martin Byrne set off on a few days' excursion. He was very anxious that Joanna should accompany him, but she, in pursuance of her plans, declared herself engaged to spend the holidays with their cousins at neighbouring Rathkelly; and on the Sunday afternoon, not without some remorseful misgivings, she saw him start half-disappointed. For she knew that she was bidding him a farewell much longer than he supposed, and that she intended a journey immensely farther than to Rathkelly.

Very early on the Monday morning Joanna packed as much as she could carry in a hand-bag and a bundle, and set out, ostensibly to meet the long-car for Rathkelly at the cross-roads. The dew still lay dim and opaque in the broad-spread shadows as she went down the cow-lane, for the sun was only just rising. When she came to the gate of the sloping pasture-field, she stopped and

looked over it. Not a beast was to be seen. This was precisely what she had expected. Had she not slipped out late over-night, and unlocked all the padlocks, so that Tom Clancy might drive off her cattle through the dark to sell at the big Easter fair of Rusheenmoe? The herd was there, she supposed, by now, and Tom would lose no time in making his bargains. He was to meet her at Garville, the railway station nearest to Rusheenmoe, whence they would travel south to Queenstown, get married there, and go on board a transatlantic liner. With the price of that herd they would be able to make a grand start in the States. "And after a bit, you know, we can come down on your brother for the rest of what's owin' to you," Tom said, "not that it's apt to be much to us here or there," he added magnificently, "only we had a right to not let ourselves be swindled." As Joanna now turned away from the gate, a long and rosy ray came slanted down the lane, and set all the hanging dewdrops ablaze, as if some unearthly jewel-casket had been emptied over the hedges. She felt quite confident that she was faring to the highest fortune.

But a change crept over her frame of mind as she waited and waited on the platform at the

dreary little Garville station. It began when the ten o'clock train, in which Tom had promised to come, arrived without any such passenger; and from thenceforward her spirits were continually to sink. They dropped to a lower level with each train that went by, some rushing through in a dusty whirlwind, some stopping to give her a few minutes of agonised suspense, ending always in dismayed disappointment; for not one brought sight or sign of Tom Clancy. As the afternoon wore away, slowly and yet heart-sickeningly fast, all her surroundings became to her like a sort of hateful nightmare, in which the most detestable features were the stolid stationmaster and the inquisitive porter. At last in desperation she quitted her dismal waiting-place, and resolved to return home. The best chance that she could conjecture wherewith to encourage herself in her sorely discomfited retreat, was that some trivial accident had for the time being vexatiously hindered Tom from carrying out his intentions; but her imagination would not forbear, of course, to conjure up occurrences far more alarming. It struck her, for instance, that his possession of her cattle might have got him into some terrible difficulty with the police authorities, from whose clutches her own testimony,

perhaps, alone could extricate him; and this thought made her fret at the lagging pace of her long tedious drive and walk.

Hurry as she would, even the dusk had almost ebbed away when she turned into the cow-lane, dragging herself wearily along between the dark hedges, weighed down by her heavy bag, which she had ten minds to fling into a ditch, and distracted with a thousand fears, which she could by no possibility discard. The fact that she had eaten nothing all day formed an unrecognised element in her despondency. She hardly knew what she wished or dreaded to behold, when the gate of the sloping grass-field should be in sight. But undoubtedly a wild hope did flare up when she came into view of a tall figure standing by the wooden bars, and for a moment believed that it was Tom Clancy. And undoubtedly, too, terror seized her as, drawing nearer, she saw that it was Fergus Moore. He stood beside the fawn-coloured Alderney, who was eating bran-mash out of a pail, while a white cow, less favoured, thrust her head over the gate to survey the repast with an expression of concentrated bitterness. Several other beasts were more vaguely visible, moving about in the grey dimness beyond the gate.

AT THE FIELD-GATE



SWARWICK GORIE

The munching of the cow so close at hand for a while screened from Fergus the sound of Joanna's footsteps, but at length he heard them, and looked up to see her slowly approaching. He went forward quickly to meet her, with an expression of relieved concern on his broad good-natured face, russet-bearded and blue-eyed, than which nothing could less resemble Tom Clancy's. Joanna suddenly felt as if after her endless, miserable day, she had reached some sort of refuge.

IV

"Well, Joanna, and is it yourself?" Fergus said. "Glad I am to see you back again anyhow. But it's the quare work altogether there's been goin' on here, and wonderin' I was did you know anything about the matter. It's more than your brother does, that's sure."

"About what matter?" Joanna said with as much show of indifference as she could achieve, which was little enough.

"Your bastes," said Fergus. "Sure now ne'er a notion you had to be sellin' them?"

Joanna in her confusion said neither yea nor nay, and he did not repeat his question, seeing that

her silence had answered it very effectually. But he made no comment.

“It so happened,” he continued, after a brief pause, “that I had to be in Rusheenmoe this mornin’ early to meet a man on business. I wasn’t at that fair widin these half-dozen years; ’tis mostly no great good. Howane’er, there I went to-day, and I wasn’t in it above ten minutes, when who should I see but Terry Molloy, of Garville, that’s a notorious ould villin, and he just startin’ to drive a herd of bastes off the other end of the green. So says I to meself: ‘It’s quare now if I don’t know the look of *thim*.’ And when I stepped over to him, sure enough, divil aught else were they except these crathurs here of yours—every single one of them. After buyin’ them, ould Molloy said he was, off a young chap, he couldn’t tell who it might be; a middlin’ big man wid black hair. But wid that, Jimmy Carr from French Market was standin’ by, and he up and says he himself passed them on the road drivin’ in, and Tom Clancy it was, ould Widdy Finny’s nephew. And he said that, more betoken, only a little while back he seen young Clancy below at the station, gettin’ into the Queenstown express along wid Fanny Fitzpatrick, the school-teacher’s daughter at Clonowen.”

“Fanny Fitzpatrick,” Joanna said, half under her breath, “it couldn’t ever be.” Yet as she spoke the world seemed swirling into ruin around her, and here and there from amid the wreck emerged remembered incidents, which now took on a treacherous aspect.

Fergus Moore was observing her intently. The scared and bewildered anger in her face, her fagged air, and heavy load of bulging bag and cumbrous bundle, the mortified despair betrayed by her would-be incredulous exclamation, all confirmed a suspicion originally but too strong.

“The two of them it was,” he said; “Mrs. Dockrell was tellin’ me the same thing afterwards. But we can aisy stop the young thief yet, Joanna, wid a wire to the Queenstown police; for I see on the paper there’s no American boat sailin’ till Wednesday, and that’s what they’ll be makin’ for, you may depend—himself and the price of your bastes. I’ll go straight to the office.”

“Ah, for mercy’s sake, don’t be doin’ any such a thing,” Joanna said aghast. The mere suggestion appalled her, so intolerable was the possibility of Tom’s return to make her the laughing-stock of the gossiping country-side. Even now she raged at the thought of her humiliating wait on the

Garville platform. Well did she remember the sight of the Queenstown express running through the station ; and she now reflected with sore chagrin that two of its passengers had probably caught a glimpse of her sitting there by herself on the bench. Somebody had fluttered a handkerchief out of a carriage window ; very likely Fanny Fitzpatrick had done it out of derision, with Tom Clancy chuckling at her side. Joanna felt that rather than ever set eyes on the pair, or hear talk of them again, she would lose her fortune ten times over. If the money went to the bottom of the sea with them, it would be all the better ; but at this moment her one intense desire was that nothing should interfere with their departure. So she vehemently and imploringly repeated : “ Don’t be doin’ any such a thing on me, Fergus. Let them quit out of it—let them go wherever they like, and don’t be delayin’ them.”

Fergus looked at her gravely. “ Then it’s the way I was partly supposin’,” he said, “ and thinkin’ you were to go off along wid Tom Clancy, he that’s took up instead wid Fanny Fitzpatrick, the little, ugly-tempered weasel—many’s the time I’d hear her scoldin’ and bargein’ at the other childer. Well, now, it was the quare notion for the likes of yourself

to take into your head. But sure, Joanna, me child, it's the quare notions we do all of us be bound to git a hold of now and agin, and the odd way we do be mistook about different things, till we come by a trifle of experience. I mind the time meself when I couldn't scarce tell a three-year-old from a four year-old; and 'ud be givin' double the worth of him for a bullock as soon as look at him. So where'd you get a deal of sinse yet awhile? But as for that young miscreant, sure what great matter, so long as you hadn't the bad luck to travel off wid him after all? He knew anyway better than you what was the right sort for him: Fanny Fitzpatrick, bedad! And if it was to be annoyin' you, sooner than bring him back I'd let him run the farthest he plased wid the money he's robbed off you in his thief's pocket. By the same token, I know right well from what ould Molloy gave me the bastes for, that he suspicioned there was some dirty work goin' on, and that he got them very reasonable off the young rogue. But the fright I gave the ould sinner put his heart across, the way he was glad enough to be shut of his fine bargain, and hould his tongue about it. Faix, if these poor crathurs had the wit, they might be none too well continted wid the bad price was paid for them

twice over this day. For you see, Joanna asthore, bought back again for you they are the very same as they were, and no more trouble or talk about them; so if e'er a body thinks to be passin' remarks, why there the whole of them are grazin' before our eyes, and who'd mind a word he'd say? And apt you are to be takin' better care that your fortune isn't made away wid a second time. But whatever you do, machree, don't be troublin' yourself wid e'er a thought of them two, that's not worth this tussock of ragweed. Sure you wouldn't look the same side of the road as Tom Clancy, not if the slieveen's coat of him was double-lined wid five-pound notes—would you now? Let alone cross-tempered Fanny Fitzpatrick."

Joanna nodded slightly. The calamity had already begun to seem less overwhelming. Wrath was a stimulant, and Fergus's contemptuous mention of Fanny dropped on her feelings like balm.

"And a bit later on," Fergus continued, "comin' towards Michaelmas, say, I wonder might I be axin' you was there e'er a body else in it that you wouldn't think too bad of altogether. But I won't be delayin' you now, for it's tired you are streelin' about, and if you'll take my advice, you'll just go in and wet yourself a cup of hot tea, and get a bit to eat.

There's a fire burning I know, for I'm after makin' free to heat a sup of water to give this heifer of yours a mash, that's had a power of drivin' forwards and backwards too. So good-night to you kindly, Joanna, and when I have it all locked up, I'll hang the keys in the holly-bush by the stable-door."

Joanna, turning away, took with her a consolatory remembrance of his words; and as she drank her warm tea by the kitchen hearth in accordance with his advice, it seemed to her quite within the bounds of possibility that she might furthermore take his hint about next Michaelmas.



AN UNFINISHED ROMANCE

THIS romance began at Lisconnel one very long summer afternoon. A troop of children, chiefly little Sheridans, Quigleys, and MacEvoy's, had strayed off the bog on to the tussocky slopes of the *knockawn* that weatherfends the hamlet, and there, for want of any better diversion, they fell to watching a fleet of clouds sail by from west to east. Great, solid, slow-moving woolpacks they were, high-piled bergs of glistening white vapour, cragged and corniced, touched in hollows here and there with a shadowy golden fawn-colour. Lizzie MacEvoy, a newcomer from distant regions, who had beheld many strange things, said that they were like a trayful of big crusty loaves, which she had seen a

LISCONNEL CHILDREN



man carrying on his head in the town of Galway. Furthermore, she declared that in Galway there were plenty of carts going about filled with the very same sort of loaves, whole loads of them, enough to build a turf-stack. These statements seemed to her audience as incredible almost as a turf-stack built up of baker's bread was inconceivable. The comparison perhaps edged their appetites ; at any rate they soon began a move down the hill towards home, where they might by good luck find that it was supper-time. They had the vaguest notions about the hour, but felt that they had been away for a long, long while.

Just as they were dropping themselves into the road off the lowest shelving ledges of a fine-swarded bank, there came into sight on their right hand—that is, from the direction of Duffclane—a very remarkable vehicle of unprecedented aspect, rather to be described as “ a weeny house wid wheels under it.” It was painted bright green, and drawn by a large cream-coloured Connemara pony, of the race called *Shan Bwee*, which means Old Yellow. Nobody except Lizzie MacEvoy had ever seen the like before. A cart going to the fair with a pig-creele was the nearest approach to it, but different indeed. And Lizzie, to excite them the more,

asserted that it was the living *moral* of one of those Galway bread-carts, only a trifle smaller. Lizzie's repute as a trustworthy relater of marvels was, however, presently to pass under a dense cloud. For when the van stopped opposite the Kilfoyles', and the driver opened the doors at the back, sorrow a loaf was there in it at all, or anything else only all the books that ever were in the world sitting on shelves stuck alongside it. That was truly a despicable result in the eyes of the small children, who lived beyond schooling, and had not a letter of the alphabet among them. "Ould books bedad!" They soon dispersed, freely expressing their opinion of Lizzie MacEvoy's veracity.

But some of their elders had more learning, and the vanman did a little business during his brief stay. As a stranger he of course interested everybody, scholars or no, and he rather puzzled them too, because although he was not apparently any sort of quality, and certainly was not an old schoolmaster, he seemed to be thoroughly acquainted with the contents of his van, and talked like an expert about the merits of this volume and that. Judy Ryan inquired sarcastically if he had read the whole of them himself, that he knew so well what a person was sure to like best. To which he replied

with the question whether the man she bought her boots from had tried all his stock on his own feet. As Judy's feet were unshod this retort was not entirely appropriate, but little Murt Rafferty hastened to point it by bobbing up his head at her elbow with, "Isn't himself wearin' her ones these times anyway?" When she turned to cuff him, he slithered down the bank behind them, and lay chuckling under a low furze-bough, out of portlier reach.

Shoeless though she was, Judy in her youth had walked many a long mile for her schooling, and she still possessed literary tastes which made her happy if she chanced on a newspaper with a bit of a story in it. No such opportunity as this day's had ever presented itself to her imagination. She could scarcely believe the eyes that showed her those crowded shelves, or the ears that apprised her that one penny could procure the loan of any two volumes for a month. Happily the penny was to be had; the difficulty was how to choose, and at length she let herself "be said," in part, by the librarian-driver, who magnanimously advised her to the best of his flouted judgment. Locking up his doors, he promised to come through Lisconnel again before that month was out, whereupon the

bystanders began to compute the present date from various time-marks, and with discrepant results. They were impressed by the off-hand manner in which he asserted, without reflection, that it was the second of July, but they accepted his authority as that of one fresh from the great world, where matters of the kind are settled. So after a little more discourse the van dwindled away down the long road, with its green sides and blossom-white inscription, "Rosmorán Travelling Library"; while even the neighbours who were no readers felt that to see it grow into sight again would be an agreeable event.

That evening, when the light was slowly ebbing towards such dimness as would fleetingly visit the midsummer night, Lisconnel for the most part sat out of doors, perched on convenient grass-banks and big stones. The great white clouds had all drifted away, leaving the whole west crystal-clear, except where a few pencilled flecks veined it with almost transparent fire. An odour of aromatic bog-herbs was the stronger on the air because the blue peat-smoke mingled with it in only meagre wafts, fitful and failing. About the Brian Kilfoyles' house there was a plenty of comfortable seats on which a party of the older women had congregated, some

with knitting and some with jugs to fill at the well, sea-green rimmed in the sward close by; to sit frankly idle not being their way. Despite the warmth, their matronly heads were protected with both caps and shawls. Their six or seven tongues kept up a fairly continuous murmur, which died out on the surrounding stillness even sooner than the trails of smoke on the air.

“I was wonderin’,” said Mrs. Brian, “did any of yous happen to see Con about lately. I didn’t set eyes on him meself since he had his dinner.” Her good-tempered face wore an anxious shadow, which deepened when nobody minded seeing him this little while back. The truth was that she was just now coming for the first time into possession of a grown-up son, whose straining against the inelastic leash of circumstances caused her many an uneasy moment. “Con’s no ways too well satisfied in himself these times,” she explained to her right-hand neighbour, Mrs. Doyne. “Gloomy like he does be now and again, and discontented. Afeard of me life I am that he might take the notion into his head to be runnin’ off to some outlandish place on us, the way the other lads do, as if there was mad bears huntin’ them, instead of their mislucky ould mothers thinkin’ bad of their goin’. And no

good of them after that, unless maybe an odd letter. I do be tellin' him they had a right to have more nathur in them, if they haven't more wit itself; but never a word out of him one way or the other. It's heart-scalded he has me."

"Well, now," Mrs. MacEvoy said meditatively on Mrs. Brian's left, "I do be sorry in me heart many a time for them young lads. Sure they're to be pitied, God knows. For at their beginnin', there's every manner of thing in the world, so to spake, lyin' before them, and the whole of it as good as offered to them, in a way. But the first instant a one of the crathurs tries to take a hould of e'er a somethin' for himself, 'tis thwarted and disappointed of it he's apt to be at every turn. He might as well be raichin' at the stars above his head, and it all the while lookin' just under his hand; you'd think he might have it and welcome—but sorrow a bit. So they see it all slippin' away from them before they know where they are, and maybe they niver had a fair chance. To be pitied they are, poor lads."

These general reflections seemed to demand no particular response, and they received none directly. But Mrs. Brian said in an aggrieved undertone to Mrs. Doyne: "I dunno what call anybody has to

be pityin' me son Con. A fine hardy boy he is, thanks be to God. 'Twould trouble them that knows him all the days of his life, let alone a body that's no great while in the place, to say there was aught amiss wid him. People do be talkin' quare."

"If it was me poor Terence, now," said Mrs. Doyne, "there might be raison in it, for anybody 'd think it a pity to see him the way he is this long while. Addin' up we were yesterday, and 'tis better than a twelvemonth since he set fut beyond our door. But a couple of year ago, ma'am, he was such another as your Con, and he would be yit, only for the rheumaticky fever that got a cruel grip on his heart. Dr. Egan says 'tis like as if there was a spring broke in it, and he questions has he e'er a bottle wid the stren'th to set it right, nor ould Dan O'Beirne. 'Twas a bad wake turn he took this very mornin', and I couldn't be lavin' him now, only Judy Ryan said she'd stop wid him till I got a while in the fresh air. Ah sure, we do be missin' poor Stacey. I must prisently be steppin' in."

"'Deed then it's the twenty pities," Mrs. Brian said, "him to be gettin' his health so indifferent."

As it happened, however, just at that moment neither Terence Doyne nor Con Kilfoyle was in a

pitiable plight. Both of them were worlds away from to-day and Lisconnel, rapt into enchanted regions by the charm of a story-teller. Judy Ryan was reading aloud to them from one of her borrowed books, the one on which she had set her heart ever since she had espied it uppermost of a pile amid that bewildering van-load. In the case of the other one she had allowed herself to be guided in her choice by the vanman, and had selected "Crohoore of the Bill Hook," but he had vainly advised her against taking "The Door by the Dark Water." His objection that he had at this time only the first of its two volumes, and could not be quite sure when he would have the second, did not prevail over the allurements of its title and cover-picture. A bold black-and-white sketch this was, showing simply the door beyond a foreground of very dark water, wrought in portentously broad straight strokes. Sedge and weed stood up about its threshold, and it was barred with a great cross-handled sword thrust bolt-wise through iron rings. "I'll chance it," Judy had said, with rapacious eyes; "you might be apt enough to have the rest of it again you come round next time." And he had promised that he would if he could.

Now she was beginning to explore it in the

company of two profoundly interested friends. She had lost no time in sharing her new acquisition with Terence Doyne, and while they were poring over the picture they were joined by Con Kilfoyle, who looked in to show Terence a curious pointed stone that he had picked up out on the bog near Ody Rafferty's still. Then when they had decided that a vague three-cornered notch on the extreme right of the engraving probably represented the bows of a boat, she turned to the printed page. Judy read out fluently and daringly, not pausing to stumble over unfamiliar words, the conventional pronunciation of which was really neither here nor there; and the course of the story ran likewise freely and swiftly, plunging into the middle of most thrilling things, and opening that mysterious door on delectable glimpses of dread. Light and shadow so strongly gleamed and gloomed on characters as well as incidents that the rising tide of vicissitude was watched from the outset with undivided sympathies. The precarious fortunes of the persecuted heroine had already roused on her behalf the liveliest hopes and fears, when the reading was cut short by gathering dusk; for at Lisconnel artificial illumination, feeble and costly, is used as little as may be.

But the party broke up under agreement to meet again on the morrow, when ample time was found for getting through a larger portion; and thenceforward there were few days that they did not assemble in the tiny slip of a room off Mrs. Doyne's kitchen. It was so very small that Terence's bed, though narrower than a berth, would have been impossible except in a recess of the wall; his two visitors had scanty space for their stools on the rough earthen floor. What rays struggled in came chiefly through the door, of so little avail was the hand's-breadth pane of coarse greenish glass, set in stones and mud deeply enough to suggest some uncouth attempt at a telescope. A big lump of a boulder planted close outside further obscured it. Still if Terence craned his neck into just the right angle, he had a glimpse of the brown-faced bog. Looking forth from his cell, it seemed daily less possible to imagine himself at large out and about there again, as he used to be in the time on the other side of that nightmare fever-chasm. His sense of "the terrible long while" grew upon him despairingly, and burdened his mind, when he was not preoccupied with acute physical distress. Other distractions he had few or none.

Therefore it was indeed no trivial matter for

him when "The Door by the Dark Water" came within his ken to engross a strangely large proportion of his thoughts. Through the dismal hours he looked forward, as towards a gleam brightening at the end of a tunnel, to the appearance in his doorway of Judy Ryan's grizzled head, else he might sometimes have doubted woefully whether the tunnel had any end at all. Now and then, it is true, he was obliged to forego the reading. There would be a day when he felt "like as if the ould lad himself was whirlin' his head round under water in a one of the black houles," or when he suffered from some equally incapacitating symptom. But on such occasions Judy and Con loyally refrained from proceeding any further with their romance.

Yet notwithstanding these delays, it became evident as the weeks went on that the first volume would be finished considerably before the date fixed for the return of the Rosmorán Travelling Library. When Judy saw that the pages were dwindling more rapidly than the month waned, she did try to be thrifty and curtail her lectures, but this economy was made difficult by the increasing interest of the story, and the eager urging of her audience, more especially of "the crathur," whom she could hardly refuse. Do what she would to

eke it out by the repetition of favourite passages, and the encouragement of time-wasting conjectures about the plot, that last leaf was turned on the twenty-second afternoon of July, a full week at least before there would be much use in beginning to watch for the van. They were left, moreover, to wait with affairs at a terrible crisis. That door with its sill by the dark water was barred on the father and the lover of the Lady Emeria, who had fallen hopelessly into the power of her fellest foes. To extricate her from such a plight, even hypothetically, passed the ingenuity of her friends at Lisconnel, and they chafed much at their state of suspense. Con said that it would be a charity to stick the thieves of the mischief up in a row, and reap the ugly heads off them like so many thistles ; it would do his heart good, he said, to have a welt at them. But Terence rejoined querulously that he didn't see where anybody with that much decency in him was very apt to come from. By way of a stop-gap Judy began to read "Crohoore of the Bill Hook," but without success. Terence's interest could not be diverted into the new channel ; it was clear to her that his attention continually wandered off.

No doubt this was in some measure due to the

failure of his strength. In those days a change for the worse had manifestly come over him, bringing with it a feverish weakness that distorted his view of things, and made him fix his thoughts upon the fate of the Lady Emeria, and Ronairn, and the old chief, as vehemently as if the tragedy were in truth impending. What Judy and Con, however they might talk, recognised as merely images in their fancy, had for him all the substance of reality conjoined with the obsessing powers of a dream. Other circumstances now came against him too. The fine clear weather had turned sultry and lowering. Overcast skies gloomed on Lisconnel, and ever and anon a thunderous scowl blackened the bog, creeping across it from rim to rim. Curlew cried, darting to and fro beneath the shadow, and wide-winged white sea-gulls sailed by, going eastward inland. Then in their wake would swoop a wild blast hissing and rattling with rain and hail showers. It all seemed to oppress and shatter Terence Doyne, as he toiled for breath, sitting as upright as he could in his low-ceiled niche. "You might suppose he was after lyin' out under the teems of it, all night, he does be that wake and onaisy this mornin'," Mrs. Doyne said to the Widow McGurk; "but ne'er a drop comes next or

nigh him where he is. The kitchen's in strames ; I have to be shiftin' about for a dry place ; the little room's iligant, whatever ails him." Mrs. Doyne, who was a rather complaining sort of person herself, spoke as if she thought that her son scarcely appreciated his privileges. Mrs. McGurk solemnly replied : "'Deed now, ma'am, 'tis a great thing when you can keep the wet weather off a sick body itself. But it's the quare thatch he'll lie aisy under, wet or dry, agin the will of God."

One stormy morning Terence was so entirely bad that Con Kilfoyle ran off to Duffclane for Dr. Egan, who came over on his car along a road traversed by lightning flashes, that kept his horse ducking and swerving, often at inconvenient points. When he arrived, he found his patient better, yet seemed less impressed by the improvement than Mrs. Doyne had expected him to be. However, she ascribed this to his annoyance at having been summoned in such ugly weather. On his way home he met Judy Ryan, whom he considered more sensible than most of her gossips, and to whom he told something of his opinion on the case. Soon afterwards, looking in on Mrs. Doyne, she found her just starting for the well in a fretful mood, because Terence wouldn't so much as look at a lovely bowl of two-milk whey

she was after making him, and that Dan O'Beirne said would be the grandest drink he could take. Nothing would suit him but a sup of water, that hadn't an atom of good in it. Sure now, he was real contrary.

"Gim-me the jug, ma'am, dear," Judy said on hearing this complaint, "I'll fetch it quicker than you would, and me shawl's dreeped through already. 'Deed 'twould be a sinful pity to cross the crathur now about anythin' he fancied at all, good or bad, if you could help it." These words suddenly smote Mrs. Doyne with a sorer dread than she could have felt at the blast of Michael's trumpet ; but there was no awful record into which she would not have dared pry rather than ask Judy's meaning. She went back to Terence, and stood looking at him silently. Somewhat to her comfort he said remorsefully that he would have a try at the whey, after a little while.

Unluckily it was beyond anybody's power to prevent him from being crossed in the matter of the one thing on which he had set his heart, that is to say, the completion of his beloved romance. He had persuaded himself that the library van was very likely to reappear at any time during the last week of July, and this gave him scope for repeated

harassing expectation and disappointment. It was constantly Judy Ryan's hated task to report that Con Kilfoyle had seen nothing from his look-out post. She thought that on each occasion Terence seemed feebler and shakier ; certainly he was less and less able to dissemble his chagrin. The forced cheerfulness of his : " Ah sure, what matter at all, Judy ? It'll be comin' along presently anyway," rang so dismally in her ears that, as she said herself, many a time she was fit to sit down and cry in the middle of the road. All along she had maintained that the last day of the month was the date intended by the driver, so when the thirty-first came, she felt desperately confident that it would bring the fulfilment of their wishes.

It dawned with no happy omens, for Terence had nearly " gone off altogether " in the night, and had now rallied only just enough to show how wistfully he was still hankering after " The Door by the Dark Water." The morning was grim with mirk and wet. An iron-grey rampart of mist had been drawn close round the hamlet, and the included tracts of bog spread a sullen black, save for a few rusty stains of withered grass, and spectral glints of skeleton tree-trunks disinterred among lime-white boulders. From overhead the lividly

leaden cloud canopy let down unfurled sheets of rain-mist with fringes of pelting drops, that quivered against wall and roof, and kept the peat-reek cowering indoors much to the discomfort of the other occupants. Though neither of the watchers apprehended that the Rosmorán Travelling Library would thus be deterred from its journey—for who would think of staying at home because the weather was a trifle soft?—they were hampered by this inclemency in more ways than one. It was impossible to see any distance along the blurred and drifting road: Con was once all but betrayed into hailing with jubilant shouts the approach of Ody Rafferty's old ass-cart; and it was difficult to form any idea at all about the time of day, not a blink of the sun giving a clue. Frequently in the course of that forenoon did Con consult the three time-pieces of Lisconnel, which were situated in his own house, and John MacEvoy's, and Hughey Quigley's. There was, generally speaking, a difference of at least an hour and a half between the fastest and the slowest of the trio, and Con took care to base his report on the latter. But at length, when even according to that it was fully three o'clock, and sorrow a sign of anything stirring on the road, except the puddles, he could no longer

pretend to think that there were not some grounds for uneasiness.

And then, just as Judy was reassuringly pointing out to Terence that it had been something later when the van arrived before, in to light a pipe at Mrs. Doyne's fire came Mick Lonergan, who casually mentioned, quite unaware of what he did, how he had met "the quare covered yoke wid the books from Rosmorán away out a bit beyond Loughcran, goin' towards Kilnaglesh, where the man said he'd put up that night, for the roads were powerful heavy—Sure not at all; there was no talk of him comin' Lisconnel ways." Mick's strong bass voice carried his words with ruthless distinctness into the little next room, and Judy saw the hopeful gleam flicker blankly out of Terence's eyes, followed by a desperate feigning of unconcern. This seemed to her as it were a countermining of her own careful pretences, and she rushed away into the rain, where to Con, sheltering under the lee of a turf-stack, she told the news with gestures so discomposed that some neighbours, observant beyond earshot, concluded Terence to be "took mortal bad," and drew near precipitately.

For a moment Con looked as disconcerted as she did herself, but then he said: "See me here,

Judy. If it's between Loughcran and Kilnaglesh the books was the time Mick met them, they're apt to be on that road this good while yet. So if I legged it straightways over the bog, why mightn't I have a great chance of catchin' them up? And troth and bedad I'll get that second volume out of the chap, if I have to wreck the ould yoke for it."

"Sure now you might," Judy said brightening up, "unless you were bogged intirely."

"Bogged in me hat!" said Con. "Fetch me the penny, and I'll run like Leary's colt."

In another minute Con was out of sight among the mists, while Judy returned to rekindle the spark of hope in Terence's failing spirits. She well knew that it might come to nothing, but matters were too urgent to allow of looking as much as an hour ahead.

With the best of good wills did Con make his way across the drenched bog-corner, adopting nearly as many different modes of progression as a more distinguished person is related to have done in somewhat similar surroundings. Treacherous was the foothold offered by the unstable surface, which often could be got over only in standing leaps from spongy tussock to tussock, and wobbling stone to stone. It was usually with reluctance that

Con visited Terence in his prison. A natural recoil from the sight of suffering which he could not relieve was strengthened by a consciousness that the spectacle might be moralised into representations about the happier lot wherewith he himself yet remained dissatisfied. In his heart he vaguely knew that these representations were unfair and false, and he resented them as a dishonest attempt on the moraliser's part to debase his standard of what might reasonably be demanded from life, and to beat down the terms on which he could honourably make a treaty of contentment, not on his own behalf alone. Accordingly he kept conscience-strickenly aloof. This bit of active service for his hapless friend was, however, quite to his mind. He plunged and splashed along, ignoring much mire and water in his determination to bring back with the utmost speed that desired intelligence about the Lady Emeria. Alas! it was a fool's errand.

Before Judy, on the watch, had deemed it possible, he came trotting into view, but ere they were within speaking distance, she saw that his quest had failed. "Ah, Judy woman, not a bit of the baste had got it after all. He said he'd be sartin sure to bring it from their place at Rosmoran next week—and divil a much good that 'ud do us,

wid the crathur gone God knows where. I tould the chap he might as well be swallyin' it whole. So then nothin' would suit him but I must take this book along wid me, superiligant he said it was, but sure now, Judy, I suppose there's ne'er a ghost of a chance that Terence 'ud listen to anythin' only the 'Dark Water'—and that I couldn't get him. There it is for you, anyhow, and wet enough bedad. Twenty minds I had to be slingin' it into every houle I went by."

"Be aisy now," Judy said quietly, "and come along in wid me." Con followed her against his inclination, but with obedience, for she evidently had some purpose and he had none.

In the little room Mrs. Doyne, who was sitting by Terence's bed, gave place to them without jealousy. She was content to hover in the doorway, if only the others could please him with the queer sort of talk he had a wish to be hearing.

"Well, Terence lad," said Judy, "here's Con back again."

A joyful light wakened in Terence's eyes. "Wid the book?" he said.

"Too late it is this evening to begin readin' rightly," said Judy, "but I was thinkin' you'd liefer hear the end of it before you went to sleep."

“Aye sure,” said Terence. “Is she got out?”

“Troth and she is out, as safe as a lark in the sky,” said Judy.

“Glory be to goodness,” said Terence. “How at all?”

“The villins,” said Judy, “was bringin’ her out of their dungeons in a boat down the Dark Water for to be slaughtherin’ the ould father of her and her sweetheart before her eyes, that they had barred up behind the Door—the black miscreants of sin. But if they did, the very minyit they come outside it, up swum the big snaky-shaped monster of a *piast* that lived in the underground river below the Hollow Mountains—there’s a dale about him in the second volume—and down he swallied the whole boatload of them, just to the seat where the Lady Emeria was sittin’ in the bows. And a hould she caught of the magic sword they had barrin’ the door, and clane through the jaws of the brute-baste she dhruv it, and he gulpin’ down the rest of the boat, the way she skivered them together. And wid that she let one spring inside, and the others all went to the bottom like so many stones of lead.”

“That was *great*,” Terence said. Con, listening, stared at Judy with awe and admiration.

“In coorse,” she continued, “I hadn’t time yet to see how everythin’ happened: but at the very last end of the story, the Lady Emeria and all her friends and neighbours were sailin’ home wid themselves as fit as fiddlers. And she wid a crown of diamond jewels on her head, that you could see shinin’ all the way along the Dark Water, like a star let down drippin’ wid light out of heaven.”

“Glory be to God,” said Terence once more. “Sure we’ll hear the whole of it to-morra, and dramin’ about it I’ll be all this night.”

But Terence never told that night’s dream to his friends at Lisconnel. And when the travelling library came next week with the belated second volume, Judy Ryan would not borrow it. “Because,” she explained to Con, “so long as I don’t be lookin’ to see, for anythin’ I can tell it happened the very way I said to poor Terence—it aisy might. But if I knew ’twas somethin’ different, vexed I’d be to think I was after reelin’ him off a string of lies, the last word ever I spoke to him.”

In this course Con acquiesced, though he expressed the opinion that the stories people made up out of their own heads were all bound to be lies in some sort of a way, and that Judy’s very

belike has as much truth in it as e'er another body's an argument which she felt did not quite meet the case. Therefore they chose "Castle Rackrent" instead; and thus it came about that the romance begun on that long summer afternoon was never really ended at Lisconnel.



MR. WILLIAM'S COLLECTION

I

WHEN William Rowan took up his abode at Glascorry, he seemed to step back into the days of his youth ; a great stride, seeing that he had long since begun to regard himself as quite an elderly man. His last visit to the solitary, many-gabled Big House had happened in his distant boyhood, for he had not been on over-friendly terms with the late owners ; and now that he came to take possession as their heir, he expected to find himself clean out of the neighbourhood's mind. But this was far from being the case. He soon discovered that his memory had remained wonderfully green among the inhabitants of Glascorry, having indeed even

sprouted and grown. People belonging to a generation who could never have set eyes on him, greeted him familiarly as Mr. William. Their elders called him Master Willie, and reminded him of sundry incidents which he had completely forgotten. The fact that he had helped Peter Gaffney's grandfather with the building of a turf-stack had become in various forms a parish tradition. A tall elm in the demesne, from a rash ascent of which he had been rescued with ladders and ropes, was still pointed out as a remarkable object, and known as "Mr. William's Tree."

This state of things rather pleased him than otherwise, giving him a vague sense of home, to which he had been a stranger throughout nearly all his lonely bachelor's life. It is likely that any stronger feeling of the sort would have clashed uncomfortably with his firmly established habits; but those out-of-door greetings and gossipings gave him no trouble, and cheered him somewhat on his desultory walks abroad. Fine summer weather and new surroundings led him on extensive rambles, for which, because he was accompanied by neither dog nor gun, his neighbours could not easily account, and which he himself soon began to find unsatisfactorily aimless. For many years past

he had been seeking an object in life, with such scant success as commonly attends the quest, when it is carried on by a lazy person, who has no decided tastes, and is possessed of ample means. In Mr. William's case his superfluous leisure was increased by a weakness of the eyes, which often limited his reading powers. Some unexact kind of hobby, in fact, was what he wanted, and he had tried several, none of which had caught his fancy. Stamp-collecting had been the latest of these ; but the ugly little paper patches had failed to arouse in him any pleasurable interest, even when the acquisition of one had cost him more than the price of a passage to the outlandish place of its postmark ; and his album had not come with him to Glascorry. He now sometimes thought of studying botany, the subject being suggested to him by the great variety of plants and flowers which came under his notice as he wandered about over the bog.

It was an immense bog, which swept out of dim, horizon-bounded distances almost up to his back gate. On this nearer part of it the peat had been much cut away, so that it showed a very swarthy visage, full of black seams and pits. Against the dark background every bright object took an extreme vividness ; a seagull's hovering wing, a

clump of furze-blossom, a child's pinafore, would gleam like stars. A pair of white shirt sleeves shining in the sun on top of a murky-ledged bank was what caught Mr. William's eye one cloudless afternoon, and drew him sauntering towards them. His intention was to ask their wearer the name of a small amethyst-coloured flower, which he had just picked up.

The sleeves were worn by young Dinny Gaffney, a son of young Peter Gaffney, whose people had farmed a little shred of land on the bog's edge for nobody knew how long. Dinny himself had been for the last three or four years living away at Killoor, where he worked with a blacksmith, from whom he was learning his trade, and to whom he must needs give an additional twelve months' labour in lieu of the apprentice's fee, which the resources of his family had failed to furnish. At this time he had come home on a holiday, because an accident to his arm temporarily hindered him from using it. Though a tall, strongly-built youth, he was rather hollow-cheeked and harassed looking, with the air of some latent grievance, not to be forgotten even amid the agreeable smoking and basking in the sun, which formed the present phase of his rest-cure. When he had given a wild-

sounding Gaelic name to Mr. William's flower, their conversation turned on the general products of bogs, and in the course of it Dinny took from his pocket a small, much-worn medal or coin, which he handed to Mr. William with a request for his opinion about it, adding that it had been found under the sod a few yards off.

“A dale of quare things,” he went on to say, while Mr. William was examining the nearly obliterated inscription, “do be got now and again on the bog. I meself come on one of an odd time, when I used to be cuttin' turf. And a couple of year back a cousin of me own over by Loughlindrum dug up an ould ancient milk-bowl with pattrons twisted on it, that some college gentlemen said was belongin' to the days of the Druids and all manner of haythens. In a great admiration they were of it altogether, and took it away wid them up to Dublin, and ped me cousin a power of money for it. I'm tould they have it now under glass in a collection.”

Mr. William pricked up his ears at this, for he suddenly remembered that he had heard of valuable antiquities being discovered in such places. And here, he bethought him, he was now most favourably situated for amassing a collection of

the kind. It would be much more interesting, and no doubt far less expensive than postage-stamps. He might employ Dinny Gaffney as curio-hunter ; probably Dinny would be glad of the light occupation while out of regular work. In short the idea struck him as an urgently excellent one, and he lost no time in expressing to Dinny a wish that he would look out for "quare ould ancient things," the finding of which would be made worth his while. At that hearing a gleam glinted across the melancholy greyness of Dinny's eyes, though, as was befitting, he said, and in some measure meant, that he would be proud and happy to do any such trifle for his Honour, and no more talk about it. An understanding was arrived at speedily, and they soon afterwards parted, the little bronze disc in Mr. William's pocket, and in Dinny's five silver shillings.

II

Some three months later, Mr. William was sitting at a table in a window of his low-ceiled, leather-scented library. It was a clear-skied afternoon, so that the September sunshine, grown long of ray and rich of hue, slanted over his thinning

grizzled locks and lean hands, and into his short-sighted eyes, peering eagerly through glittering glasses. Spread out before him he had a number of small objects, several of them very minute, most of them metallic, but a few of them apparently wooden. All of them bore rusty, battered, or weather-stained marks of age, which made their material and purpose more or less obscure. He viewed them with proud complacency. The gradual acquisition of them had indeed been his chief pleasure through the whole summer, beguiling the grey hours of frequent rainy spells. It had given him a feeling, in no ill-omened sense, that he knew not what a day might bring forth; and the contemplation of the treasures which he had already accumulated never palled upon him, for it filled his mind with ever-new conjectures and imaginings, and even with forecasts of fame to come, when the Rowan Collection might be renowned as a wonder of the antiquarian world.

Of late he had been inclined seriously to consider the advisability of submitting his finds to expert judgment, and he had now resolved upon journeying to Dublin with that view early next month. At one time he thought it might be well that Dinny Gaffney should accompany him, to

relate exactly the circumstances of each discovery ; but Dinny had shown a rather unaccountable reluctance to join the expedition, and the idea no longer existed. " Sure, what would I be doin', makin' a fool of meself talkin' before them gentlemen that has the learnin' ? " Dinny had modestly demanded.

An oblong bit of thin blackish metal, which might, Mr. William conjectured, have formed the lid of a little casket, was at this moment occupying his attention. There were traces of letters on it and as he scrutinised it closely, he believed that he could make out a faint CC., which inspired him with a hope of Roman numerals, perhaps recording a date most interestingly remote. Reference to his notebook showed that he had neglected to jot down the precise place where this latest addition to his antiquities had been disinterred by Dinny Gaffney, and as it promised to prove a valuable one, he determined to repair the oversight by consulting Dinny without delay. So he very carefully set about moving the odd little miscellany, piece by piece, from the faded crimson tablecloth to the drawer of a cabinet, which he had labelled " Archæological Specimens."

About the same time, a large party were

assembled in young Peter Gaffney's kitchen, where continual twilight veiled the irregular outlines of walls, floor, and rafters, aided generally by a haze of bluish turf-smoke. Accordingly the dimensions of the apartment appeared somewhat vague, in a way which created an impression of spaciousness ; but it was not in fact by any means commodious, and its resources both as to size and furniture were severely taxed by the simultaneous presence of Peter and his wife, three of their daughters, and two of their sons, along with the widow Kirby and her Bridgie, who had called. The young people had bestowed themselves in the background as best they could, perching high or crouching low according to circumstances, while their elders sat on two chairs and a stool at the central table, engaged in earnest discourse, the widow's visit having been utilised as an opportunity for the informal transaction of some business.

“ Well, then,” said Peter, “ we must see what Dinny has to say to that. Dinny, lad ! ” He raised his voice, and as there was no response, looked round the room. “ Why, where's Dinny at all ? He was in it only this minyit.”

“ He's went away wid himself,” several voices informed him.

“ I dunno,” Mrs. Peter said querulously, “ what flouncin’ off wid himself he has, just when he’s wanted.”

“ Ah sure, not at all, ma’am,” Mrs. Kirby said, with a rather forced affability, “ why would we be delayin’ him, takin’ up his time, keepin’ him in here? And he belike wid plenty of other things to do.”

“ Moonin’ about on the bog like an ould strayed ass, that’s wonderin’ where it’s come to, and tinkerin’ some little bits of rubbish in the shed, is the most I seen him at this great while back,” said Mrs. Peter, “ and I should suppose the day was long enough for that, even if he stopped.”

She was interrupted by the entrance from the inner room of Dinny himself. He had a tin canister in his hand, and wore an expression of elated excitement, as he approached the table.

“ Your father was callin’ you,” his mother said, “ to ax did you get any word yet from Dan Mullarkey about the half-fee.”

“ Is it about takin’ the half-fee? ” Dinny said, his eyes a-gleam. He was screwing round the canister’s lid, which came off with a jerk in his hand. “ It isn’t much call Dan Mullarkey ’ll have to be talkin’ about half-fees, or whole ones either,

and I goin' back to him wid that trifle in me pocket." So saying, he leaned forward, stretching a long arm, and inverted the canister over the table, on which the contents fell clinking out. Gold and silver coins they were, mostly half-sovereigns and half-crowns, and they made quite a heap on the deal board. A long sunbeam, levelled at the open door, shot in and set them glittering. Larry and Mick, descending with flops from the dresser-ledge and the window-seat, drew near to stare at this extraordinary display of wealth. Indeed, everybody's eyes grew wide.

III.

"Tin pounds it is," said Dinny.

His father said: "Me sowl to glory!"

"And where in the mortal world," said his mother, "was you after gettin' it at all?"

"Where it was to be had," Dinny naturally replied.

"Och, quit playin' the fool," said his mother, continuing the dialogue on conventional lines, "and tell us the truth."

Dinny was too full and proud of his news for further dallying. "Sure, I got it off Mr. William,"

he said, "for the quarest ould lot of little unchancy odds and ends of thrash that ever you set your two eyes on."

"And what bewitched poor Mr. William to be givin' anybody money, let alone by the pound, for them description of things?" said Peter.

"Is it what bewitched him? Whethen now, bewitchin' you may call it. Sure, he's took up wid the notion that this bog here is chock-full of all manner of very ould haythen queeriosities, like them ones people do be rokin' out now and again in different places, and thinkin' a dale of. And axin' me he was to be lookin' about, and bringin' him any I could find. 'Wid all the plisure in life, your Honour,' says I to him. But sorra an earthly iotum of the sort I e'er seen in it hereabouts, barrin' some brass timperance medal, or a broken pipe, or such. Howsomever, thinks I to meself," said Dinny, launching forth on a tide of triumphant narrative, which swelled as it proceeded, "if them was the kind of ould lavin's he'd his heart set on, 'twould be apt to be all one to him where they come from, so long as himself was none the wiser. So off wid me, and got a couple of shiny soda-water bottle fastenin's that was threw out up in MacAulay's yard, and I gave them a heatin' in the

fire, and a few cracks with the handle of me knife, and I stuck them under the turf-stack till the next day, and then I fetched them out, and up I brought them to the House, and they as black and grimy-lookin' in theirselves as heart could wish, to see what he'd say to them. And I give you me word as plased as Punch he was, and ped me another five shillin's for them out of hand. I disremember what comical name he put on them, but it was somethin' fine. Well, now, that was no great while after him first comin' here, and since then there's ne'er a week gone by but I'm after bringin' him some ould article or another, and he payin' me five shillin's a-piece for them, or maybe tin. One time I found an ould pot-stick lyin' in the corner here, so I took and put a kind of flourishin' pattron on it wid me knife, and then I mixed a tint of sut and whitenin' together wid a sup of docks' juice, that I rubbed into it. As square as anythin' it looked."

"I mind now I was missin' it," Mrs. Peter said, "and wonderin' what would be gone wid it."

"Up to Mr. William it went," said Dinny complacently, "and in a great takin' he was over it entirely. Part of a herald's staff he said it was apt to be, and gave me a sovereign—so there's for you.

And another thing he thought no end of was a shortish linth of a broken chain off the ould mule-harness, that I fastened a few fandangles of bone buttons and glass bottle-stoppers on to, and tould him I got it hid down under a turf-bank. Scrawmin' sketches of it he was on paper next time I come. 'A highly interestin' objec', says he to me. 'Bedad, sir, the like of it I never witnessed anyway,' says I to him. But once I thought I was lost; for I brought him a little dinted match-box, and when he was just lookin' at it I seen 'wax vestas' stamped on to the side of it in weeny letters that I didn't notice before. Plain enough they were, so I made sure he'd spy them out on me; but, troth, if he did, belongin' to some outlandish Emperor of the Romans he consaited it was, and oncommon valy-able. The aquin of such foolishness I never beheld. Great talk he has now of goin' up next month to Dublin, along wid the whole iligant lot, that he'll be showin' to the learned gintlemen in the Colleges and Acadimies there; and it's much if among them all some of them don't see the sort of ould stuff he's got a hould of. But sure agin the time he comes back I'll be away wid meself out of this, so where's the odds? A good job I made of it anyhow—every pinny of tin pound. Bedad now,

it's surprised you'd be to see the little sinse he has."

"I'm not takin' upon meself to say what it might suit other people to be surprised wid," said Peter Gaffney; "but I'll take me oath that the only thing surprisin' me this minyit is seein' a son of mine turned out the likes of such a little-good-for, humbuggin', money-grabbin', scandeelious young rogue of a mane-spirited slieven."

Everybody was more or less startled by this pronouncement of Peter's opinion, but nobody so much so as Dinny himself. It fell upon him like a thunderbolt unapprehended, because, for one thing, he had been standing where he could not see the cloud darkening on his father's countenance, while, for another, he was so deeply immersed in his own feelings of self-satisfaction that he failed to observe how unsympathetically his hearers received his narrative, how none of them joined in his laughter at Mr. William's expense, or expressed any admiration for the cleverness of his devices. For a moment he was quite taken aback; then wrath aroused itself.

"And who are you callin' scandeelious to?" he demanded, seizing on perhaps the most trenchant epithet in his father's uncompromising little

character-sketch. "What at all scandeelious am I after sayin' or doin', I should like to know?"

"Inventin' lies, and chaitin' them you had a right to know better than to be playin' tricks on," said his father; "and Rowans ownin' Glas-corry, and Gaffneys farmin' their land time out of mind."

"If they was ownin' the Kingdom of Connaught itself, I dunno what that has to do wid me," said Dinny.

"Then it's a mighty ignorant young bosthoon you are," said his father.

"'Deed now, if nothin' else 'ud contint you but to be makin' up thim sort of ontruths, that's no thing to go do," his mother said, eyeing the heap of coin rather wistfully; "what call had you at all events to be tellin' them to poor Mr. William? When there's the Jacksons over at Rathroe, you might ha' tried, thim that keeps a big grocery shop somewheres, and do be rollin' in money, and as common as dirt."

"Oh long life to you! I hope you'll be gettin' your health finely," Dinny said loftily and with ironical scorn, "till I demean meself to have doin's or dalin's wid the Jacksons, good or bad. Musha, cock them up!"

“ You'd be better employed, let me tell you,” said his father, “ than thievin' off of the Family.”

“ I mind poor Master Willie,” said Mrs. Peter, “ when he was scarce the heighth of this table, and meself not much bigger. And the time when he would be helpin' th' ould grandfather wid thatchin' the roof over our heads—handin' him up the straw. There was a dale of nature in poor Master Willie.”

“ A disgrace to the whole of us it is, e'er a one of us to be takin' advantage of him that treacherous way,” said her husband.

“ Many an apple and pear the ould mistress would be givin' me,” put in Dinny's eldest sister Lizzie, “ and I fetchin' the skim-milk up at the House.”

“ Musha, whist wid your gabbin'. Is it for the sake of that ould *raumuish*,” said Dinny, “ I was to be losin' me chance of earnin' a matter of tin pound aisy, and gittin' off slavin' a twelvemonth more for Joe Mullarkey widout wages? And some I could name makin' up matches all the while in a great hurry behind me back, and me not able to spake a word for meself, wid ne'er a pinny comin' in to me yit—a fine fool I'd be, bedad!”

“ There's plenty worse people than fine fools,” Lizzie remarked oracularly.

“ ’Twas a big sum of money to be takin’ off the poor gintleman,” Mrs. Kirby said in a tone of somewhat feeble protest, with a stolen glance at the gold and silver, “ if ould rubbish was all he got for it.”

“ Aye, to be sure, ma’am, you’re agin me too,” Dinny said with bitterness. “ And I suppose your daughter Bridgie’s of the same opinion, thinkin’ I’d ha’ done right to be throwin’ all me chances away ? ”

There was a question in his tone, and he listened for an answer, but discreet silence continued to prevail in the shadowy corner which contained Bridgie Kirby. He could not conceal his disappointment and mortification.

“ Well, then, since dogs’ abuse is all I’m gettin’ among yous,” he said, “ maybe the sooner I take meself out of it, the better ye’ll be plased.”

“ We will so,” said his father.

With that, Dinny began to huddle his coins back into the canister. Anger and haste made him clumsy, and they slipped about as he gathered them up. Their clang, struck from the hollow tin, seemed like a knell rung over his frustrated hopes and unprofitable gains.

IV

But before the last coin—a half-crown—had clattered in, a sort of thrill vibrating through the room made everybody aware that another event was happening. What started this sensation was the sudden falling of a shadow to eclipse the long sunbeam which had been fingering the more solid gold and silver. The shadow was thrown by a figure standing in the doorway, and in a moment all present recognised Mr. William. At the sight Dinny said: “Bejabers!” dropped the canister, which spilled half its contents on the table, and vanished with head-foremost haste through the back door. Yet, so promptly did his mother regain her self-possession, he had scarcely disappeared when she had dexterously flung her apron over the canister, and was bidding the visitor a cordial welcome.

By the time that Mrs. Peter had duly enquired whether it was himself, with as much exclamatory surprise as if she had expected him to come somehow by deputy, Mr. William had begun to discern through the interior dimness that he had intruded upon a party embarrassingly large, which did not apparently comprise the person of whom he was in quest. Rather disconcerted, he explained that

he wished to see Dinny for a minute ; and here Peter Gaffney prevented his wife's reply, getting ahead of her because his was a ready-made fact, while hers had to be selected from a choice of fictions. "He's after leggin' it out of this only just now, your Honour," Peter said. "Run along," he commanded his family in general, "and be callin' him in."

His order was so far obeyed that Larry slipped out of sight behind Katty, and might be supposed to have run ; but Mrs. Peter lost no time in protesting against it. "Grant me patience, man, where's the sense of settin' the childer to stravade about the country after him, and he halfways over to Glenagannon by now? As vexed as anythin' he'll be, poor lad, for missin' you, Mr. William, and a foot he wouldn't stir, I well know, if e'er a notion he had your Honour was comin'. Sure he was sayin' to me only this mornin' that the bog 'ud be as lonesome as the bottom of the lough if it wasn't only for the chance of meetin' Mr. William of an odd while, and he so plisant and frindly. But he got news of a job of work might be in it at Glenagannon, so off wid him to try for it. Bedad, now, poor Dinny isn't one of them who won't either work or want, I'll say that for him."

"It won't be the first big lie you're after tellin' thin, not by a many," Peter said aside.

"The same way yourself would, if so be you had the wit you're short of," his wife rejoined indiscreetly.

"I only looked in," Mr. William said, unconscious of these bickerings, "to see Dinny about a small question that occurred to me; but it's really of no importance."

"Beggin' your Honour's pardon," said Peter, "in my opinion it's a very serious matter, you to be robbed by anybody out of this house, and payin' sums and sums of money for little bits of rubbish."

While Mrs. Peter appealed under her breath to various supernatural agencies, Mr. William stood for the moment perplexed. Then he believed that he understood, for he bethought him of his collection, and it seemed to him that Peter was expressing just the view which an uncultured mind would be prone to take of such not obviously desirable property. So he said reassuringly: "Oh indeed, if you are referring to the curiosities which your son has lately been getting together for me, you may depend upon it that you need have no scruples of the kind. He has not been by any means overpaid for his time and trouble, and if I am not much

mistaken, his finds will be considered of great interest and value by the competent judges in Dublin, to whom I propose to submit them."

"'Deed yes, Mr. William," said Mrs. Peter, "that's the very thing poor Dinny himself would be sayin' to me. Rael plased he was thinkin' he'd got the right sort of ould ancient emblems you did be wishful to have. Times and again he'd be showin' them to me, and wonderin' what the Dublin gintlemen 'ud say to them."

"Troth now, that woman 'ud have a lie ready to put down on every one that ever was tould in this world, ma'am, if it's dealin' them out you were," Peter observed to Mrs. Kirby.

The confidence somewhat embarrassed her, so that instead of replying, she turned to beckon Bridgie out of her corner, and say it was time they were stepping home. But as she did so, being slightly flustered, she somehow twitched off with a flick of her shawl the blue-check apron which Mrs. Peter had adroitly thrown over Dinny's inopportunately produced hoard.

"Och, bad luck to the clumsiness of me! Is it after knockin' any of them down I am?" she said apologetically, making matters worse by drawing attention to the little mishap. Promptly her

hostess interposed. "Ah sure, not at all, ma'am. And no right it had to be there, whatever it is—that's more than I can tell. Is it the price of the calf he's after leavin' lyin' litterin' about?"

"Ne'er a price it is of no calf," said Peter, "as none knows better than yourself does. But it's a true word you're after spakin'—very accidental belike—for no right the money has to be there, or anywheres else except in Mr. William's pocket, that the young rogue the same as stole it out of. Howane'er, by good luck we've got the chance now to be payin' it back dacint, and no thanks to him . . . Leave reefin' the sleeve out of me coat," he added, with a jerk away, for Mrs. Peter was pulling him remonstrantly by the arm, as he swept the coins into the canister, a preliminary, she doubted not, to an immediate act of restitution, "and have done wid biddin' me whist. Is it spendin' his money you'd let him be, travellin' up to Dublin, and makin' a show of himself when he gits there, bringin' along a lot of trash out of the ashpit? Raisin' the laugh on you thim gentlemen 'ud be, Mr. William, if they seen the ould match-boxes and bottle-stoppers the young miscreant's after patchin' up, and passin' off for the mischief knows what. But sure, you can be just

slingin' the pack of them at the back of the fire, your Honour, as soon as you get home; and here's all you paid him for them, Mr. Willie, right enough, as far as that goes."

Peter, beneath the distracted eyes of his wife, and the astonished eyes of Mr. William, held out the canister of coins. "It's not chaited one of your Family 'll be by anybody belongin' to this house, wid my good will," he said. "And more shame for them that thinks any way different."

"But, my good man, nobody *has* been cheating me," Mr. William affirmed confidently, though some of Peter's phrases rang ominously in his ears.

"That's very true for you, Master Willie," said Mrs. Peter, "ne'er a thought poor Dinny had in his mind of such a thing at all, nor wouldn't. Under a misapperhension he was, and that's the whole of it. For accordin' to the way he understood, your Honour, what you was wantin' would be some little tasty play-toys like, that you would be sendin' off by the post to divert any childer you might be apt to know; and not them plain, ould-fashioned things, that he could bring you just as he picked them up out of the dirt, and no trouble about it. So contrivin' he was continual how he could fix them up, and hard set to do it, and he

wid next to no use of the one hand. But frettin' he is now ever since it come to his knowledge that your Honour was wishful to have anythin' he found the very way he got it, and no need to be distressin' himself puttin' any sort of shape on them. He heard tell of it somewheres, I dunno rightly——”

“He seen it on the paper,” Lizzie prompted, “about the collections of ould things up in Dublin.”

“Aye, bedad, he did so,” said her mother, “on the *Evenin' Herald* it was. And many a time he does be sayin' to me what will he do now at all, at all, he thinks so bad of havin' Mr. William annoyed wid the wrong kind of collection, and he after payin' a trifle for it too. ‘Sure I well know, mother,’ says he to me, ‘though an odd half-crown's nothin' here or there to his Honour, sorra the penny of it would he take back,’ says Dinny to me, ‘not if you went down on your two knees to him.’”

“Hould your gab,” Peter said, elbowing her aside. “Is it talkin' the head clean off him you'd be, not contint wid robbin' him?”

“Gabbin' am I? Better it is anyway than the bad talk you have out of you about them you've

little to do to be abusin' behind their backs," said Mrs. Peter.

"Aye, sure enough, raison good he had to be runnin' off wid himself, supposin' he was delicate about hearin' people's opinion of him," said Peter.

"Troth had he, poor lad," Mrs. Peter said, "and his own father turnin' on him wid abuse like an onnatural hyena."

Mr. William, a listener perforce while the mutterings of these voices prophesied domestic war, rapidly cast about him for some pretext wherewith to cover a precipitate retreat. But what actually propelled him from the house without much regard for appearances, was an offer of refreshments, which Mrs. Peter, desperately anxious to make a diversion, began to press strenuously upon him. "Och, Master Willie, what am I thinkin' of? Let me be wettin' you a cup of tay after your walk. Or would you liefer be takin' a drink of sweet milk or buttermilk? I have a jug of it lovely and thick standin' just within there." For this beverage was one so especially abhorrent to Mr. William that merely the mention of it caused him to hurry at full speed through his leave-taking; and he presently found himself out of doors, unconsciously grasping the heavy little

canister, which Peter with successful persistence had thrust into his hand.

V

The voluble discourse of Mrs. Peter still rang bewilderingly in his unaccustomed ears as he crossed the narrow precincts of the Gaffneys' fenced land, and passed out into a boundless space of bog, here clad with a springy growth of short fine grass and heather, on which amply-spreading furze-bushes had settled sombrely down. He had not taken many steps over this pleasant surface, and was yet far from having arrived at any enlightening conclusion about the statements which had just been made to him, when he became aware of somebody close behind him panting rather loudly. Looking round, he saw Bridgie Kirby. It may be observed that Bridgie was not in the least out of breath, but had taken this method of notifying her approach, otherwise inaudible on the soft elastic sward.

“I beg your pardon, sir,” said Bridgie.

“Yes?” said Mr. William, and waited interrogatively.

“It was about Joe Mullarkey's fee, that Dinny

Gaffney's workin' wid," said Bridgie; "I was thinkin' your Honour maybe by chance didn't hear tell about it."

"I seem to have been hearing so many things about Dinny Gaffney," said Mr. William, "that really I can hardly say."

"Annoyed he is this long time," said Bridgie, "wid the notion he has another twelvemonth to be workin' for Mullarkey free, by reason of not ownin' the money to pay his 'prentice fee. So how is he to be gettin' married, and no wages comin' in to him? That was why he would be savin' up the bit of money your Honour has there in his little box."

"Oh, then he is thinking of marrying?" said Mr. William.

"If his little box of savings wasn't took on him, he would fast enough," Bridgie said, looking pointedly at the tin canister; "'deed would he so. And ne'er an atom of harm he meant, only puttin' a dacint, ould appearance on the things he would be bringin' up to the House, for that was what your Honour had a wish for. And sure them he showed me might be as ancient as all the ages of the world, for all anybody could tell, after he readyin' them up. Rael handy Dinny is. But what chance has he to be gettin' married, says he, and he wid ne'er

MR. WILLIAM AND BRIDGIE KIRBY



a pinny to his name? And his few pounds goin' off wid theirselves now in his little box. Makin' up a match some folks might be wid ould Murtagh Corcoran, before he knows where he is, and that's what he does be thinkin' so bad of. Frettin' about it he is this minyit, sittin' over there just behind the big furze-bush—your Honour can't see him, but I noticed him, passin' by, and the black look on him would terrify you."

"And whom is he intending to marry?" inquired Mr. William.

"Sure it might be as apt to be meself as anybody else," Bridgie replied frankly. She was a tall, slender colleen, with a very fair complexion, the darkest of grey eyes, and an abundance of real curly hair. Mr. William looked at her reflectively.

"I declare now, it sounds more likely than their other stories," he said.

"Likely entirely 'twould be, your Honour," said Bridgie, "supposin' I was bringin' him back the few odd pounds he had the misfortune to be layin' out of his hand a while ago, the way they got gathered up somehow by mistake. And yourself after givin' him the order for them ould things. More work there was on a one of them, he would be sayin', than on a set of horse-shoes."

To do Bridgie justice it should be said that she did not *quite* take the canister from Mr. William. But her hand did come out a long way towards it, and in obedience to a gesture half insinuating, half peremptory, he yielded it up as automatically as if she had touched a spring. Promptly her fingers closed round it, and she was several paces away before she had well finished saying "Thank you kindly, sir."

For a moment he watched her darting off towards the big furze-bush, that stood up blackly opaque against a clear golden west. Then he turned in the opposite direction, following his grotesque giant of a shadow over the glow of the purple-brown bog. As he went he was at first vaguely conscious of having lost something, a sense which before he had gone far defined itself into the knowledge that the contents of his carefully labelled drawer in the leather-odorous library had become valueless; that the Rowan Collection would never exist, and that he had now no object for a journey to Dublin. The affair certainly was rather disappointing, rather discouraging; nevertheless he persevered in a determination to go on seeking some object for that longer, inevitable journey.

Near his gate he met several small, large-eyed children, trotting on bare feet. One of them was carrying a belated spike of foxglove, double her own height, all studded with crude green knobs, save for a few pinkish, embroidered blossoms left at the top, not yet gone to seed. She called it *méaracawn-na-meanshee*, a name the intricate sound of which pleased him, though it was for him a sound and nothing more, as he did not know that it meant "the fairy-women's thimble." He said to himself that he had at least two little tasks in prospect to help him through the evening's tedium, for he would write and order some botany books, as soon as he had cleared away his collection of antiquities.



JOHN THE GHOST

ONE cloudy morning in June, John Kiernan hoped it might be the will of God that he would find all as well when he came back as they were when he was leaving, and tramped off to catch the Ballycreagh boat for Glasgow with a reaping-hook round his neck, a scythe over his shoulder, and a bundle wrapped in red cotton dangling from his hand. He was accompanied by a large party of his neighbours, similarly equipped ; for Carrickmalin sends forth many harvestmen, though the exodus is not so general as from some districts further west, where old people, and children, and their mothers, spend such long, lonely summers that they rejoice to see the hours of daylight shrinking. John had

often before loathfully made the voyage, and he expected to repeat it often, for he was a young man still, notwithstanding that his elder children were nearly full grown. In fact he had already begun to talk of taking Andy along with him next year, a project which divided the mind of Andy's mother between dread of another separation, and relief at knowing that "Himself" had a companion. This would lessen the chance of some misfortune befalling him off away in Scotland, so that he would never come home again, and she would never know rightly what had happened to him, but just wait and wonder until hope lingeringly died. The foreboding of that was her master fear at these seasons, and it weighed heavily upon her now as she watched him out of sight from the door of her dwelling. It stood in the middle of a little bright green patch like a magnified fairy-ring, on the edge of the dull, olive-brown bogland, and its nearest visible neighbour was diminished by distance to a fleck that she might have taken for a white cow, had she not known it to be the O'Rourke's cabin.

Mrs. Kiernan felt herself set on the verge of a forlorn and harassing period, nor did events belie her presentiment. Her eldest boy was wild, her

youngest baby pined peevishly, the intermediate children were hungry and quarrelsome, while the bad weather made their belated "pitaty" crop a source of grave anxiety. Furthermore all her troubles loomed larger through the pervasive sense that she need not expect to set eyes on the man of the house at the soonest minute until the end of October, nor be surprised if never a foot of him came for a month after that again.

However, on one stray fine day in August, things looked more cheerful under the mellow sunshine, and in the late afternoon she took heart to go with little Dinny—happily asleep under her shawl—and call on Mrs. Magarity. By the way she meditated much on the consolatory fact that nearly half the time of John's absence must now be over. Mrs. Magarity receives many visits, partly because, being a kindly and conversational old woman, she is a popular person in society, and partly because she lives at the junction of two highways. So Mrs. Kiernan was not surprised to find that several of the neighbours had looked in before her, and were dispersed about the large, irregularly-shaped kitchen, the weather not being cold enough to make the fire a point of attraction. Her hostess said that she had not been next or nigh them for a month of



Sundays, and presently got with her into a nook where they sat discussing intimate domestic affairs a little apart from the other callers. Soon afterwards one of them, Barney O'Farrell, commonly called the Hurler, took his leave, and was just dropping himself through the wall-gap back into the road, when Art Ganly came by headlong, panting as much with excitement as speed.

“ And where might you be powderin' off to wid yourself ? ” demanded Barney.

Art halted grudgingly, and glanced over his shoulder before he answered: “ Sure I'm runnin' me fastest to poor Mrs. Kiernan's. There's the black word of bad news for her this evenin', the crathur—John's died on her.”

“ Och to goodness, man, and what took him at all ? ”

“ Divil a bit of me knows. He wasn't drowned crossin' over, that's sartin, or he wouldn't wait to come all this while. Like enough he might be after gettin' kilt on the railway, if it wasn't some manner of sickness.”

“ But who was you hearin' the news of it from ? ” said Barney.

Art, glancing behind him again, edged up closer to reply.

“ *Himself?* ”—Barney repeated Art’s furtive whisper loudly—“ What talk have you at all ? ”

“ Och whist, man. Amn’t I just after passin’ along by th’ ould buryin’-ground below, and who else but John Kiernan was standin’ forment the gateway ? His back was to me, by good luck, for widin a stone’s throw of him I come before I seen him—between us and harm ! ”

“ Then it’s very aisy you might be mistook,” said Barney.

“ Sorra the mistake I mistook. Himself it was, the very same way he left, or maybe a trifle longer and narrower lookin’. Gazin’ stidfast he was towards the corner where all the Kiernans do be buryin’ theirselves ; and you may depind what brought him was the thought it’s there he had a right to be lyin’, if he’d lived a couple of months or so longer. Small blame to him to not be restin’ contint away off in furrin places. I seen him as plain as yourself.”

“ Step back wid me,” said Barney, “ now while there’s plenty of light in it, and let us try is he there yet.” But he had scarcely spoken when Art was rushing on again with an inarticulate whoop of refusal.

Barney stood for a moment meditating. He

put no great confidence in Art's accuracy as an observer, and he stuck to his own conjecture that it was a case of mistaken identity. This seemed to him the most reasonable and natural explanation, because, he argued, nothing was especially likely to have befallen John. "There's no hurry to be frightenin' his wife, anyway, till we're better certified," he concluded. "Art may flourish along wid himself on the wrong road; 'twill do him good to run till he finds her where she isn't."

Then he went round to Mrs. Magarity's door, and with a significantly crooked thumb beckoned out Tim Flaherty, whom he had left sitting. Having informed Tim, he in like manner drew forth Patrick Joyce and Micky Darby: whereupon the four of them formed a resolution to go and investigate. That seeing was believing they agreed with the rest of the world, though the belief they would base upon what they saw might be rather peculiar to themselves and their neighbours.

They had not very far to go down the straight, furzy-banked road before they turned off it into view of the burial-ground wall, top-heavy with overhanging ivy-tods. And there, pacing under its shadow, moved a figure at the sight of which they all stopped dead. Tim Flaherty suddenly

remarked in a whisper, "D'ye know, I'm afeard I've scarce time to be comin' any furtherer;" Barney O'Farrell said, "Hould your gab;" and Micky Darby crossed himself. He was just behind Patrick Joyce, who kept on slowly backing.

At this moment the tall man whom they were watching stood still and fumbled in his pocket, after which he rubbed something against the wall. Dusk was now thickening, and the flash of the match flared vividly. Almost immediately a whiff of strong "navy cut" came wafted on the breeze, and the four men shouted simultaneously. "Eia, John Kiernan, is it yourself at all that's in it? And what brought you back so soon?" was the predominant salutation.

John Kiernan turned round and came towards his friends, rather surprised that they should stand calling questions without stirring to meet him. He replied to them advancing, gradually dropping his voice as the distance lessened.

"Aye, bejabers, it's meself, who else? But sure just gettin' me death I was"—Patrick Joyce's jump three steps backwards brought him into collision with Micky Darby, though they both were moving in the same direction—"accidental, wid a job of some chap's raipin'-hook, and we crowdin'

off the boat at Glasgow. Destroyed the hand of me was, and meself lyin' in hospital for better than six weeks. The only wonder is that ever I got me heels out of it safe from among them all. For every day of me life there'd be every murderin' thief of a doctor in the place at me, threatenin' to take off the half of me unlucky fingers. One little jackeen there was, wid an ass's grin on his face, that I'd love to be cloutin' over the head wid an ash-plant this minyit, I would so, himself and his amputations. Howane'er, one night I tould Nurse M'Arthur, that's a dacint woman, that if it was interferin' wid me fingers they were, the first bit of work I'd do when I got up agin 'ud be raipin' the hand, or belike somethin' more, off of the first of them villins I could set me eyes on. And I should suppose she made it her business to be lettin' them know next morning what I was intendin'. Because after that there was no more bad talk out of them ; and, glory be to God, they contrived to lave the whole set on me, only a trifle stiffened. And a lady that come visitin' our ward made me up a grand subscription, the way I wouldn't be ruined missin' all the harvestin'—and may God reward herself and her family. So I crossed over yesterday ; but I'm waitin' here this half hour and more

for Christie Scott, that offered me a lift to our place—delayin' down at Crowe's he is. I'd tramp it quicker, only I'm a bit awkward at carryin' things yet," John concluded, pointing to where, leaned against the wall, his scythe slanted helplessly above his bundle and hook.

That clearing up of the mysterious appearance gave general satisfaction. Everybody would have regretted John Kiernan, and nobody wished for an increase in the number of local "walkers." He was not, however, fully restored to the rank of a living man without some little delay. Art Ganly had run swiftly and loquaciously, though happily without finding his main object, and his news grew and spread apace. In the course of the next four-and-twenty hours, John met with a variety of tragical fates, and several days passed before neighbours meeting at mass or market quite ceased to say: "Did you hear tell what's after happenin' poor John Kiernan of Carrickmalin? Kilt dead he was in the streets of Glasgow wid one of them quare ingins of cars rowlin' over him." Or, as the case might be: "Took bad he was one mornin' wid pneumony on the lungs, and he workin' at some place beyant the Canal, and sure it's buryin' him they were the next Sunday."

This was indeed natural enough. But it may seem a curious fact that while Art's mistake did not bring upon him any ridicule, there was an inconsequent tendency to "rise the laugh against" John. People used to ask him whether he had found e'er a grave to suit him yet; and why he hadn't invited them to his wake. Hence, moreover, sprung his clinging nick-name of John the Ghost.



A WOMAN EVER VEXT

To the few passengers assembled in the third-class waiting-room at Cloneer Railway Station on a certain damp November afternoon, it seemed rather a godsend that young Mrs. Rick O'Carroll should have chosen this place and time for a quarrel with her husband. On the principle that two are required to make one, it was indeed so lopsided as perhaps hardly to deserve the name, for Rick's attitude throughout remained little less passive than that of a cliff at whose base the white surf flashes and seethes. Still, even in such circumstances, what may be called a very pretty quarrel does often arise, as we see on many a wild day along rock-bound Inverlisk ; and here nobody was

inclined to belittle the O'Carrolls' dispute because Mrs. Rick did nearly all the talking.

Most of her half dozen audience were neighbours on their way home, like herself, to Dunloughlin from market, and thus their general interest in other people's affairs was now particularly heightened by the fact that these other people were acquaintances. It must not be supposed, however, that there was any unmannerly display of curiosity. They would have been long sorry to appear so ignorant of what was proper as to let on that they were listening. On the contrary, they kept up among themselves a low hum of conversation, carefully subdued to a pitch that did not baulk them of a word they wished to overhear. If old Jim Caffrey was now and then betrayed into uttering a grunt of approval at what he considered some good point made by Mrs. Rick, whom he had known all the days of his life, the inadvertent demonstration was politely ignored by everybody else. Only one of the persons present took a different course. This was Nicholas Sullivan, Mrs. Rick's younger brother, in appearance a less vivacious version of herself, good-looking, grey-eyed and dark-haired. He sat apart from the rest of the company, and wore an air of moody abstraction.

As the unpunctual five o'clock train delayed even longer than usual, and as its intending passengers had of course left themselves a very ample margin, there was full time for the controversy to rage and swell, rising on Mrs. Rick's part in a steadily climbing crescendo of vehemence. At last it culminated in her suddenly jumping to her feet with a thrust-out hand. "Gim-me me half-ticket," she said peremptorily. "I'll go to me mother's, and maybe come back on the nine. In no hurry I am, goodness knows, to be gettin' home to that God-forgotten little ould shanty I'm stuck in there, like a drowneded thing caught between a couple of stones."

To this Rick made no reply beyond fumbling in his pocket for the pink return tickets, one of which he produced, and after looking hard at it, as if he were anxious to impress upon his memory the fact that its number was 353, handed it over to his wife, whose impatient eyes shone with anger. There was enough black hair about his long face to leave his expression somewhat doubtful; but in any case she snatched the ticket without looking at him. Then she took up her market-basket, and stalked quickly across the room. At the door she turned round to throw towards her husband a

small dark-blue parcel. "You might be wantin' that before I come," she said haughtily over her shoulder as she went out. The paper, bursting at his feet, showed that it contained white sugar. He gathered up a few scattered lumps, and put them with the parcel into a coat-pocket, after which he also went out, but at a slow sauntering pace.

"Apt to be puttin' in his evenin' at Moriarty's place, he is," Mrs. Caffrey commented upon his exit; and a neighbouring matron rejoined: "Aye, bedad, ma'am, sure it's a poor case for a man to be turnin' into an empty house at the day's end, wid nobody to give him a word good or bad any more than if he was a dumb baste." To which: "Sure it's bothered as well as dumb a body might liefer be that was livin' alongside of Delia Sullivan's tongue," replied Mrs. Caffrey, who did not share old Jim's opinion of young Mrs. Rick. These remarks were necessarily made half aside, because her brother Nicholas still sat in his corner, and might be hearing more than he seemed to do. He was bound for the town of Glasdrum, where he had employment in the post-office.

Now, had it not been for circumstances of special emergency, this difference between the young O'Carrolls would never have become public

property to the extent that we have seen. But as things were, Mrs. Rick had no time to lose, since the letter which she desired to prevent her husband from sending would otherwise be posted that very night. It was at that moment written out fair in his pocket, an acceptance of a three months' engagement as mate on board a small steamer voyaging between Larne and Leith. To this she strongly objected. Her wish was that he should take a fourth share in the Gallahers' fine new boat, which would presently start fishing in the Bay. She had several excellent reasons for preferring this plan. The boat was first-rate; the Gallahers, father and sons, had made a deal of money in her last season, and the coming one promised equally well; they were very wishful to have him along with them; and he had lately brought home from the Scotch harvesting a sum quite sufficient to purchase the share. What she found more exasperating, however, than all the cogency of these arguments was the fact that Rick had for some time seemed to be entirely of her opinion about the matter, which she had begun to regard as settled, when he had suddenly "took up wid some quare notion or other," and declared himself in favour of the steamboat.

“And this, mind you, after he just bein’ better than three months away off over in Dumfries,” ran Mrs. Rick’s complaint to her mother that evening. “You’d think he might contint himself at home for a while. And what at all he’s doin’ wid the pocketful of money he brought back wid him is more than I can tell you ; no account of it can I get out of him. I seen every pinny of it on him right enough only last Monday ; I could take me oath of that—but tale nor tidings of it since. ’Deed now I wouldn’t wonder if he was after throwin’ the whole of it away on some foolery or other—backin’ racehorses very belike.”

Mrs. Sullivan allowed that it hadn’t an over-nice appearance ; but urged her daughter not to be thinking too badly of poor Rick O’Carroll, for it was no more than the nature of young men to carry on foolish and headstrong, and sling their money about as if they had only to pick it up again the next minute, like something they were after just laying out of their hand on purpose. “And sure you might look long enough,” she added, “before you’d find e’er a boy as sinsible as Nicholas, that you do be used to, and as studdy ; troth might you. It’s not to be expected, glory be to God, for there’s plenty few enough of his like in Ireland.”

The complacency of Mrs. Sullivan's tone might have somewhat jarred upon Mrs. Rick's mood, had not wrath against her husband forbidden her to resent any comparisons made to his disadvantage. She would hardly have demurred even at the exalting over him of Paddy Wogan, the black sheep of the village, let alone of her favourite brother. Therefore she assented emphatically to her mother's view, and announced her intention of remaining where she was for the night. "Suppose you didn't get back in time to see him to-morrow, and he settin' off so early?" Mrs. Sullivan suggested half discouragingly; but Mrs. Rick only said: "And supposin' he was gone itself, after that? I hope he'll be gettin' his health until I break me neck runnin' about the country in the dark because he won't stop aisy where he had a right to. Musha, cock him up."

And in fact when she did return next morning to the little house at the foot of the sea-cliff, Rick was gone. The key of the door had been thrust into its hiding-hole under the thatch, and the tea-caddy contained a wisp of paper wrapped round ten shillings, with an intimation that he would send a money-order from somewhere "agin this day week." No other traces of him were to be seen.

Upon this discovery, Mrs. Rick remarked to her few hens and Foxy, the reddish terrier, that it was a good job to be shut of the big obstinate mule, and that she would just as lief, or liefer, he stayed away until the Day of Judgment. She then sat down on a stool by the fireless hearth, and cried for about half-an-hour, no doubt at the small probability of his absence being so indefinitely prolonged. Her regrets were only ended for the time, when a creeping sense of chilliness incited her to set about rekindling the fire. Rick had apparently gone off without so much as making himself a cup of tea. "Contrariness was no name for him."

After that day, the wintry months went gloomily past the lonesome little house by the sea. It was stormy weather most of the time, and Mrs. Rick's mood quite corresponded. Her wrath against her husband did not by any means subside. You might, indeed, as reasonably have expected to see increasing quiescence in some liquid which was continually stirred up with a stick. The stick with which she kept her angry thoughts awhirl was generally a speculation about what Rick could have done with that sum of money, his harvest earnings, in amount not less than "pounds and pounds."

Since the moment when she had learned his sudden decision against the Gallahers' boat, nothing at all satisfactory had she been able to extract from him about this money, and she not unnaturally felt aggrieved at the mystery which he chose to wrap round the matter, inasmuch as ignorance respecting its fate left her very much in the dark as to their financial outlook for the coming year. If it were still in Rick's possession, their circumstances might be considered fairly affluent, but precarious and straitened if it had gone to loss; and that it so had gone she grew steadily more firmly convinced. Soon, in fact, she found that the only doubtful point was the particular piece of folly or wickedness on which he had actually thrown it away. Through many hours of idleness she brooded over the subject, inclining to the opinion that among all its horrid possibilities, betting was on the whole the most probable.

But one Sunday when she was visiting her mother, she expressed this belief in the presence of Nicholas, who had come over from Glasdrum, and he derided the notion. "Is it Rick settin' up to be bettin' on races?" he said; "sure he never done it that ever I heard tell of. A great offer he'd make at it, bedad. It's my belief that the man

knows as much about horses as I do about herrings." Nicholas somehow managed to convey by his tone that Rick's ignorance was a ridiculous and his own a creditable thing; and Delia agreed with him as usual. The despondent mood which had been noticeable in him at the time of his brother-in-law's departure had now passed off, and he was not at all disposed to listen sympathetically to his sister's grievances. Rick might as well be on board a steamer as an old fishing-yawl—either one or the other of them was beastly—and hadn't he a right to do what he pleased with his own bit of money, so long as he sent her home as much as she wanted? Here, contrary to custom, Mrs. Rick dissented, saying that it was "aisy enough to be talkin' about rights agin other people." And she returned to her solitary abode with a perturbed mind, still full of harassing surmises.

Slowly and heavily the season wore away, till the new year was a month old, and the daylight lasted perceptibly longer, a change which seemed only to enlarge the scope of her discontent. When the dark night had shut her in by the fire, with a blinding lamp set in the window, and Foxy asleep at her feet, and the roosting hens overhead, she generally felt more placable, and could fix her

mind on the socks she was knitting. But one evening towards the end of February, dusk, closing in round the mistress of the cliff-foot cottage, seemed to make a fittingly sombre setting for the blackness of her humour, while her furious thoughts were uttered aloud for her in the gusts of a fierce and rising tempest. The news which had so roused her anger had been conveyed to her that afternoon in a few hastily scrawled lines from Rick. For some days past she had been expecting to receive the usual remittance, and to hear that the time of Rick's return was fixed, but this communication contained no postal-order, and merely said that he had some thoughts of engaging for another spell with the steamboat company. The paper bore no address ; and as in her eager opening of it she had thrown the envelope into the fire, there was not even a postmark to show from which side of the water, Scotch or Irish, it had been sent. Her bitter disappointment at this speedily surged up into vindictive rage, that sought some object whereon to wreak itself, but was almost as much at a loss for one as a wave swelling in mid-ocean. To fling Rick's letter after its envelope was a very transient relief, and having done that, she could think of nothing better than to sit down and write an

incoherent complaint to her mother. Hitherto she had set aside all suggestions that she should take up her abode with the Sullivans during her husband's absence ; but now she announced that as Rick was about running away from her to the ends of the earth, and leaving her without a penny in the world, all she could do would be to come along as soon as she could get her sticks of things packed up. When she had finished this composition, and had a run round the corner of the cliff with it to the Donaghs' cottage, where Jerry Donagh promised to put it in the post for her that evening, she felt so far appeased that she could sit quietly by her fire, and reflect with fury upon the outrageous iniquities of Rick.

Wilder and wilder grew the weather as that night advanced. The waves throbbed like steam-hammers where they reached the cliffs, and closer at hand Delia heard big shingle stones, seldom touched by the tide, all clashing and clattering together in its grip. She said to herself that it was likely enough she was to be swept away and drowned, and that it was very little Rick cared whether she was or no. During occasional lulls in the storm, she always added a conjecture that he was finely content, took off with himself to be spending his

money on eating and drinking, and she left without so much as a grain of tea in the house ; for to this state she had actually been reduced by the failure of supplies. “ Belike he was wishful she’d get her death starvin’.”

Daylight came back lingeringly after long murky hours spent chiefly in such meditations, and she looked out gloomily on the storm-tossed strand. A dark line of seaweed had been pushed up almost to her door by the high tide, which was now ebbing out of the small shingly creek. The wind had fallen, but the raging of the sea had hardly yet abated. Mrs. Rick was more firmly resolved than ever to leave the cottage without delay ; so at the earliest moment possible she ran round again to her neighbours, the Donaghs, in the next cliff-nook, and arranged with them for the loan of their pony-cart, in which to transport her household goods to Cloneer. For she now intended not merely a temporary visit to her mother, but a permanent break-up of her establishment, and a removal of all portable property. It happened that, except the unwieldy dresser, which anyhow could not be stirred, the furniture belonged to herself, as did likewise the half-dozen hens. “ And isn’t he after desertin’ them along wid meself, the villin, supposin’

anybody was to be passin' any remarks?" she said, justifying her action with grim irony.

Packing the cart with these possessions occupied her and the numerous young Donaghs for the greater part of the forenoon. Towards twelve o'clock they had finished, having piled up high an unshapely, toppling load, the aspect of which might well have daunted the heart of Patch, the rust-coloured pony, as he stood at the foot of the steep and deep-rutted breen. Patch, however, was used to sand-loads, less bulky but far more ponderous, and he started with a struggling cheerfulness. It was almost a shock to see him move, because while he stood still he looked so like some animal that had been stuffed, very insufficiently, a long time ago. Soon the wobbly wheels creaked out of sight between the leaning sand-banks, and the shouts of the two escorting Donagh boys were muffled out of hearing; their brethren ran home, shoo-hooing before them the couple of hens which had remained behind for cart-hire; and Mrs. Rick was left alone with an unoccupied hour on her hands before she need set out to catch the train at Dunloughlin.

As she loitered aimlessly in front of her dismantled cabin, along the cliff-path above came Jerry Donagh, returning from the village, and he

shouted down to her : “ There wasn’t e’er a letter in it ; ” for he had called, according to promise, at the post-office. Though she had entertained but small hopes that Rick might have despatched the omitted money-order, their extinction seemed to leave her suddenly groping for the means of expressing a heightened resentment. “ There couldn’t be less than suits me,” she shouted back ; but, “ It’s the worth of him,” she said bitterly to herself, moving towards the door to shun Jerry’s observation. In doing so, she nearly tripped at the threshold over a trail of seaweed, and stooping down she angrily flung it into the room, where it fell upon the black and white hearth. “ ’Tis the pleasant-lookin’ place he’ll find, if so happen he lands back agin any time,” she said, surveying it through the doorway, “ and sure it’s plenty good enough for the likes of him ; not but what I might maybe make it a trifle iliganter yet before I quit.”

With that she gathered up an armful of the heavy dank weed, and threw it after the first. Another and another followed it, for the bundles lay there in swathes, ready to hand, and the exertion relieved her feelings, besides warding off the chill of the wintry air. By the time that she had stopped to take breath, the floor of the little room was

scattered as thickly as the adjoining beach with masses of black-looking weed. Some of it had even caught in the empty hooks of the dresser, from which it hung in fantastic festoons. "I'll just fetch in a good clump for the middle of it," she said to herself, "and then I'll be steppin', in the name of God."

At a little distance she saw a suitable trail draping the edge of a pool, and as she went over to it she made a tragical discovery. For on the dark-brown mat lay a reddish object, which proved to be the lifeless body of Foxy the terrier. Mrs. Rick remembered that he had not come in last night, and that she had supposed him to be spending it, as he often did when his master was absent, with his friends, the Donaghs. But now it appeared that he had been caught on his way home by the swirling high tide. It was a melancholy accident, not that she cared very much about Foxy, who had never made any secret of his preference for Rick, and had treated her with supercilious coldness. Her frame of mind, however, straightway led her to declare that the mishap was "a right sort of judgment on Rick," a view of the matter which she reiterated more than once, as, bundling up the corpse of the drowned terrier in dripping weeds, she deposited

it conspicuously in the centre of her wildly strewn floor. This seemed the finishing touch to her domestic decorations. Having contemplated them with sombre glee, she pronounced them "real tasty," and proceeded to start for Dunloughlin.

She chose the steep boreen as drier, though longer, than the way by the strand; and she had not stepped far up the hill when she saw her brother Nicholas coming to meet her. There was in his demeanour an excited solemnity, which would have struck her had she not been so full of her own affairs. "I've got a couple of holidays," he explained, "so I'm stopping at home, and mother sent me along to see what ailed you, for we couldn't make head or tail of your letter, it was wrote that quare."

"Wrote plain enough it was in my belief," said Mrs. Rick, "and all manner there is ailin' me, as anybody might tell you widout writin', and I left here in me desolation by a little-good-for slieveen, that won't send me so much as a pinny to keep me in yellow meal, after marchin' off wid a pocketful of pound-notes, and bad luck to him——"

"Och, don't begin cursin' Rick," Nicholas interposed hastily.

"And why wouldn't I?" said his sister. "'Tis

the laist I can do, in my opinion, when it's about the most I can do on him—the mane naygur.”

“ A diff'rint opinion you might be apt to have, if you knew but all,” said Nicholas.

“ A worsen one 'ud be the only differ then,” said Mrs. Rick.

“ Better it might be one way, and worsen another,” said Nicholas.

“ I dunno what way at all,” said Mrs. Rick, “ he'd be aught better than as stupid and stubborn as an ould strayin' ass, and he foostherin' off and lavin' a very good job behind him, wid the mackerl——”

Nicholas interrupted her again. “ You didn't hear tell yet that the two young Gallahers is lost ? ” he said.

Mrs. Rick stared at him aghast. “ You don't say so ! Lost ! ” she exclaimed. “ The Lord have mercy on their souls this day. And what was it happint them ? ”

“ Capsized they were in a squall last night, and they runnin' home out of the gale,” said Nicholas. “ And the both of them drownded, and Tim Sheehan along wid them.”

Mrs. Rick continued to gaze at him fixedly, without in reality seeing anything, so preoccupied

was she with the reflection that had she not failed to get her own way, for all she could do or say—and many of her sayings and doings had certainly nowise lacked in vigorous unpleasantness—Rick would probably at that moment have been in Tim Sheehan's place. The wind, ruffling up the lane, drove a gustful of loose sand against her like spray, and bore in the hollow boom of breaking waves, which seemed to take her breath.

“So you see,” Nicholas went on, as though he were relating some most obviously logical sequence of events, “if it wasn't only for *me*, Rick 'ud be at the bottom of the Bay; and if it wasn't for *him*, I'd be in the middle of Allenmore Jail.”

“What fool's talk have you?” said his sister.

She 'did not move her puzzled eyes from his face, and they now began to see what they had before them, a fact which caused Nicholas some degree of embarrassment as he proceeded with his explanation.

“Didn't that tom-donkey Dan Cahill come along before last Glasdrum races wid a great story of the wonderful horse Mr. Douglas's Step-Aside was goin' to be, unbeknownst to everybody? Accordin' to his account of it, every pinny you didn't put on the baste you were as good as throwin'

out on the side of the road. And Gorman the jock after lettin' him break his blamed ould leg at the first on-and-off jump, and be hanged to the whole of it."

"So that was where Rick's harvestin' money went?" said Delia.

"It was not entirely altogether, in a manner of speakin'," said Nicholas. "For nothin' 'ud suit Cahill but to be braggin', the way I was tellin' you, just at the very time when I had a chance of layin' me hand very convanient on a loan out of the office, and he must needs have me mind stirred up wid his discoorsin' till I couldn't rest contint to let slip the two chances at once. So after the dirty ould race goin' wrong on me, outrageous ructions there was bound to be prisently in th' ould shop about the few odd pounds."

"Then to keep you out of landin' before the magistrates, in a court of justice, on a heavy charge, it went," Delia said slowly, as if summing up a series of horror.

"And to keep Rick himself out of landin' in destruction along wid the Gallahers equally as well, mind you," said Nicholas, "for there he'd be this mortal minyit as sure as he has a hair on his head, and he dead set on takin' a share in the mislucky

boat. You might as well be argufyin' wid the gulls fightin' over the fish, as tryin' to put him off the notion, as long as he had the money. So if I meself wasn't the raison, you might say——”

Nicholas stopped abruptly short of further details about his intervention, and was silent for a while. His sister felt at a loss how to express herself. An obstruction had suddenly risen to stem the current of her wrath against Rick, and against Nicholas it had never been wont to flow without strong restraint. It was he who resumed the conversation. “I'm after meetin' a couple of the young Donaghs,” he said, “a bit up the boreen, and they wid everythin' droppin' off of the pony-cart in showers, whatever quare botch you made of loadin' it. I fixed it up for them the best way I could, but it's much if the whole consarn isn't fallin' down about their ears before they get over the hill. Little enough you've left, I should suppose, in the place below there.”

“Just stop a minyit,” said his sister, “till I run back and fetch somethin' I'm after forgettin' in it.”

A vivid picture of the dead terrier lying in the middle of the seaweed-littered floor had at this moment flashed across her mind, and somehow

seemed to her very intolerable. It was not at all likely that anybody except herself would ever behold the spectacle, yet she could not bear the thought of leaving the place that way. She would put Foxy out of sight, anyhow, and perhaps tidy it up a bit. That she would thereby be revoking an act of vengeance on Rick was a fact which did not fully rise into her consciousness as she said, "I won't be any time," and turned quickly back down the boren.

Peering in at the dark door, with windy gleams of sunshine flickering behind her, she could for a moment see nothing except thick blackness. Then she thought she heard a faint rustling within, and she seemed to become aware, whether by sound or sight, of some more opaque object that moved slightly among the shadows, and moaned as it moved. This discovery alarmed her so extremely that she was on the point of taking flight, when the terribly vague figure suddenly rose up in the dimness and said, "Whethen now, is it yourself, Delia?" whereupon she all at once found herself unable to imagine how she could have supposed it to be anything other than just Rick in his blue sailor's jersey.

"I declare to goodness," she said, "you gave

me the quare turn. I thought you was come back the way poor Biddy Harrell's man done, and he dead and buried all the while."

"And I thought it was under that you were," Rick said, pointing to Foxy's seaweedy mound. "Is it drowned out you are entirely?"

"Sure not at all," said Mrs. Rick, "but too lonesome the place was altogether. So after packin' up me things I am to go stop above wid me mother. 'Twas only poor Foxy got his death wid the high tide last night comin' in on him unbeknownst, rowlin' up over itself mad-like before the storm."

"Too lonesome it is," Rick said, looking round him, "and too contagious to the brink of the water. The same thing that happint poor Foxy might aisy be happenin' yourself, bedad might it. So when I found last night that I was after disremimberin' to stick in the money-order in me letter, I took and stepped over here from Portgallen—the ugly weather I got comin' along by the strand road—the way you'd have it early, and I could be tellin' you I seen a grand little house there, convanient to the harbour, that 'ud suit us well, and I goin' backwards and forwards; for a good job I've got wid M'Sharry and Ferguson. What would you say to it, woman alive?"

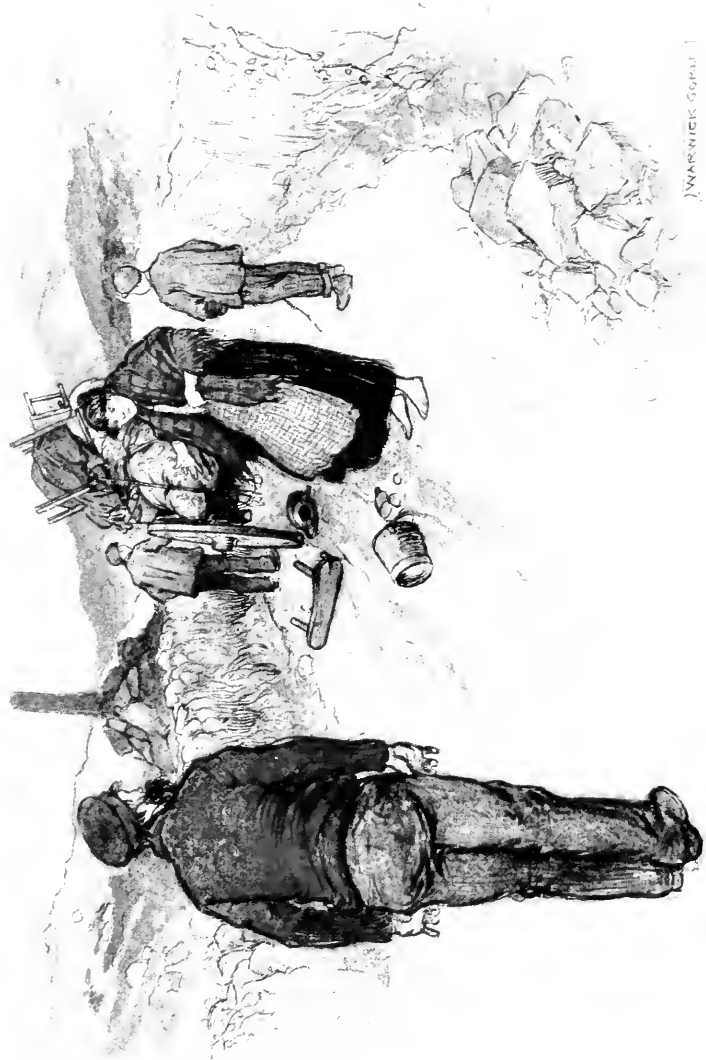
Mrs. Rick almost said, "'Deed 'twould be rael iligant," but checked herself just in time to save her reputation for invariable captiousness. However as she could improvise nothing more to the purpose than "'Twould be an awkward piece of business movin' your ould dresser," Rick easily translated the futile objection into an unusually gracious assent. Before he could make any further remarks, Nicholas stuck his head over Delia's shoulder and looked in.

"To your sows!" he said, "there's Rick himself back agin after all your tantrums. You might ha' known he would be right enough, when, by good luck, he wasn't along wid the Gallahers. But what bewitched you to be lavin' the room that way full of——"

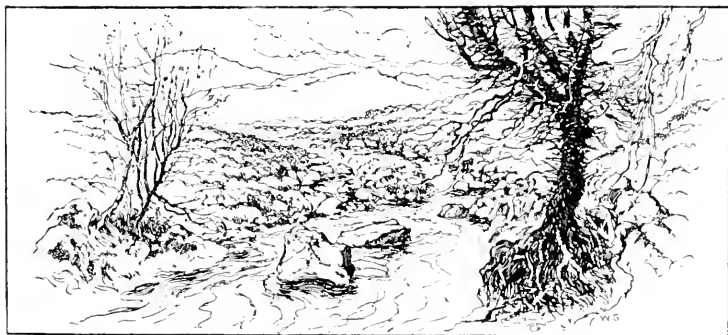
"I'm just about runnin' to turn back the pony-cart," said Mrs. Rick, not wishing to enter upon the subject. "There's no sinse in the boys streelin' over wid it, only to be streelin' it back agin."

Her hasty withdrawal carried her out of ear-shot, but it did not divert Nicholas from prosecuting his inquiry. "Apt she was to be slingin' it around in a fantigue like," he said, looking about. "Finely infuriated she was at bein' disappointed of your letter or somethin'. And bedad if it wasn't only

"WHAT DELAYIN' HAVE YOU?"



WARWICK GORGE



THE LOAN OF A PENCIL

I

EVEN a few minutes seem a great space of life when you are being whirled along, fast in the grip of wild waters, coiled about and about you, struggling, gasping, choking, feeling the invisible hand pressed heavily on your head to keep it under, and snatching with your own futile hands at priceless solid things which pitilessly repulse you, while many-hued flashes lighten before your eyes, and many-toned noises thunder round your ears, that, blind and deaf, you may the more desperately perish. Such at least was Robert Fennell's experience immediately after he had slipped off a rocking slab of

stone in the flooded Conra River. He had set an unfortunate foot upon its treacherous face, lured by the bait of an uncommon-looking fern-tuft, green beneath a dripping ledge, and a sudden tilt had forthwith toppled him over. For a terrible time it appeared as if he were going to be drowned outright; then at last something seized him by the sleeve, and he feared it was only one of the hanging branches that had often caught him, to let him lightly go again. But this was a persevering human arm, and it hauled him violently out on to a root-veined bank.

Fennell had not come after all so near death's precincts that he had to travel back painfully through dismal regions. He was at once extremely glad to find himself with his head safely in a sodden clump of withering bracken, and he did not feel inclined to repine over-much though he grasped a stalk of stinging nettle as he scrambled to his feet. Still, his physical plight was miserable enough, as he stood, most thoroughly drenched, shivering in the November air, and staring dizzily where the rush and swirl went by without him.

“You'd a right to step up to my fire now, and get yourself dry,” a voice said at his elbow. The speaker evidently was the person who had rescued

him, a tall, lean, youngish man in labourer's clothes, ragged and grimy ; his grizzled black head was bare, and his hollow cheeks had a shaggy setting. A fire sounded comfortable, and Fennell said vaguely, "Where is it? Thanks—" Then recollecting that he had more serious cause for gratitude, began to express it, but was promptly checked.

"If there's goin' to be any gabbin' out of you," said the man, "I'd liefer I left you where you was, or else put you back." With this gracious disclaimer he picked up a bundle of sticks, to one of which a soaked cloth cap adhered. "I stopped that floatin' down," he said, "so then I streeled on to try was there anythin' else follyin' it. Come along wid you."

He led the way up and down a faint track through the thicket, which presently turned them out on a small cleared space in the wood, fronting a high, firry crag. A cave-like hollow at the base of this had been built into a rough sort of shanty, with sods and logs ekeing out its natural walls and roof, but without chimney or window, or any door except a barricading plank. Red-hot boughs glowed encouragingly on the hearthstone, and Fennell instinctively made for it. Whereupon: "You might better be swimmin' home down the stream the

way you was, than offerin' to dry them clothes, and they on yourself," the man said sternly. "'Twould drive the wet into you, and give you your death, as sure as the blade of a knife. Slip them off, and I can loan you some."

Fennell protested strongly against this proposal, but the man took from a wooden box beside the fire a very respectable light-grey homespun suit, almost new. "I do be savin' them up dacint agin I want them in June," he said, "but they might get no great harm wid you wearin' them a couple of hours ; and I've got nothin' to do only keep an eye on you, in case you had any notion of walkin' off in them."

Established thus under surveillance by the fire, with his own garments steaming close by, Fennell would have liked to talk away the time, for he was fairly inquisitive as well as sociable ; but his host gave him less than no encouragement, and he had to entertain himself by looking about him, a resource speedily exhausted. There was very little of anything in the rude shed, and nothing at all remarkable, except perhaps one of the end walls, formed almost entirely by the smooth face of a large boulder, which had been rather freshly white-washed. This gleamed conspicuously amid the

THE CALENDAR IN THE SHED



prevailing smokiness, and on it, done apparently with charcoal, was some big black writing, which he could just make out to be a calendar of the past four or five months. Each day was marked with a cross, up to the present date, November the seventeenth. It could not be considered a particularly interesting or instructive inscription, though it seemed to imply that the occupier of the shanty was impatient for the passing of his days, a mood with which Fennell, fidgeting through his tedious wait, would have readily sympathised.

At long last, however, the man, who, seated in the furthest corner, had been muttering to himself with tantalising indistinctness, became more generally conversational, and volunteered the statement that in another half-hour the clothes would be as dry as if there wasn't e'er a drop of running water in the width of Ireland. Fennell took advantage of the opening, discreetly and warily, lest it should close with a snap, and replied: "Then I needn't intrude upon you much longer. I see you're stopping up here?"

"Since then," said the man, pointing with a stick, which he was whittling, towards the earliest date on his calendar—the first of July.

"Ah, indeed; that may be all very well in

summer," said Fennell, "but in cold, wet seasons you're hardly weather-tight, I should think." He looked up at the roof, through which from several points large drops were slowly ticking down on the earthen floor, where every gust that went by set straws and other trifles in motion.

"If it gets too soft at any time," said the man, "I've nothing to do but just step down and find a night's lodgin' below in Delganrath, and take me chance of talkin'. 'Twould be quare entirely if I couldn't hould me tongue that long. I got the charcoal-burnin' job up here to keep meself out of the way of people; and, once I'm shut of you, I won't see e'er another, plase goodness, for a great while; not till I have to be goin' after a bag of oatenmale. But I'd risk gabbin' sooner than get me death of cold this day of the year, for that 'ud be ruination. Troth and bedad, I'm bound to be alive and well on the twenty-second of June next year—it falls on a Monday."

With some difficulty Fennell refrained from anything more directly interrogative than pointing to the wall and observing, "You haven't put it down there?"

"'Twould look too far off yet awhile," said the man. "I'd be annoyed seein' it. But it isn't so

much over six months now after all. Fine and long 'twill seem to somebody any way. . . . The beginnin' end of June 'ud be a plisant time to get out, after a year at hard labour, and go walkin' wherever you have a mind about the country, thinkin', very belike, to set off to the States, where nobody knows you, and make a grand fortune, and you a young chap wid a long life before you."

Fennell was slow to answer, partly because he hoped something more might be coming, and partly because he felt at a loss for appropriate comments upon this future prospect. "It might be pleasant enough," he said at length; "I've never had any experience of the kind myself—though no doubt many of my betters have," he hastened to add.

"The better you are, the worse thratement you'll get; you may trust the divil for that same," said the man. "And the bigger villin's in your coat, the readier every person 'ill be to be swearin' you the best of characters, and recommendin' you to mercy, and givin' you chances. Much chance he gave her, that he wasn't fit to walk on the same road wid, the best day ever he lived. Them's the sort has the luck, unless of an odd while somebody makes it his business to see they'll get somethin' different, whatever else may happen—and, faix,

but it's little *I* care. . . ." He had been moving off, so that distance increased the obscurity of his enigmatical mutterings, and the end of his soliloquy was quite beyond earshot. Fennell completely failed to elicit anything further.

Soon afterwards, however, when he had painfully imprisoned himself in his sorely shrunken suit, and had begun to fumble furtively in his clammy purse, he was startled by a voice again remarking at his elbow: "If it's for anythin' to be givin' me you're lookin', you needn't throuble yourself: I wouldn't take twopence for luggin' you out twice over. You're not worth that much, nor the half of it. Signs on it, if you was, it's swep' away you'd be, and lyin' at the bottom of Lough Devenish under thirty feet of wather this minyit."

"How was it that I didn't drag you in, then?" Fennell said. He was goaded into the retort by the provocation of his shrivelled boots rather than by the rudeness of his host; but the latter ignored the innuendo.

"If there was any fear of that happenin', I wouldn't ha' gone next or nigh you, divil a fut would I," he said frankly, "for if you took and drowned me, you'd be after doin' a good turn to the blackest villin in the land."

“I can’t see why you didn’t let me alone, in any case,” said Fennell; and this objection the man was evidently unprepared to meet. He had to grope about for an explanation before he found any sort of one.

“Well—maybe—I thought you might have a bit of an ould lead pencil about you, that you could lend me the loan of, supposin’ you wasn’t drowned. I’m a trifle short of room there for settin’ down the rest of the time that’s comin’, and I’d do it a dale smaller and tidier wid a bit of pencil than to be scrawmin’ it wid the burnt stick.”

Fortunately Fennell was provided with two inches of pencil in a nickel-silver sliding holder, which the man apparently regarded as property of much value, not to be unceremoniously transferred.

“Are you livin’ anywheres convanient?” he said, “for then you might be fetchin’ it again any time after June. I could lave it where you’d find it, on the little ledge.”

Fennell replied that he lived far from conveniently in London, but might perhaps return to Clondesert next summer for the salmon-fishing, and if so, would call at the shed; upon which understanding he took his leave. All the long trudge

home, what thoughts he could detach from the intrusive discomfort of his unaccommodating foot-gear were bestowed on speculations about the nature of the event to which this cynical preserver of his life was looking forward so eagerly.

II

In the following June Robert Fennell was again at Clondesert, and one bright forenoon towards the end of the month, when the wind had a wrong slant for fishing on Lough Devenish, he did once more climb up from its shore along the course of the impetuous Conra River, this time with a view to revisiting that charcoal-burner's shed in the hillside fir-wood. He left behind him Clondesert stirred to unwonted excitement by tidings which had come that morning on the mail car from Damesborough, half-a-dozen miles away. They interested everybody in a vivid way, for they told of a tragedy which had just been enacted on the road near that town, and whose victim was a native of the village. Fennell heard all about it from several people before he had his breakfast ; indeed the neighbours were so full of the story that he could hardly have met one of them without evoking it, any more than he

could have brushed against wet boughs without scattering drops.

Yesterday, it appeared, a prisoner had been released from Damesborough Gaol, where he had done twelve months' hard labour for manslaughter. He was one Stephen Gildea, the younger son of Terence Gildea, whose forefathers had farmed a good little bit of land on Cruaghnameena time out of mind, and had always had the name of being very respectable people. Nothing was known against this Stephen until he married, when his conduct took a turn for the worse. Everybody agreed that it was no fault of the wife, a nice quiet girl, by the name of Susan M'Evoy, who came from the county Clare ; but his ill-treatment of her had grown into a parish scandal, and, " May was a year," had culminated in her death. He had knocked her down with the handle of a *loy* in the milking-shed, and she had fractured her skull by the fall. Many people were strongly of the opinion that his crime was nothing less than wilful murder, but consideration for his family had withheld them from publishing their views. At his trial the witnesses, not without some hard swearing, and much suppression of facts, all worked for mitigating circumstances, and the result was that he got off

with what everybody declared to be “ a dale less than he deserved by rights.” His offence looked still blacker before long, when his parents who “ had never held up their heads in this world again, goodness might pity them,” had both died ; whereupon the rest of the family emigrated to New York.

Now, the term of Stephen Gildea’s imprisonment having expired yesterday, he was released from Damesborough Gaol at an early hour in the morning, and after sunset two egg-gatherers, on their way home, had found his dead body in a dyke by the roadside, at a lonely place between the town and Lough Coote. He had been stabbed to the heart, but not robbed of his money or watch. About his movements after leaving the prison nothing definite was known ; he had spoken of going to America. A boy minding sheep on a hill, not far from where the body was found, said he had seen a man go by on the road that morning—a tall, thin-looking man in a light-grey suit and black felt hat—who certainly was not Stephen Gildea. “ Sure, he knew well by the walk of the chap, and by the broad-brimmed hat. Hadn’t he often enough seen Stephen Gildea drivin’ past to the fair, and ne’er a sign of such a thing on his head at all ? ” But in spite of young Denny’s confidence, most of the

neighbours maintained that he could not have been sufficiently near to see rightly, and that the stranger was probably Stephen Gildea himself. So far, therefore, the general public had no clue less vague than an inferentially unfavourable estimate of the unknown assassin's character; and the police reticently guarded the secret of their precisely similar ignorance.

“ Well now, to spake the truth, it's little the better anybody was apt to be for him, wherever he might have gone, goodness forgive him,” summed up the last person with whom Fennell discussed the case, old John Heffernan, namely, as he sat on his boat by the shore of Lough Devenish, waiting for an improvement in the disappointingly brilliant weather. “ But 'twould ha' done no harm to let him have his chance of quittin' this country paiceable. He was young enough yet, and might have behaved himself more dacint out in the States, though, bedad, 'twas a quare bad offer he made at it over here, leadin' the poor, plisant-spoken girl the life of a dog, and doin' the same as murder on her in the end. Herself had the good-nature in her, the crathur; many's the cowld night she would be sittin' up wid a sick body. Aye, there was more than a few sorry after poor Susan Gildea.

A fine figure of a man himself was too, and the both of them to be in their clay this day, and they not so much as half-a-dozen year married. 'Tis a misfortunate pity it happint that way ; but, sure, it was to be. And whoever it was took and put the knife in him's very like to be none too respectable himself, that he need go interfarin' wid other people."

"Indeed, it's a serious matter to have such a ruffian at large," Fennell said. But he was wondering as he spoke why old Heffernan's remarks should seem to have awakened a remembrance of his own mishap in the Conra River, and his detention in the cave-shed huddled away under the crags. There was no traceable association of ideas, he thought at first ; yet as he strolled about, one occurred to him, and he suddenly started up the footpath by the stream.

Rain had fallen heavily during the night, and when he came to the rapids where he had slipped in, the water was still twisting weighty, solid strands between the boulders, or smothering them with flurries of creamy foam. Fennell abstained from any rash steps among them, and after some beating about, hit on the track through the thicket which led him up to the doorway of the shed. A sunbeam following him in, dimmed the red glimmer

of embers fading on the hearth. They might have been a remnant of the fire he had sat before, so unchanged did everything look; and the first thing he specially noticed was a draping of light-grey tweed clothes, spread out as if to dry—assuredly that roomy suit in which he had spent a couple of hours. For a few moments he supposed himself to be alone, but a slight sound came from one corner, and turning thither, he saw his man lying at full length on the ground. Fennell recognised him instantly, notwithstanding that he was now close-clipped and clean-shaven, and that the hollowness of his looks had become even more striking. His idle hands lay bleached and wasted, as if they had been grappling with a fever. He wore the same ragged labourer's clothes, but was also wrapped round in the folds of the most comfortable garment on earth, for he was sleeping with the profound obliviousness that waits on release from prolonged strain of body and mind.

Seeing that he showed no signs of waking, Fennell, after a minute, walked stealthily on further into the shed, and up to the whitewashed end wall, which bore the calendar. At first sight he thought that it was as he had left it, but on a nearer view he saw that six months had been added in smaller writing with a pencil. A cross marked off every

date up to the day before. "And, by Jove," Fennell said to himself, "yesterday was the twenty-second." No cross stood against it, but, instead, a few scrawled words. They were : *To hell with him.*

If taken to task, Fennell would have had some trouble in accounting satisfactorily for his next action. It was prompted by a mixture of motives, wherein none may have been stronger, singly, than a characteristic discontent with merely a spectator's part, which made him loth to retire ineffectively, without by some means emphasising the fact of his presence. To do so by arousing the sleeper seemed, at best, inexpedient ; while even less could he contemplate arousing any other persons. But what he actually did was this : when he had stared for a time at that one strong phrase, he took out his pencil, and wrote underneath it, opposite to " June 23rd " : *Found in the ditch.*

" I suppose that warning makes me an accessory after the fact," he thought ; and, just as he was extending an irresolute thumb with a half intention of rubbing out the words, his eye fell on a little stone ledge, where the pencil he had " lent the loan of " so many months back lay, worn to a stump, in its silvery case. That was, he remembered, according to promise. " Where has he got his

knife?" Fennell wondered suddenly, and sent a rapid glance round him. No knife was visible, but on the wall by the door hung a broad-brimmed black felt hat, and below it stood a pair of heavy boots moistly muddy. Somehow the sight of these suggested to him that he would rather continue his meditations in another place; and when once he had made his way cautiously out of doors, he did not pause until he was again standing beside that turbulent passage in the river. The rough wildness of the water had a certain reassuring and quieting effect upon his mind. "It must have been a very considerable risk, whatever he may say," he thought, as he watched the swirling rush. "After all, is there nothing to be said for wild justice? That was life for life, in one way, and so is this in another. He seemed to me that day to be certainly eccentric, if not insane outright; and now, unless I'm much mistaken," he argued on, recalling the sleeper's drawn and shrunken face, "he's not long for this world, however things turn out. I don't believe I've done any harm."

Then he looked over his shoulder, and began to walk quickly down-stream. He had heard a rustle, it might be a footstep, from the direction of the thicket.



THE FIRST DRIVE

IT is not very long since Phelim M'Gonigal, a little farmer living at Inverdrum, near Clochranbeg, found himself in a position to set up an outside-car of his own. As in such districts a car seems an almost necessary luxury, the attainment of one is always among the earliest signs that a man's affairs have taken a prosperous turn, and the possession may be regarded as conferring some sort of rank, a degree above that of neighbours who are no more than "very poor people altogether." We must not suppose, however, that Phelim's ability to take this upward step was by any means due to any thrifty exertions on his own part ; indeed to have imagined a cause of the kind would have argued you quite

unacquainted with his character. For Phelim was notoriously ne'er-do-weel and happy-go-lucky in his manner of life. Moreover, though he worked hard enough on his screed of a farm, everybody knew that if ever its stony fields produced him a spare penny, his first impulse would in all likelihood be to give or lend or play the same away. His wife, Maggie Lauder, who ought by rights to have been complementarily near and close, was in fact just such another as himself, and had no children, whose interests might have checked her open-handedness, which now recognised only the strong restraint imposed by possessing nothing more to bestow.

Consequently the M'Gonigals were well liked among their neighbours, and the news that Phelim's brother Mike, dying off away out in Buffalo, had left him a tidy bit of money, was deemed uncommonly good news at Inverdrum, making everybody feel as if the place had grown vaguely richer. Likewise did they feel as if the town of Clochranbeg had come perceptibly nearer, when they learned that Phelim was "about looking out for a horse and a side-car." Few little hamlets are more hopelessly at the back of beyond than Inverdrum, not so much in actual distance, as because hardly

any kind of conveyance ever comes along its hilly by-road, except of a very odd time a cart drawing a load of lime from Coleman's kiln ; so that the inhabitants must rely mainly on their own walking powers for the chance of getting about. Five miles distant, Clochranbeg with its Mass and market was therefore inaccessible to some of them, and these feebler persons especially counted much upon the prospective driving of the M'Gonigals.

All the neighbourhood was sympathetically excited on the afternoon when Phelim brought his purchase home from Doolin fair. It was a light chestnut horse, white faced and footed, with a wig-like flaxen mane, and the car wore a coat of such a brilliant canary colour that the women gasped with admiration as it passed. Phelim had got the whole turn-out from Batty O'Kelly of Leglish, and declared it to be the grandest bargain ever he had made in his life ; which, after all, was not any great boast. Nobody gainsaid him, but everybody who had an opinion worth mentioning refrained discreetly from expressing it, until old Tim Sheehan should have spoken ; for Tim has known better days, and is considered a judge of high things. On this occasion, however, he saw fit to be ambiguous, and merely remarked : " It's got a fine lick of fresh

paint on it, anyway ; but maybe you'll know more about it by the time you're after knockin' a little of that off of it." And he walked away murmuring, " Batty O'Kelly, long life to him ! "

That was on Friday evening ; and the following day seemed long to Phelim and his wife, for did not beyond it lie the glory of their first drive to Mass at Clochranbeg on their own car ? Part of the interval Phelim spent in filling up an awkward hollow in the roadway near his house, to the dangers of which he had lately become alive ; the acquisition of a cherished piece of property being to a man somewhat as to an ant were the growth of an additional feeler. As neighbours passing by stopped to inquire about his job, it seemed only natural to end his explanation with the offer of a lift going over to Mass on the morrow ; and he had done this many times before the sun went down. They had already arranged that seats should be reserved for old Nano Donagh and lame Peter Rourke, " the crathurs " ; and in the course of the day, little Joe Rooney had a fall, and bewailed a grazed knee with most piercing lamentations, until Mrs. M'Gonigal appeased him by a promise that if " he would be a good boy, and quit bawling, he should have a fine drive next morning to the town, on the well of the

new car ; aye, to be sure, and little Lizzie and Johnny too."

Thus, by the time that the hour for starting actually arrived, the number of persons who could have claimed a seat on M'Gonigal's car had swelled to a crowd almost large enough for a very decent burying ; and although, of course, but a comparatively small proportion of them thought of holding Phelim to his promise, those who did take him at his word and put in an appearance formed a much more than reasonable load. So the upshot of it was that Mr. and Mrs. M'Gonigal had to relinquish their intention of themselves driving to Mass, and to see their car set off piled deep and high with old and young, and charioteered by Murty Walsh, a youth whose confidence in his own coachmanship Phelim did not share.

These arrangements had taken so long to complete that the two M'Gonigals began their disappointed tramp hardly expecting to be in time for even the last Mass. Murty Walsh had shouted a promise to come back and fetch them, but they trudged on and on without meeting him. It was a showery May morning, stickily wet underfoot, and a damp west wind leaned heavily against them all the way until they came near the town. Then a

turn in the steep road discovered to them a group, which accounted only too clearly for Murty's defection.

The chestnut stood in the centre, sullenly, with a pair of broken knees, and detached from the yellow car, which was surrounded by its late occupants, gabbling aggrievedly. Their complaints burst forth afresh upon the arrival of the car-owners, who were greeted with the simultaneous recital of a dozen disasters. Old Nano averred that every bone of her body had been shook into the wrong place. The Widow Farrell had got a quare toss that she wouldn't be the better for to the longest day of her life, and her good shawl was a mask of mud. Peter Rourke, briefly, was all destroyed. The other passengers deplored sundry sprains and scratches, and two or three black eyes had begun to appear among them. All of them, moreover, seemed disposed to hold the lender of the unlucky lift responsible for their dilapidations, considering it no thanks to him that the whole lot of them hadn't got their necks smashed, with his ould rattletrap. All except perhaps Tim Sheehan, who was standing with a broken shaft in his hand.

"Sure," he said, "there was nothing in the world keepin' it together—only a dab of putty. It

wouldn't ha' lasted any time even if me hayro there"—his hayro was Murty Walsh—"hadn't took and run it into the bank." Murty, who owned one of the black eyes, here scowled thunderously at Tim over Mrs. Farrell's shoulder, but Tim continued unaware: "To be sure now I was thinkin' Batty had some raison of his own when he painted the yoke an inch deep that-a way. It's the tasty ould contraption entirely. And if that baste hasn't got side-bones, I don't know his head from his tail. Batty O'Kelly, bedad! Himself's the gay ould lad that's in it."

This is how it happened that there were so many places empty in Clochranbeg Chapel on a certain Sunday morning. And nothing but the great popularity of Phelim and his wife prevented it from coming to pass as a further sequel that *a lift on M'Gonigal's car* should be used as a common periphrasis for any piece of unsuccessfully attempted benevolence. For in these places people have only a small choice of events whereon to base their proverbial philosophy, and to sharpen their satirical wits; so that they cannot well afford often to let slip the opportunity offered by even such trivial occurrences as the failure of this first drive.



A TRANSFER

ONE misty morning on the threshold between winter and spring, a stir and bustle, as of some unseasonable harvest, pervaded the land. There was much hewing, lopping, and sawing, tugging at heavy, unwieldy masses, and gathering up of small scattered fragments. For the biggest wind of half a century had swept past a few days since, and had made a power of work, not to be finished in as many twelvemonths. This was now in full swing, ranging from the removal of ponderous trunks, trailed like ogre's artillery on creaking wheels by uninterested horses, to the procession of tangled, tottering bundles, each one overloading an old crone, stiff and bent, who moralised upon the goodness of

ill-winds, little or big, as she saw the heap of fire-wood rising in the corner of yard or kitchen.

Lisnacran is clustered, with a dozen thatched roofs or so, at the mountain end of a narrow green glen, which sinks and spreads into the sombre-coloured, peaty level of Moyathy Bog ; and it was a couple of miles down along the road to Clonrea that young Alec Gowran and his cousin Fergus Doyle were busy on this early March morning. It is a ledge of a road, with a steep slope into the valley on the left hand, facing away from Lisnacran, and walled on the right by the furzy, heathery, craggy pedestal of Knockure, a barren little hill. Of the forest that used to shadow it, a small remnant had weathered scores of big winds in the form of one tall elm, crowning a jut of rock, which here makes the road bend abruptly. But now its topmost twigs were resting on the low, sodded dyke over the way, and it would have fallen flat had not its wrenched-up roots been caught on a projecting boulder, which turned it into a slanted bridge, lofty enough hardly to obstruct the thoroughfare beneath it.

The two lads apparently wished to alter that state of things, for they were at work with pick and spade about the base of the buttressing boulder.

It was a tough job, and a rather risky one towards its close, when the great stone began to loosen and tremble ; and at last they had scanty time to save themselves by agile backward jumps, when down it came amid much sliding and tumbling of earth, followed by the rushing fall of the huge trunk, dropped with all its branches sheer across the road, which it barricaded effectually. Alec and Fergus stood peering through the interlaced twigs, as if they expected to see something new beyond their screen. Said Alec : “ That’s grand now. Ne’er a crathur could say but that th’ ould tree come down just wid the weight of itself. And it’s much if anythin’ goes by here on four legs more sizable than a rat or a rabbit.”

“ It’s bothered people are apt to be, sure enough, drivin’ along this way,” said Fergus. “ Tellin’ me what at all you wanted wid it you said you’d be, when we had it finished.”

“ Well, there you are,” said Alec.

“ Divil a fut am I,” Fergus said, after brief reflection.

“ Musha then, if you must know, up last night I wàs at ould Tim Brady’s, he that married me mother’s sister, Rose O’Farrell, and that’s schamin’ to get married again ever since she got her death

this twelvemonth back. And his notion now is that nothin' 'ill suit him but Hugh Martin's daughter Norah, over at Clonrea, where yourself come from—Norah Martin, if you please, that was goin' to school along wid us all only the other day, and he keepin' the public there at home before I was born, and as grey as the dust on your brogues since ever I remember, and ownin' a couple of grown girls as ould as herself—set him up to be thinkin' of the likes of her."

"She might be thinkin' little enough of him?" suggested Fergus.

"You're the clever man, bedad. Isn't it what her father's thinkin' that makes the odds? And a fine fool he'd be, too, in my opinion, if he was in any hurry givin' herself and her fortune to ould Tim Brady. Not but what Tim's a comfortable man, and be hanged to him. He must have a dale saved by now. But I was tellin' you, when I was at his place last night, he tould me he was after sendin' word to Martin's that he would be drivin' over to them on the car, along wid ould John Flannery, match-makin'. Bedad, he had the face on him to tell me as bould as brass that he expected to be comin' back wid the weddin' settled for Easter. Says I to him he had a wonderful

consait of John Flannery then, for a go-between, and maybe he'd have better luck if he stopped at home himself—he wasn't best pleased. Howsome'er, I thought to meself if them two was hindered by any manner of manes of gettin' over to Clonrea this day, I might slip across the bog to Martin's meself, and put in a word for Norah and me father's son before they get anythin' fixed different. Ould Hugh's a dacint man, and if ever I got his hand-promise, he wouldn't go back on it, no matter who come after me. But don't be gabbin' about it, Fergus."

"Divil a much won't I," said Fergus. "And should you suppose the daughter 'd any liefer have yourself than Tim Brady?"

"Should I suppose? Goodness preserve us, man, has she eyes in her head? Och, I'm right enough, if that was all. But I'll want you to be keepin' a look-out for Tim's car comin' along this road. After ten o'clock they will be startin', and you might stop promiscuous somewheres not too far from Tim's place, till you see the car turned comin' home again, and then run and let me know. I'll be waitin' convenient, out of sight, for I'd sooner they didn't see me. And off I'll set straightways to Martin's."

“Well and good,” said Fergus. “It might be your best chance, if you have one at all.”

A couple of hours later, Alec, reclining under a furze-bush in a slight hollow, was aware of Fergus beckoning him from the grassy ridge close by. “They’re goin’ back now,” Fergus said. “If you step up here quick, you might get a glimpsst of them yonder roundin’ the corner.” Whereupon Alec, joining him hastily, just caught a somewhat distant view of a yellow car drawn swiftly by a white-faced, hog-maned, skewbald beast.

“Themselves it is,” Alec said. “There’s Tim’s ould aunt’s red handkerchief on this side ; he was bringin’ her, I know. They do be arguin’ wid her for not wearin’ a bonnet on her head to make herself look respectable, but sorra a bit she minds them. Faix, the little mare’s makin’ great goin’ of it, as plased as anythin’ belike to be trottin’ home that soon. Jig away, me hayroes ! So now I’ll take out wid meself over the bog, and try me luck.”

As he started, with nimble springs, along a tussocky track, Alec felt that his luck would probably be good. He had changed his working clothes for his best grey tweed suit ; he had combed and oiled his curly black hair, and had put on a new cloth cap, and a green tie with a golden harp

“AND IS IT YOURSELF, ALEC GOWRAN?”



and shamrocks. Hence, mainly, he had kept out of sight, not that he was at all dissatisfied with his appearance, but because he wished to avoid the neighbours' comments upon such elegance at a time when he ought by rights to have been busy putting down potatoes.

Alec's tramp of half-a-dozen miles gave him time to elaborate his plan with more care than he had bestowed upon it since it had suddenly darted into his mind overnight. He had already arranged that he would account for his call upon the Martins, with whom he was not upon intimate terms, by alleging a commission to inform them of the accident which had precluded Tim Brady's arrival. From that point, however, his imagination now set forth on a lively excursion, and before he reached the low, whitewashed farmhouse on its brown patch of ploughed land, he had added several suitable incidents to the story which he proposed to relate.

Hugh Martin himself was sitting with an afternoon pipe on a bench half in and half out at the front door, which seemed fortunate to Alec, as it offered an opportunity of leaving his message merely in passing, without making any further advances, if circumstances looked unpropitious. His courage was wavering slightly, yet he walked up

to Hugh with an air of confidence not wholly feigned. "And is it yourself, Alec Gowran?" said Hugh, who was a rather sailor-like elderly man with long grizzled whiskers. "Well now, it's late for the dinner you are. And I'd ha' thought if you was comin' at all, you'd ha' druv over wid the rest of them on the car."

"Sure, that's just what I come to tell you about," Alec began glibly. "There's a bit of a tree after fallin' across the road by Shanmaglesh, that me uncle, ould Tim Brady, says he couldn't get the car past at all at all. So he axed me to step over and bid you not to be expectin' him, or Flannery. He couldn't say what day now he might be able to come."

"And so you left him there at home, he bid you tell us?" said Hugh. "By the powers, that's as quare as anythin'."

"Tellin' you the truth," said Alec, "I was thinkin' the same meself. Because if his mind was anyways set on comin' over to yous, he might have contrived it somehow, tree or no."

"Is it axin' the baste to be leppin' it you'd have him, and she under the car?" said Hugh.

"Where's trampin' it over the bog the way some I could name done this day?" said Alec.

“ Bedad, did you ; and yourself’s the spruce lad that’s in it too,” Hugh said, eyeing him with a closeness that made him feel pleasantly conscious of his smart attire.

“ And double as far I’d walk and welcome for the chance of a sight of some I could name as well,” Alec said, with oracular gallantry. “ In course you must remember ould Tim Brady’s none so young as he was, poor man, to be skytin’ a dozen miles across the country. Norah’s father he might be, accordin’ to his age. Or, for the matter of that, you couldn’t be sartin but he may have some business at home he’s more particular about, so he made an excuse of the bough of the tree. I was thinkin’ I’d ax you did you ever hear any talk about him and the widow M’Evoy, she that has the farm beyond our place, Morrystown ways ? ”

“ What for would you be axin’ ? ” said Hugh.

“ Oh, just because people do be sayin’ he’s about makin’ a match wid her. She’s a dacint woman, not too young for him, and owns a very handy bit of land. But there’s more says it’s your daughter Norah he has some notion of—cock up the ould codger ! So I thought I had a right to mention it to you, in case he was just houldin’ on and off wid you till he’s made sure of the widow.

For that's no thing to be doin' on you, and he very belike keepin' away better men than himself from Norah."

"Them sort's plenty enough to be sure, sign's on it," said Hugh. "And so you left him at home coortin' the widow M'Evoy?"

"Ah now, Mr. Martin, that's your own story; I never said so," Alec protested complacently. "All I know is that the last I seen of him a while ago, himself and John Flannery was drivin' on the car facin' for her place. And you can make what you like of that."

Mr. Martin suddenly flung out a foot, and kicked open the door just across the narrow entry. "Tim Brady!" he shouted, "here's your nephew come over from Lisnacran wid the news that you and John are away coortin' the widow M'Evoy this minyit of time. So could you send him e'er a word how might you be gettin' along?"

Whereupon what seemed to Alec a large crowd of people plunged headforemost through the door with a promptitude which argued that they had been standing as close to it as possible. And the first to emerge were Tim Brady and John Flannery.

"Wasn't I listenin' to the young bosthoon?"

said Tim. "And what the mischief brought you trapesin after me wid a pack of impident lies?"

"I seen—I seen the car meself," Alec stammered, "drivin' back home."

"Aisy you might," said Hugh, "and for all that Mr. Brady, and his daughter, and Mr. Flannery's here this couple of hours. It happint as handy as anythin', for our car, drivin' over to Lisnacran, met wid theirs, just where both of them was stopped by raison of the tree blockin' the road. So what does they but shifts their loads, and turns about, wid the understandin' they'll meet there and shift back again this evenin'. So everybody's got to where they wanted, barrin' ould Mrs. Green, that was delicate about scramblin' round through the branches; and she went home on her car, and no harm done."

"Your horse has the worst of it," said John Flannery, "travellin' nigh three parts of the whole way."

"He's well able for it," said Hugh. "And a light load he'll have home, wid only the wife, and Norah, and the boy. But let me tell you, Alec Gowran, it's a fine fool you are to be gabbin' about Mr. Brady and the widow M'Evoy, when we're just after makin' up a match between him and me

daughter Maggie here. Noreen wasn't for him at all. 'Deed now she as good as said—no offence to you, Tim—when the letter come last night, that she'd as soon think of ould Crazy Christy, and that if there was any bother about it, off she'd go to her brother Jim in the States. But liefer than that, I'd let her have the poorest boy in the parish she might fancy, so long as he wouldn't be takin' her out of it. Howane'er Tim himself and Maggie were quite agreeable; and supposin' she is the youngest sister itself, what great matter? Norah might aisy be marryin' before her all the same. So then, to be out of the way, Norah and her mother said they'd drive over to Lisnacran this mornin', and go see some people we was friends wid, the time they lived near us. But, bedad now, young Gowran, you've riz a grand laugh agin yourself wid your romancin' about Tim and the widow. They've raison to be obliged to you. Come along inside, man, till we drink their healths."

From this invitation Alec turned to flee; but Hugh, who was jovial and excited, slammed the front door, and set his back against it; and though at the end of the passage, the back door, framing a view of Martin's green side-car, offered another way of escape, Alec did not attain to it without a violent

scuffle, which wrecked his fine scarf, and almost wrenched a sleeve from his new coat.

Thus dilapidated, and with derisive laughter echoing in his ears, Alec found himself alone on the bog, full of mortification and dismay. These feelings occupied him wholly for some time ; but as he dawdled among the heathery hillocks and shelving brown turf-banks, while the shadows stretched away eastward, his spirits began to recover. The situation might not be so desperate after all. He recollected how Norah was still free—a cardinal point—and how he now knew on the best authority that her choice would not be vetoed by her father. And if it really rested with her, it surely might well fall upon Alec Gowran. Not that he was by any means the poorest lad in the parish either. Who could tell but that one short interview with her might even now splendidly retrieve the humiliating blunders of this day ? The strongest chance of that lay, he thought, in intercepting her on her way home. Accordingly he made for the fallen tree.

And, sure enough, the first thing he saw there was the yellow car, with the white-faced, hog-maned skewbald browsing along the bank's grassy slope, on a convenient ledge of which sat Mrs. Hugh Martin. But who was that along with her except

Mrs. Doyle, the mother of Fergus? So it was they that the Martins were visiting. And where was Norah?

“Good evenin’ to you, Alec Gowran,” said Mrs. Martin; “we’re waitin’ here to meet our own car, Norah and me. There she is yonder, sittin’ on a branch of th’ ould tree wid Mrs. Doyle’s son.” Alec looked, and beheld Fergus, in holiday garb, eagerly discoursing to Norah Martin. “’Twould be a pity to disturb them,” Mrs. Martin continued, “for the fact is that they’re after comin’ to an understandin’ wid one another this very evenin’. Not but what her father and I have had a notion this while back of the way it might be. . . . Troth, he’s leppin’ away over the dykes like a grasshopper bewitched,” she added, as Alec suddenly withdrew.

“Quare and flustered he looked, as if he was drinkin’ or fightin’,” said Mrs. Doyle. “Now, my Fergus is as studdy as the stars in the sky; and terrible set on your Norah, ma’am, time out of mind. I give you me word, I thought the eyes ’ud start out of his head this mornin’, when he seen who it was that was drivin’ up to our door on Tim Brady’s car.”



JULIA'S BORROWING

ON a certain fine Sunday afternoon in spring, all the inhabitants of Letternafarragh were talking about a strange event which had occurred at that morning's Mass. This was nothing less than the reading out of Bernard O'Loughlin's name on the list of defaulters who had failed to pay their church dues. The occurrence thrilled the whole parish with a strong sensation, for never had such a thing been known to happen in the family of the O'Loughlins, who were not only devout but well-to-do. Mrs. Bernard, indeed, was considered quite a "votyeen," and stations had been held at their house. At ten o'clock Mass the congregation more than half doubted whether they had really heard

aright, until everybody confirmed everybody else's belief that what Father Donnelly had said was "Bernard O'Loughlin," and "one pound fifteen and sixpence"; and at eleven o'clock Mass many ears, eagerly cocked in anticipation, placed the matter altogether beyond dispute. Most people declared that it was "quare entirely"; but a few expressed the more unfriendly, if not less neighbourly, opinion that it would be "a fine take down for them O'Loughlins."

The O'Loughlins themselves were very painfully alive to all the talk which they did not hear with their ears. Upon them the announcement had fallen like a thunderbolt, taking them utterly by surprise for more reasons than one. And the worst of it was that the most important of these reasons family pride forbade them to make public. For it was the fact that they had all the while supposed the debt to be duly paid. Certainly last Friday the money had been entrusted to Bernard's youngest brother Larry, that on his way to Glastrim he might leave it at the Priest's house; but as certainly he had gone off without so doing.

Now, as horse-races had taken place on the Saturday in the neighbouring town of Athderry, and as Larry was well known to have strong sporting

propensities, his family at once surmised not merely that his professed intention of visiting their Glas-trim cousins had been just a pretext, but that he had furthermore feloniously misemployed, for the purpose of "putting on," the sovereign and silver confided to his charge. Of course the O'Loughlins would not communicate these suspicions of one of themselves to the neighbourhood at large. Only in his first wrath Bernard did mention them to his old friend and distant kinsman, Patrick Doherty of the small adjoining farmstead. Bernard spoke with much bitterness, vehemently declaring that they would soon send the young thief of the world about his business, if he offered to show his face there again the next day, and he after disgracing them all before the parish. "Sure the wife's cryin' the eyes out of her head this instant," quoth Bernard resentfully, "and says she can't so much as let the childer go to school any more, to be the laughin'-stock of all the rest. And as for me poor mother, she's ragin' wild." Though old Doherty suggested the possibility that they might find they were mistaken, and that Larry might have something to say for himself when he came back, Bernard took his departure firmly disbelieving in any such result.

Bernard's conviction was fully shared by Julia Doherty, old Patrick's daughter, who had been present at the interview. She had, in point of fact, stronger grounds than either of them for entertaining suspicions of the kind; because on Friday afternoon she had seen her brother Terence, bound for the Races, receive from Larry O'Loughlin a handful of coins, and had partly overheard a conversation about the backing of horses, whence it appeared that nobody with an atom of wit in his head would put a penny on any beast in creation except Teague Maher's Black Diamond for the Rochestown Cup. Terence had not yet come back, but the news that Black Diamond had been nowhere was already abroad in Letternafarragh, and had made it clear to Julia that Larry would return—if he did indeed return—on the morrow empty-handed, having won nothing wherewith to replace his forced loan, or to propitiate his relatives, so righteously indignant. This prospect caused her serious concern, as she and Larry had been friendly companions all the days of their lives, till latterly they had somehow seemed to drift somewhat apart. Therefore she considered the situation anxiously for a long while that night before she fell asleep.

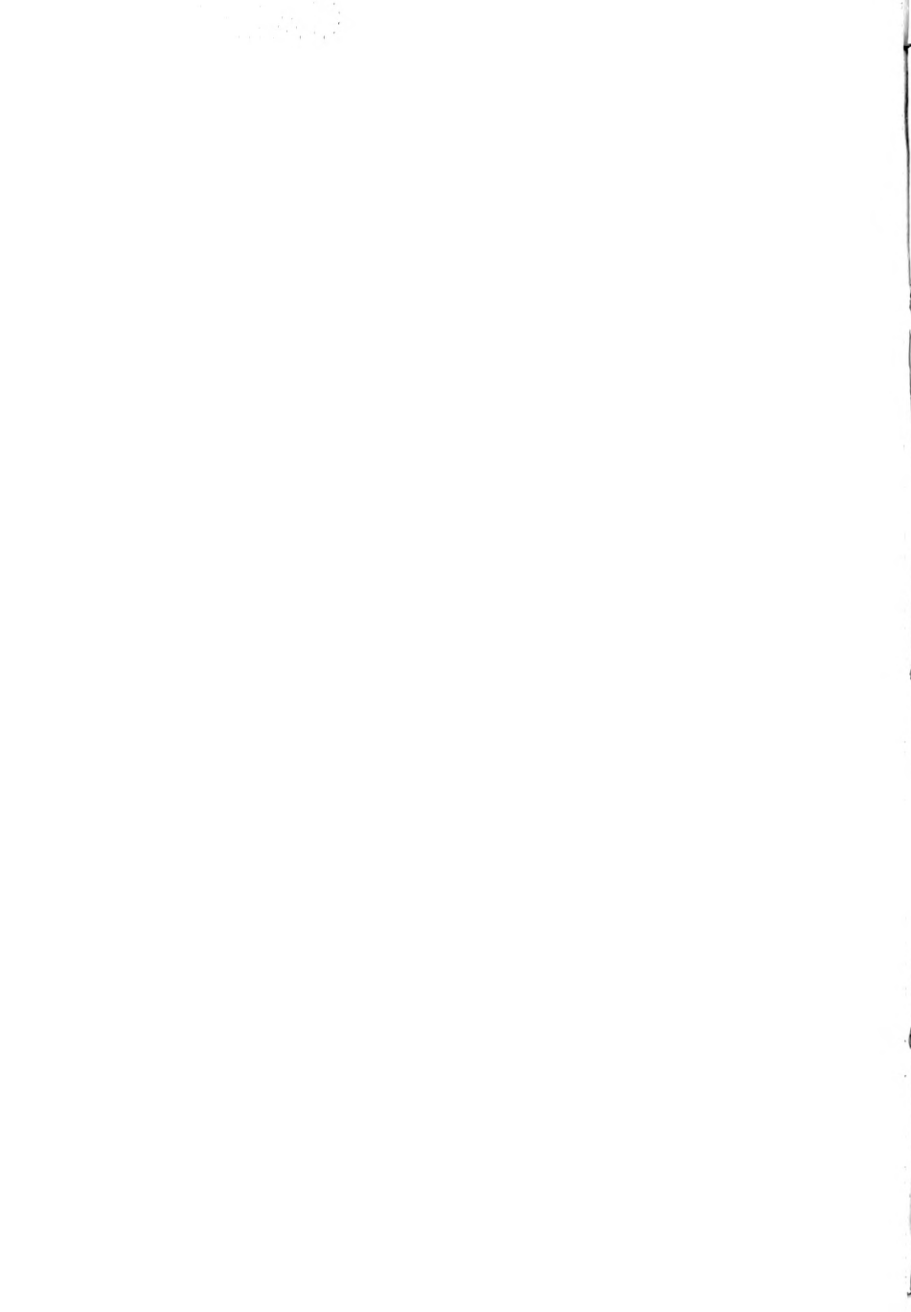
She rose early on Monday morning with a formed resolution on the subject. This was rendered practicable by the lucky circumstance that she had an account at the Post Office Savings Bank, small it is true, but well over two pounds, and therefore sufficient for her purpose. There were, however, she knew, some official formalities to be gone through before she could get actual possession of the amount she wanted; and it was necessary that she should have the money without any delay. So she had determined immediately to visit old Mary Walsh, who was mother's sister to her father. For the widow Walsh, as everybody knew, owned savings beside which Julia's were entirely insignificant, and had them, moreover, in her personal keeping, accessible to her at any moment of the day or night, if she just moved a loose stone in her kitchen floor. Occasionally it was pointed out to her that the hoard might be found one of these fine days equally accessible by other people in a way which would not please her; but her reply to such warnings never varied in substance: "Troth and bedad I'd be long sorry to go pay away me bit of money into e'er an ould consarn of a bank, and have nothin' to show for it at the heel of the hunt except a scrawm on a scrap of paper."

These crude financial views now proved very convenient to Julia Doherty, who was hoping that she might persuade her great-aunt to lend her the needful one pound fifteen and sixpence, just until she could draw that sum out of the Post Office at Letternafarragh. It would make a devastating hole in the little store which had grown so slowly out of her earnings by crochet-work and the sale of her two hens' eggs; but to her mind the importance of her object quite outweighed the heavy sacrifice. She only hoped that she might be enabled to make it while there was time.

What she had planned was to meet Larry O'Loughlin on his way home, and give him back the money with some story about her brother Terence bidding her return it, he having "by some manner of means" failed to put it on the horse. Then, she thought, Larry would be able to produce the sum, thereby clearing himself from at least the darkest suspicions of his family, and averting a quarrel, which might have disastrous consequences—might even end in his running off to goodness knows where, and never coming back from that terribly vague address. Albeit her plan involved some difficulties, and had some drawbacks upon which she did not like to dwell, they all seemed

JULIA GOES A-BORROWING





more endurable than a vision of Larry wandering away into exile, friendless and forlorn.

Julia found it by no means easy to negotiate the loan. Her great-aunt was mistrustful and reluctant, feeling herself to have been over-persuaded against her better judgment when she finally yielded on the promise of interest at the rate of sixpence a day. Even then she took an incredible time counting it out in small silver, and speculating about the piece of finery that Julia would be fool enough to spend it on. At last, however, the girl had it safely grasped in her impatient hand, and could be off. She hurried down the lane at the top of her speed, for her whole scheme hinged on intercepting Larry before he reached the stile at the cross-roads, where he would be sure to take a short cut home over the fields.

Herein fortune favoured her, as he and she arrived at the place almost simultaneously. "Luck it is," she said to herself; "it might maybe look square, if he seen me waitin' for him." And thereupon she wished Larry good-morning as unconcernedly as possible, adding as if the thought had just that moment struck her: "Oh, and before I disremimber it, here's the one pound fifteen and sixpence that Terence bid me give you, whenever

I happint to see you anywheres—he's gone away again himself for a couple of days. He never got a chance of backing Black Diamond after all, because—because—I don't rightly know why. But anyway he bid me give you back the money, and here it is."

The immediate consequence of this disingenuous speech was surprise both on her own and on Larry's part. For she had not in the least expected that he would stare at her perplexedly, and reply in unaffected amazement: "Whethen now, what talk at all have you about Black Diamond, and payin' back money, Julia Doherty? Sorra the brass bawbee was I after givin' Terence to put on any baste wid shoes on its feet: raison good, I hadn't e'er a one to me name."

"Sure now, that's as quare as anything," Julia said, much taken aback; "I thought 'twas yourself Terence said this belonged to; but belike I didn't rightly understand him. And I seen you givin' him the money on Friday."

"Och, that was only a few odd shillings I was owing him this long while," Larry said. Then with a perfectly genuine start of sudden recollection he thrust his hand into a pocket exclaiming: "By the same token, I niver remimbered to lave the

onvelope with his Riverence that they gave me and I settin' off. Murder alive! and he after writin' for it twyste. I never thought of it from that good day to this. You see me business over at Glastrim put it out of me head. I went there to try settle about takin' a share in Mick and Murt Daly's boat; for we do be too thick on the bit of land here, and a better chance I'd have at the fishing; so I've come to terms wid the two of them reasonable and fair enough. But thinkin' of that I disremimbered Father Donnelly cliver and clane; one pound fifteen and sixpence it was too, I mind, the same as yours there. Faix! I'm apt to find them all on their hind legs at home."

"You are so," said Julia, "and they read out at Mass yesterday."

Larry's low whistle expressed unspeakable dismay. "Whee-ee-ew! They'll be leppin' mad. Maybe the best thing I can do now is to be steppin' round by his Riverence's and lavin' it before I go home. That might pacify them a trifle, and they might think 'twas Father Donnelly himself overlooked it by some sort of an accident. They'll be plased to hear tell about the boat, if they're not all of them too cross altogether. So I'll trot off wid meself. Bedad, if it wasn't only for meetin' you,

Julia, divil a bit of me 'ud know where to have them, or what to be at wid them."

Watching him out of sight, Julia felt on the whole relieved. She was glad that she, like all the others, had made a mistake, and gladder still to have escaped betraying what her mistake had been. As to the boat, her feelings were more doubtful. Larry would be often away from home, and out on the treacherous sea. His poor mother was to be pitied for that prospect, Julia thought.

When she considered that he had had a safe start of her, she ran back up the lane towards Mary Walsh's house, being anxious promptly to restore her now no longer needed loan. Into the dusky kitchen she darted, and laid down the jingling silver on a dresser by the door.

"It's sorry I am to be after puttin' you to so much trouble, Aunt Mary," she said to the old woman, who was hanging up a cream-coloured delft jug on a hook, "but I've changed me mind about borryin' the one pound fifteen and sixpence, so here I've brought it back to you, and I'm much obligated all the same."

"Och, be aisy now and whist wid your obligations," Mrs. Walsh replied, in an angry whisper. "What call have you to come bawlin' about me

money before you don't know who? And Larry O'Loughlin all the time listenin' to you there behind the settle, that called in just a while ago for a drink of buttermilk."

"Larry O'Loughlin!" Julia repeated, in extreme consternation. "How could I be tellin' he was in it? I thought he was after goin' home. . . . He'll guess the way the whole thing is now for sartin-sure," she said to herself, and was turning to flee out again precipitately, but her great-aunt caught her by the shawl.

"Fine tearin' in and out you have," said old Mary Walsh. "Just stop a minyit, me lass, till I see is it all right." And Julia had to wait while the coins were clinked and counted with what seemed to her most unnecessary loudness and deliberation.

Her confusion was increased before the reckoning had ended, by the appearance of Larry's head, sure enough, over the high back of the settle. But she felt somewhat reassured when he proceeded to remark drowsily: "Well, ma'am, yourself's the terrific woman to be keepin' up such an ould clatterin' wid all them cups and saucers that a man can't scarce get to take a couple of winks of sleep in paice. Howane'er I must be steppin' along; and thank you kindly for the buttermilk." So saying,

he went out, blinking ostentatiously, and apparently unaware of Julia's presence.

That Larry O'Loughlin excelled Julia Doherty in acting a part there can be little doubt, and equally little that what he had overheard enabled him to put two and two together with much accuracy. How he was affected by his meditations on the motives of Julia's short loan may be inferred from the end of a talk which he had with her one day not at all long afterwards. He had been describing a recent business interview between himself and Father Donnelly.

"A trifle stiff he was, and unfriendly like, at the beginnin' ; so I up and tould him it might be no great while before he heard news of a match-makin' in a parish he knew somethin' of. And sure after that he got as plisant as anybody, at the notion of a weddin'-fee comin' his way."

"I dunno what took you to be tellin' his Riverence e'er such a story at all," protested Julia, "that day anyhow."

"Somethin' put it in me head," said Larry. "And sure if I got a middlin' good turn at the mackerl this saison, I don't see what would hinder us of biddin' him be axin' the two of us in Chapel agin Michaelmas."

“It’s the quare ridiculous talk you have, goodness may pity you,” Julia declared. But as she presently added reflectively, “His Riverence couldn’t be chargin’ us as much as if me father had got the name of ownin’ cows,” it is safe to conclude that the talk did not wholly displease her.

Julia had not yet, however, heard the last of her borrowing. A day or two after this conversation with Larry, word was brought to her that old Mary Walsh wanted to see her immediately. Mrs. Tuohy, the bearer of the message, reported that “the ould crathur seemed to be in a great taking about something, whatever it was”; so Julia set off that same afternoon. She found her great-aunt “as cross as a weasel,” and not in the least mollified by the promptitude with which her summons had been obeyed.

“Och then you’ve had the grace to be steppin’ up at last”—thus ran her greeting. “Ready enough you are to come bouncin’ in on a body, when it’s a loan of money you’re after; but mighty careful to not be showin’ your face next or nigh one, when it’s a matter of payin’ your debts.”

“What debts at all, Aunt Mary?” Julia asked, in some dismay.

“Wasn’t you owin’ me sixpence ever since last

Monday week, and this is Tuesday, for the interest on the money you borried off me ? ” said her great-aunt; “ and sorra the farthin’ of it am I after layin’ eyes on.”

“ Sure I kep’ it next to no time,” Julia urged ; “ I should suppose I had it in me hand scarce half-an-hour.” But her great-aunt rejoined vehemently : “ If ’twas only half a minyit, me fine lady, let me tell you there’s the sixpence due to me all the same.” And in the end Julia undertook to bring or send that sum early the next day, a promise with which she left her creditor but partially satisfied.

It was Larry O’Loughlin who conveyed the sixpence. He agreed cheerfully to do the errand, being amused at the old woman’s “ nearness,” and looking forward to a talk with her about Julia and himself, a subject which still had a charming novelty. But when, whistling blithely, he rounded the turn of the lane which brought Mary Walsh’s cottage into view, he found her outside it in a very distressful state. Hobbling to meet him, she accosted him distractedly : “ Och, Larry O’Loughlin, near losin’ me life I am. Some villin there is in it this instiant,” she said, pointing to her door, “ after me bit of savings.” Whereupon she breathlessly

explained how she had gone a few steps down the road for a bucket of water, and how fetching it home, she had "caught sight of something lurkin' and prowlin' in the corner behind the ould settle. The shadow movin' on the wall was as plain as anything, like a big lump of a man stoopin' over the floor, and feelin' about for the loose flag-stone. So down I dumped me bucket, and out wid me to try was there e'er a one to help me, but sorra the sowl I seen, Larry, till yourself comin' along."

"Sure it's the quare feelin' I'll larn him very presently," said Larry, pleasantly excited; and with that he went headforemost indoors. There, sure enough, he discovered something which was lurking and prowling, presumably with felonious intent, but which precipitately fled through the back-door, amid the volleyed splashes of an emptied water-bucket, and rushed up an elder-bush, where it sat dripping and swearing.

"Quit the thievin' vagabond is, and a big, black-lookin' baste of a brute too," Larry, emerging, informed Mrs. Walsh, who had waited quakingly on the road.

"Glory be!" she said; "but are you sartin he isn't hidin' about yet anywheres in the yard?"

"I'll take me oath he isn't, ma'am; howane'er

I'll just throw a look round to contint you," Larry said, falling in facetiously with her views.

When he returned with a reassuring report, he found that Mrs. Walsh had ventured indoors, and was sitting by the hearth with her green baize money-bag on her knee. "See me here, young Larry O'Loughlin," she said solemnly, "made up me mind is to be runnin' no more risks wid tramps. So tell me now, lad, would your father's house below in the Town be a safe place for keepin' anythin' valyable?"

"Safe enough it might be," said Larry, "but I heard tell ever that the Bank was the right place for keepin' money in."

"'Tis the wrong sort of right place then," said Mrs. Walsh, "wid iverybody's belongings mixed up through other, and no manner of satisfaction. I'd a dale liefer be trustin' it to you. Twenty-eight pound ten it is; plenty to bury me dacint twice over, if need was."

"Ah not at all, ma'am, this long while yet," Larry said politely.

"And the five pounds 'ud be yours," Mrs. Walsh said, holding out to him an unfolded bank-note.

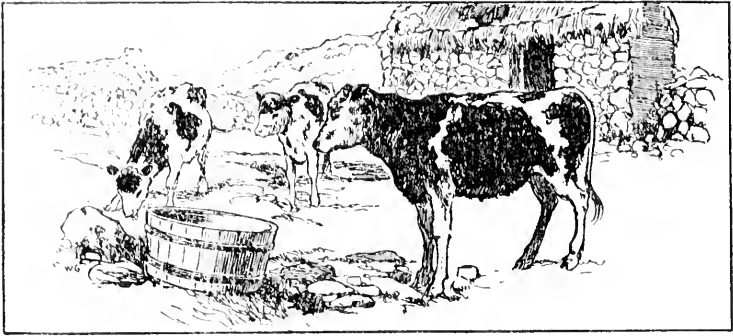
"What for, ma'am?" said Larry.

"For mindin' the rest of it," said Mrs. Walsh.

“ Ah, not at all, ma'am,” Larry said again ;
“ no pay I'd be axin'.”

“ Accordin' to my experience,” said Mrs. Walsh,
“ nothin' 's all you get for nothin' in this world ;
and if I wasn't payin' aught, believin' I wouldn't
be that anybody 'ud heed the money. So you may
take the whole of it or lave it.”

Larry did not feel justified in leaving such a
welcome enlargement of his ways and means ; and
thus it happened that he returned home richer by
four pounds nineteen shillings and sixpence than
he had started. Julia shared his joy at this op-
portune accession of wealth ; and they agreed that
though it seemed a queer thing to “ as good as pay
interest on lending a loan,” it certainly was for
them a most convenient kind of borrowing.



A STORM OF TERROR

JAMES DORAN of Glenort Farm was crippled by an accident, which had happened, he thought, just at the most crooked time it could contrive ; but this view is rather commonly held by the victims of accidents. Anyhow the straining of a tendon in his ankle prevented him from putting his foot to the ground, or from doing more than stump a step or so with great difficulty on two sticks against his doctor's advice. This state of things seemed particularly irksome to him one bright April morning, when he woke up earlier than usual. Unluckily he had forgotten to wind his watch, so that he could only guess the time with much impatient incorrectness. Long before there were any grounds

for the belief, he felt convinced that all the household had overslept themselves outrageously—and it market-day! Though he was at length somewhat appeased by sounds of stirring below, he soon got into a fidget again because neither of his sons appeared to lend him a hand with his toilet. He lay fuming and fretting for a while, and then scrambled into an adjacent chair, conscious that he had given his unchancy leg “a twist ’twould be none the better for.” In a gloomy mood he sat reflecting upon this, and the general state of his establishment, now left, as he was a daughterless widower, unsupervised by master or mistress. He had reached the fearful pitch of thinking it likely enough that nobody had fed the calves, when Sally Keogh, the maid, thrust her dishevelled head in at the door, and said: “Och, and are you up, sir? Sure then I’ll run and fetch you your breakfast.”

Sally reappeared speedily with a cup of very black tea, a dish of very fat bacon, and a plate of very thick bread and butter, which she arranged on the hollowy seat of another chair.

“What’s gone with the boys?” inquired her master querulously. “They haven’t been next or nigh me this morning.”

“I didn’t see a sign of them yet myself at all,”

said Sally, "but I mind Mr. Tom sayin' last night he was goin' out early to look after some snares he has set, I dunno rightly where. And a while ago Terry Maher noticed Mr. Atty goin' across the far end of Scott's meadow; runnin' as fast as he could pelt he was, and had the wood-chopper in his hand. Morebetoken he's got the key of the loft in his pocket, so not a grain of oats could they be fetchin' out for the mare, till they wrenched the ould padlock off of the door, and that's delayed them startin'."

"The young jackass!" said the farmer, enraged. "It's the sweet mess I'll be finding everything in when I'm out again, between you all."

"I declare now," said Sally, disinclined to pursue this subject, "I brought up ne'er a spoon. I'll run down for one this instant."

She sped off, but bounced back again immediately. "I see out of the lobby window," she said, "there's a strange man lyin' under the hedge at the stile into the paddock. Some tramp he looks to be; but I'm not sure it isn't Dark Mick, the blind fiddler. The coat he has on him might be an ould one Mr. Tom gave him the last time he was here."

"Just step out then," said her master, "and give him a bit of food, and send him about his

business, before he takes to throwing lighted matches around among my ricks as like as not."

Promptly Sally went, but soon returned with a crestfallen air of failure. "It isn't Mick he is after all," she said, "when I seen him from the front door; too black his hair is. Some stranger he's apt to be. Anyway he's fast asleep yet, and a quare sort of appearance there is on him, the way he's lyin'. You couldn't tell was he sober. I wouldn't be interferin' wid him meself; so lookin' for one of the lads I was to put him out of it, but they're all took up wid the load of straw. I suppose the poor man can be stoppin' where he is till they're done."

"Troth and he cannot," said James Doran. "Plenty of time they'd leave him to set the whole place in blazes about our ears. Go straight and bid Jack Moynihan or Pat Ryan see the fellow off the premises, before they do anything else good or bad. Run along, and let me hear no more talk about it."

Once again Sally obeyed the first part of the injunction, but the last clause was beyond her powers to carry out. He was fated to hear much more talk about it very soon. In fact he had only just given up indignantly expecting a spoon, and

had begun to stir his tea resentfully with the black bone handle of his fork, when a sudden commotion arose below. Shouts and shrill calls resounded both in and out of doors, and a rushing hither and thither accompanied the confusion of voices. Their tones expressed amazement and dismay, but the cause remained obscure, as the louder vociferations alone reached him distinctly, and these were merely bawls of "Jack," or "Pat," or "Judy," which threw no light upon the matter. Ignorantly listening, he conjectured that one of the cows might be choking herself with a turnip, or that the chestnut mare had fallen down under the cart—imagined disasters which made him rage at his own helplessness. The worst thing that could have happened him, he said to himself, was to be laid up in the middle of all the spring work.

At last, as if swept upstairs by the topmost wave of the swelling excitement, Sally Keogh came scurrying in, with eyes now wilder than her locks, and words that matched them well: "Och, sir—och to goodness! Och, saw you ever the like? Sure, sir, poor Mr. Tom it is lyin' there under the hedge all the while, and he kilt dead."

"Killed?" said James Doran, staring at her stupidly, "and what would kill him?"

THE STORM BEGINS



WILKINSON GIBBLE

“ Sure, ’twould kill an ox, they said, the terrible crack he’s after gettin’—the one side of his head all stove in ; so Jack Moynihan was tellin’ me, for I’d be long sorry to look at the like meself,” said Sally.

“ Get the doctor to him,” James Doran said hoarsely. “ Get Dr. Byrne.”

“ Pat Ryan’s run off for him and Father Magill ; and Peter Hannay was about fetchin’ the police, only *I* bid him not to yet a while,” Sally said, with a sort of frantic self-importance. “ For says I to him, if it was poor Mr. Atty had the misfortune to be after doin’ murder on him, it might be by some manner of accident partly ; and anyway, we had a right, says I, to let him have a chance of gettin’ off wid himself out of this.”

“ What the mischief is the woman raving about ? ” said James Doran.

“ Is it ravin’ ? ” said Sally. “ How ravin’ I am, bedad, and meself the only one that had the wit to hinder them of leggin’ off hot-foot to the barracks wid the news, and gettin’ Mr. Atty hung very belike, the way you’d be at the loss of the both of them, instead of only poor Mr. Tom—Heaven be his bed this woeful day ! For if once the police had a hold of the story, ’twould be as good as the rope round his neck, after Judy Molloy

that's a great one to gab, seein' the two of them in hand-grips this very mornin,' let alone young Maher meetin' Mr. Atty in the field, runnin' for his life, and the hatchet he done it wid on him. Och, poor Mr. Tom, the crathur. 'Twould be happenin' just when I was about wettin' the tay, for they say he's warm yet."

"Go bid some of them come up to me," her master commanded with so desperate a calm that Sally vanished on the spot.

When she had gone, he tried to get on his feet, but failed in tremulous dizziness. All the world seemed swaying and tottering around him. A huge chasm had opened between him and the time, a few minutes ago, when he had been concerning himself so deeply about possible mishaps to cows and horses and carts. But he was looking back into a period much more remote as he said half aloud: "Fine and set up we were with the pair of them in those days; and all the while we ought to have christened them Cain and Abel, if we had but known." He repeated "Cain and Abel" more than once, as if it were a joke of which he could not clearly see the point.

Presently, however, his meditations were interrupted, for Sally Keogh came darting in, pushing

before her the youth Terry Maher, who seemed reluctant and abashed.

“Spake up this minute, and tell the master where you seen Mr. Atty just now, and the way he was,” Sally exhorted him; and Terry related his little story, gathering confidence as he proceeded: “In Scott’s meadow I was a while ago, comin’ to me work. And who should I see runnin’ across it but Mr. Atty himself? Racin’ he was like a mail-train, and the look of him would terrify you: as white as that sheet he was, wid his two eyes starin’ out of his head”—Terry rolled his own eyes portentously—“and no cap on him. ’Twas over the cap they started fightin’. Judy heard him axin’ Mr. Tom where it was directly before they settled to box.”

“And the hatchet,” prompted Sally.

“And the hatchet he had in his hand,” said Terry. “I noticed the blade shinin’ and it swingin’ agin the sun. But I was scarce near enough to tell for sure was the wisp of hair on the edge of it the very colour of Mr. Tom’s. I wouldn’t swear to it at all events.”

“I wonder he hadn’t the sense to be slingin’ it in the first ditch he passed,” said Sally, “but maybe he thought to take it a bit further away from the place.”

“Hidin’ it under his coat he was very precautionous like,” said Terry—“once he seen me, that is.”

At this moment Judy’s voice shrilled up the steep stairs: “His Reverence is comin’ along through the paddock.” Whereupon Sally and Terry clattered down headforemost to witness the next scene in the tragedy.

James Doran did not know how long he was left there alone. Time hardly counts in the kind of chaos which had suddenly overwhelmed his world. He was sitting in stark despair, with an unseeing gaze fixed on the fleecy cloudlets that drifted across the handsbreadth space above the cowhouse roof, and was muttering to himself, “She’s well out of it all, anyway,” when in walked their son Atty, bareheaded, sure enough, and hatchet in hand, but quite cheerful, until he espied his father, upon which he exclaimed with some concern: “Why, dad, are you up? I wasn’t intending to be so late, but I just ran out to knock a couple of staples in the gate-post at the end of the cow-lane, that you were talking about, and several things delayed me. I couldn’t find my cap high or low; and then Tom and I sparred a bit in the cart-shed, and that kept me too. And this old chopper was

the only tool we could get hold of, and not very handy for what I wanted. And when I got back, Tom was after catching his foot in a wire, jumping off the stile, and giving his head a bang that knocked him stupid for a few minutes, and the rest were all of the opinion he was killed. Such a whillaloo I landed in on! I give you my word they've got Father Magill, not content with the doctor. But Tom presently came round as right as a trivet, and Dr. Byrne says there's not a ha'porth amiss with him. They'll be stepping up to see you directly. The worst of it is that they have the cart, what with one thing and another, so late setting off for the market."

"Sure, what matter for that at all?" his father said blandly. "They'll be there soon enough, no fear. And it's a grand job to have the gate-post fixed. I'll be stepping round to look at it myself one of these days before so very long."

"Well," said Atty, surprised and pleased at this unwonted optimism, "I'd better go down and see to his Reverence and the doctor's breakfast, and I'll be glad of some myself. I left Tom devouring away like a Trojan—and he killed, you know. Have you got anything there, dad? or will I bring you a bit more?"

“Oh, I’ve plenty, plenty, first-rate,” said his father. “Go along and get your own, before Tom, the young ruffian, has it all ate on you.”

When he was alone again, he took up his knife and fork, and began to use them without the least thought of what he was doing with them. His cup had slidden into a hollow of the unlevel chair, and had spilt part of its contents into the dish of bacon. The lukewarm tea and greasy rashers made a detestable mixture, but he consumed it contentedly. At that moment there was probably no happier person in the county Wexford than James Doran, though he was merely a crippled elderly farmer, carelessly partaking, in his dingy little room, of a far from luxurious meal. For at the same time—perhaps it may be as foretaste of some hidden future that such experiences possess their somewhat mysterious charm—he was enjoying a sudden deliverance from the stress of a storm fierce with the torment of terror.



AND NO THANKS TO THEM

AFTER the auction at old Peter-Paul M'Elroy's, enmity prevailed between the houses of Dockrell and Walsh. It was not a declared feud, for they still remained on speaking terms, but a kind of smouldering ill-will, which might at any moment blaze up into open war. The cause of it was that field of old Peter-Paul's, which projected wedge-like between the Dockrells' and Walshes' holdings. A rather stony and swampy tongue of land it was, abounding in furze-shagged hillocks and rush-fledged hollows, but near the tip of it lay a small pond, and this made it desirable in its neighbours' eyes, because both of them were badly off for means of watering their cattle. Old Peter-Paul, who was

“just a quare ould oddity,” had possessed it for nearer seventy years than sixty, and in all that time had made no use of it whatever, so that man nor beast had been the better for it within anybody’s recollection. Accordingly, when this state of affairs ended with its owner’s life, the chance of acquiring field and pond was eagerly anticipated. But on the very morning of the auction, what did Fergus Dockrell do but go behind everybody’s backs and make a private treaty for that field with James Sullivan, Peter-Paul M’Elroy’s heir? All the parish were of the opinion that the proceeding was a mean trick, inexcusable except on the principle which admits such sharp practice to be almost more natural in the buying and selling of land than of horses. However, it was only natural, too, on the part of the forestalled Murtagh Walsh that he should be disinclined to accept even this dubious apology for his successful rival. And the latter was, of course, bound, in self-defence, to think as badly as possible of the man whom he had outwitted; hence arose tightly-strained relations between the two families.

The Dockrell household consisted of elderly Fergus himself, with his wife, and their son, Sylvester. Murtagh Walsh was a widower, and for

him his unmarried sister and daughter, Kate and Teresa, were keeping house. A few workpeople also on either farm adopted, with more or less zeal, the views of their respective employers. Teresa Walsh, however, was certainly angrier than anybody else about the transaction. Her father's wrath was chiefly concentrated on "th' ould schemer" Fergus; her aunt's burned with the mildness appropriate to a pacific temper; but Teresa's indignation knew no bounds, and engulfed the Dockrells and all their belongings, from the guilty owner himself down to his innocent little chickens, which she now shooed away furiously if they trespassed in from an adjoining field. As for the son, Sylvester, "she wouldn't look the side of the road he was." Indeed, the first time she met him after the sale, her chin went up so high in the air as he passed that her new hat all but slid off backwards, and a gust of wind took the opportunity to whisk it away outright. When he handed it to her, you might have judged by her mien that it had just dropped down from the distant clouds, to which no one would think of saying "Thank you."

Murtagh Walsh did not so soon find an occasion for effectively demonstrating his sentiments. To

toss his head with scorn, or pretend that he saw and heard nobody, could never have relieved his feelings about the case by any manner of means. But every morning when he superintended the troublesome filling of his beasts' drinking-troughs, he would glower resentfully in the direction of the coveted pool, grimly saying : " I'll get a hold of it yet, before I'm done. Bedad will I, and no thanks to them." He emphasised the " and no thanks to them," as if he meant to express something more than merely the absence of gratitude.

The pond-field was separated from the Walshes' land by a tall swarded bank, higher on their side than on the other, their level being slightly lower, at the foot of a slope. Therefore, the pond was not visible to them, unless they climbed up, which none of the Walshes, assuredly, would demean themselves to do, now that it had become the ill-gotten property of " them Dockrells." Some of their retainers, however, had less dignity to stand on. Mick Crowe, the herd-boy, for instance, beguiled many a tedious moment by surveying the enemies' territory from the broad top of the bank, and though he dared not lay a report of his observations directly before his master, the less formidable Miss Kate heard it with interest, nor did

she keep it to herself, let her brother and her niece appear to be as deaf as they pleased.

In this way they were kept well posted up about anything that happened near the pond, and before long a rather curious circumstance came to their knowledge. It was hot summer weather, so dry that most people's water supplies were dwindling, and barrels and buckets might be seen on the road to and from the shrunken Rafirthy River. Everybody knew that until the time of the M'Elroy auction the Dockrells had to send half a mile for all their cattle's water; consequently it seemed more than a little strange that, after they had enjoyed the advantages of the pond for a week or so, not one of their beasts should be seen coming next or nigh the place again. Yet Mick confidently asserted this to be the case, and he was corroborated by Pat Doran, the ploughman, and Biddy Maguire, a gatherer of stones. Kate Walsh suggested that perhaps there was something amiss with the pond-water, which would certainly be a very appropriate "judgment on them after the mean way they had carried on over it." But that did not seem a likely explanation, especially as pailfuls were sometimes observed to be fetched up the sloping field. Besides that, Murtagh Walsh

would not have cared to be thus summarily and arbitrarily deprived of his grievance, as well as of his hopes of somehow redressing it for himself. So his view was : “ Musha, not at all. What would ail the water except that it’s a dale too good for them, or the likes of them ? But just let me fine gentleman wait ; I might have it yet, and no thanks to him.”

Then, while the drought still continued, the Walshes received a more important piece of intelligence about the Dockrells, namely, that one of their best young beasts had mysteriously disappeared—a yearling shorthorn, in which Fergus Dockrell had taken a particular pride. There was no doubting the fact ; the animal had gone, though how or whither remained an unanswered question. They were said to be “ as black and secret as night about it up at Dockrells’.” Nobody had seen a sign of the creature, sick or sound, alive or dead. Certainly, Harrison, the vet., had not been called in to it ; and more certainly, if possible, it had not been sold, as Hughy Keegan, the yard-man up there, had the face to let on to Biddy Maguire. Sold, bedad ! Murtagh Walsh was well aware that old Fergus knew his business a great deal better than to lose a matter of six or seven pound by selling it on

that day of the year. A much likelier story—in fact it presently became an article of firm belief with Murtagh—was that the beast had been attacked by one of those fatal, new-fashioned diseases, which a cattle-owner is required to notify to the authorities, who will thereupon probably slaughter all the rest of his stock, and that to avoid these destructive consequences the Dockrells had buried it in hugger-mugger, illegally unbeknownst, and were hushing the matter up. For doing so, Murtagh thought that they might get into very serious trouble, if their conduct came to light ; and Teresa, hearing him make the remark, declared herself to wish from the bottom of her heart that such a thing would befall them.

Her ill-will towards the Dockrells was not a whit diminished one morning soon afterwards, when she went on an errand into the fields. The spell of dry weather had been broken by a night rustling and murmuring with rain, that had drenched the countryside very thoroughly before the clouds rolled away at dawn. Now in the shine of the sun it was all green and glistening. Teresa's business was to tether one of the cows, whose tastes would otherwise lead her to graze with fastidious gluttony on nothing but the richest clover-clumps. A long

rope and tethering-pin, wherewith to restrict this imprudent feeder, hung over Teresa's arm as she crossed the warm pasture-land, somewhat concerned to keep the wet grass from touching her freshly made-up skirt of pale-blue linen, which gleamed into white beneath the strong rays. But they glowed so fiercely on her bare head that when she came into the field adjoining the pond, she chose to walk along under the shadow of the boundary bank, notwithstanding the greater dampness that lurked there, and the tall weeds that sprinkled her with large clear drops. As she brushed past them impatiently, she thought how, if her father had got the pond-field, he might have put the troublesome Cherry into it, the grass being so poor that the greediest cow could hardly over-eat herself there. This reflection did not assuage the bitterness of Teresa's feeling about the Dockrells, only for whom there might now have been no need for anybody to get her clean skirt all destroyed, streeling it through the wet pastures.

Suddenly a loud shout sounded on the other side of the bank, evidently quite close by. Coming from that quarter, if it had been any ordinary kind of call, she would have turned "a bothered ear" to it, and taken no notice of it whatsoever. But

there was a ring of such wild desperation in this cry that, without pausing to consider, she scrambled up the bank, and looked down into the field. At only a few yards distance lay the pond, full of blue sky and white cloudlets, and at first sight that was all she saw. In a moment, however, she perceived that at one corner of it, where rushes grew high and thick, a sort of commotion was going on. Through the weedy fringe she caught glimpses of the head and shoulders of somebody, who seemed to be struggling violently in the water, ever and anon heaving himself up a little higher, and uttering a frantic shout as he fell back again. And the voice was Sylvester Dockrell's.

Teresa Walsh jumped down and ran towards the pond, but speedily found herself getting bogged in a deceptive swarded swamp, which threatened to pull off her shoes at every step; while Sylvester, seeing her, shouted still more wildly: "Keep out of it! Don't you be comin' any nearer. Keep back for your life, Terry Walsh! Let me be, and run and call somebody—but run away wid yourself, whatever you do. . . . I'm all right here, I tell you," he added, in a breathless bawl.

Luckily Teresa had sufficient presence of mind to use her own judgment about obeying these

injunctions. She did keep out of the quagmire, but she did not run away. Thrusting the long spike of the tethering-pin as far as it would go into tolerably solid soil, she flung one end of its rope, with steady aim, to Sylvester, who got a good grip, and whom she was thus able to help by pulling thereon with all her not insignificant strength. It was a doubtful and dangerous struggle; and not until after much hauling and floundering did it end in the restoration of Sylvester Dockrell to a firm footing once more on the surface of the earth.

Seldom can it have borne two muddier persons than they were, as they stood together in the brilliant July sunshine. For Sylvester was clad from head to foot in black peaty mire, and Teresa had been abundantly bespattered with the same.

“Glory be to God that you’re out of it, anyway,” she said, panting. “But how, in the name of fortune, are you after gettin’ into it? And what sort of an ould hole is it at all?”

Sylvester gasped and shivered as he replied: “Sure now, very belike I wasn’t rightly mindin’ what I was doin’, and that might be the way it happint. But as for the sort it is, it’s the blackest ould divil of a murtherin’ mud-hole in the width of Ireland. Bad luck to it! If it wasn’t only for

yourself comin' along, swallied up it had me now the very same as our misfort'nit crathur of a calf."

"Oh! so that's where the red shorthorn went to!" Teresa exclaimed, with interest. "And all of us wonderin' what was gone wid it."

"There now, let it out I have," Sylvester said, his disconcerted expression not wholly obscured by a many-barred visor of mud. "But sure I daresay you won't be talkin', Teresa. We weren't wishful to let on about it, in case any person might be risin' the laugh agin us and the grand new waterin'-place we'd got for to drownd our bastes in handy—that's what they'd say, like enough. And they wid no more notion there was e'er such a thing in it all the while than we had ourselves."

"People that are in a great hurry entirely to be buyin' land behind other people's backs do be very apt to find quare things on it, I shouldn't wonder," quoth Teresa pointedly. Perhaps she could hardly have been expected not to take advantage of the opening he had given her. Having thrown her dart at him she turned away, and began to tug at the tethering-pin.

Sylvester stood watching her ruefully. His aspect was both pitiable and absurd, as the murky ooze dripped from the garments which had so

nearly dragged him to muddy death. A few white streaks still showed in his shirt-sleeves, like the borders of a magpie's wing ; otherwise he gloomily blotted the brightness.

“’Deed then, Teresa Walsh,” he said, “well enough I know your father does be thinkin’ bad of my father gettin’ beforehand wid him in relation to this bit of a field that’s full up of stones an’ furzes, if there was nothin’ worse in it. But bedad now, the poor man was intendin’ no harm. And at all events, I meself had neither hand nor part in the matter, nor wouldn’t ; that’s the truth I’m tellin’ you. So no call *you* have to be thinkin’ bad of me, and lookin’ as if it was some descripshin of a little weasel or rat you seen runnin’ alongside the road, and we goin’ to Mass or market, and ne’er a human crathur at all.”

But Teresa did not turn round in response to this appeal, and with averted head she continued to pull at the tightly-fixed spike, as though she had not heard a word. There was a short silence, and then Sylvester resumed in a tone of extreme bitterness—

“Aye, that’s the way it is wid you. And, by the same token, Teresa, if plannin’ you are to be cross wid me ever, I’d as lief you’d let me go to the

bottom there, body and bones, and no more talk about it.”

At this Teresa hastily rose to her feet, and faced him with indignation. “May God forgive you, Syl Dockrell, for sayin’ such a thing. You that had a right to be givin’ praises to the great Goodness that it’s standin’ on firm land you are this minyit, and not lyin’ down yonder choked under the black water. Keepin’ whist you’d better be than tellin’ thankless untruths.”

The light and warmth of the clear blue and green world around them seemed to justify and emphasise this rebuke. As Sylvester made no reply to it, but apparently acquiesced in a woe-begone way, she naturally shifted her point of view. To be sure, the grounds of his dejection made it not altogether inexcusable.

“Not but what there’s some would be long sorry of any such a thing happenin’ you,” she went on. “And as for lookin’ cross at you, sure we can be talkin’ handier about all that another time, when you’re not dreepled through wid wet, and takin’ your death of cold every instant you stop here delayin’, instead of runnin’ home to get dried. Weasels and rats, bedad! Musha, man alive, anybody’d be a dale liker to take you for an ould

scarecrow that they were after stealin' out of wherever it was threw away in the corner of some ditch, and makin' a shift to stick it up again."

All the traces of his mud-bath did not suffice to mask the joy which lit up Sylvester's countenance at these signs of relenting. He showed, however, no more disposition to be warned into running away than Teresa herself had done a short while before. "Ah, what matter for a trifle of wet?" he said. "Ne'er a bit of harm's done, if it wasn't only for dragglin' your skirt. But there was just one thing I was wishful to tell you about—a plan I have in me mind consarnin' this ould pond, the way it wouldn't be givin' us any more bother."

"Wid drowndin' yourselves or your bastes, is it?" inquired Teresa.

"Och, no, but wid makin' mischief between the whole of us, that does be worser a dale," said Sylvester. "Doesn't it now, Teresa—jewel?" he added tentatively.

"'Twill be the quare plan if it hinders that," Teresa said, letting the term of endearment pass without protest. "Leppin' over it me father is, I can tell you, and small blame to him. Never a day comes but he's passin' the remark that he'll

get a hold of it yet, and no thanks to the pack of yous."

"And that's the very thing I was thinkin' we might conthrive," said Sylvester. "For the pond was what he'd his heart set on, by raison of the cattle. Many a time I heard him say 'twas all this field is much good for."

"He does be sayin' so, sure enough, and that 'twould graze a rael grand herd of skeletons. But supposin' he does itself? Here's the pond, and yonder's ourselves at home on the wrong side of the fence from it, and apt to stay there; unless our bastes are to be whirlin' themselves over it to get a drink, like a flock of sparrows whizzin' across a hedge. Morebetoken, Cherry, the strawberry cow's down below there all this while, killin' herself as likely as not in the wet clover. I must go along and get her tethered."

"Just wait, Teresa asthore, till I tell you," said Sylvester. "D'ye see the iligant hollow over there in your field forenent us at the foot of the little slope? The very shape it is for a pond, like as if it was scooped out of a purpose; and I do be noticin' a sup of water lyin' in it now and again, when the weather's soft."

"Well?" said Teresa. "I see it right enough.

But I don't see what use there is in the shape of a pond on a body's land, any more than if it was an empty egg-shell."

"But look you at the handy fall of the ground there is down to it out of this. If anybody took and clapped a couple of linths of a drain-pipe in between the two of them—the full one and the empty one—more than a few minyits it wouldn't be," Sylvester said, "before there was ne'er a drop left up here in the pond—not as much as swimmin' for a tadpole—nor yet a taste of dryness below in your hollow, and it filled up into a pool of standin' water, as convenient as you please. And what's to hinder your father of doin' it?"

Teresa looked from the pond to the hollow, as if trying to imagine the effect of such a transfer. Then she said: "And what's to hinder *your* father of havin' the law of him for interferin' wid the water out of your ould pond, and drawin' it away?"

"Sorra a fear of that is there, Teresa Walsh," Sylvester affirmed solemnly. "You may take my word for it, he need be under no apprehinsion of any such a thing. Sure, to begin wid, me father might niver know what was gone wid the water. An aisy job it 'ud be to get the bit of a pipe laid down some fine dark night, and nobody the wiser

next mornin' that there was e'er a conthraction of the sort in the place. It might go dry of itself."

"Aye, to be sure, or your father might go foolish in his mind, too," said Teresa.

"It's no lie I'm tellin' you, Teresa; ne'er a word would there be let on about it, in any case, good or bad. Frettin' he is this while back, poor man, over the notion of Murtagh Walsh bein' annoyed wid him, and the Walshes and the Dockrells very friendly ever in the ould times. Moreover, the fact of the matter is," Sylvester said, "that the pond would be nothin' to him. In-tindin' to put sheep in the field he was, and this place is too boggy and dangersome for them entirely. Drowndin' themselves in dozens they'd be, if we offered to go wash them in it, not to spake of the ugly divil of a black mud-hole, that's a terror to man and mortal. All we can do wid it is to fence it off safe, the way it won't be the death of anybody else. . . . Musha, good gracious, Teresa jewel! it's very near losin' me life I was that time, only for you comin' along. Takin' a couple of steps backwards I was to get a clear view of the hollow, and fast it had me before I knew aught. Rael threacherous it is. We might thry slingin' a few cartloads of stones down it, to fill it up, if

there's e'er a bottom to it at all ; but I question is there. Me own opinion is that there does be a spring under it, and by raison of that it niver goes dry. Troth now, it's as fine a drinkin'-place as his heart could wish that your father 'll prisently have, if he'll be said by me. And then you and I'd have a good chance of everythin' else bein' made up dacint and agreeable."

Upon the prospect thus eloquently recommended Teresa reflected for a while in silence, and at last she said : " If I could get him persuaded anyway that it was a plan of his own, he might thry it ready enough. No love or likin' he has for to be takin' other people's advice. And if he thought he had the water, and no thanks to anybody, I wouldn't wonder if he made it up wid your father ; but sorra a bit will he as long as he's under the belief he was got the better of ; that's sartin. Sure, at all events, I'll do me endeavours."

Teresa's endeavours were done with discretion and crowned with success. Her father was skilfully led to imagine himself the author of a scheme for conveying the contents of the coveted pond by secret sluice from his neighbour's land to his own ; and one moonless August night saw the enterprise triumphantly carried out. From the Dockrells'

side of the bank came never a sign that they had at all perceived the abrupt shrinking away of their pool, and the simultaneous appearance of another gleaming hard by in the Walshes' grass. But through many a following year Murtagh Walsh found it an unfailing source of especial pride and pleasure. Though his relations with Fergus Dockrell soon became once more quite amicable, he was still wont to repeat with undiminished complacency, as he surveyed its placid mirror: "Aye, bedad, and no thanks to them." A view of the matter in which his daughter Teresa, now Mrs. Sylvester Dockrell, took care that he should continue undisturbed.



MICHAEL THE MEDITATOR

MICHAEL CLOHISKEY began his meditations, as most people do, at a very early age. Be it observed that by meditations here are meant chiefly speculative musings upon large impersonal subjects, such as would seem appropriately to occupy the philosophic mind. This mind, according to the poet, is brought us by the years ; but, if so, it is as an act of rare restitution rather than as a gift, since it was ours at the outset. In fact, however, it probably remains with us all along, though in abeyance, being merely thrust into the background by the urgent trivialities that crowd to the front as life advances. Later on, when the throng of these slackens and dwindles, the original disposition to

be concerned about matters of wider scope may once more manifest itself. We must have all noticed the proneness of the extremely young to ask questions which the most self-confident gnostic can hardly answer off-hand. *Where was everything before there was anything? What made nothing? Can time stop like a clock?* Simple ontological queries of this kind are often indeed discouraged by evasive or priggish replies; but the tendency to put them, or at least ponder on them, is more effectually counteracted by the examination to which the child presently finds himself in his turn subjected, and that not by any means in a scholastic sense alone. *What does D-O-G spell? How much is twice four?* and the like, are but items in a shorter catechism. Another one, indefinitely longer, runs on through and beyond his school-days, propounding more personal and more heterogeneous questions, which grow progressively harder to answer successfully, while the consequences of failure seem far more serious than merely the unsatisfied curiosity resulting from his baffled first attempts to grapple with the fundamental mysteries of existence.

But at last, as a rule, there comes a time when the child's age-worn son has no longer occasion to

occupy himself much with those practical problems, and finds leisure, perhaps thrust upon him, to resume his earliest studies, if he will. He is not always disposed to do so. Sometimes in the course of his experiences he has lost his capacity for anything except business matters, and as his own active part in them grows less, he diverts himself by contemplating his neighbours' affairs from a gossip's point of view, without any profound speculations about How and Why. Sometimes he has waxed apathetic, and fixing a blank gaze upon nothing in particular, solaces himself possibly with tobacco, but certainly not with philosophy. Still the fact remains that there is not uncommonly a return to the meditative mood, and that when old people sit by the hearth, or lounge in sheltered corners out of doors, the chances are in favour of its rather frequent recurrence.

As for Michael Clohiskey, at no period of his life was his habit of high thinking wholly intermitted, though it did not escape some of the usual interruptions. Among the first of these was his schooling, which consisted largely of learning by heart incomprehensible arithmetical and grammatical rules. Reading and writing, it is true, he also acquired, but as he had nothing practically to

write or read, and no prospect of ever having anything, the accomplishment seemed to him just a part of the inscrutable plan by which his elders saw fit to make his life unnecessarily difficult and irksome. His school-days, however, were only brief, for on his father's early death he went to live with a grandmother, who thought him more profitably employed in scaring crows at a shilling a week, although she did complain that his "bits of wages were ready to go on him ag'in he had them earned, what with his little shirts and shoes and such."

Crow-scaring Michael found much more compatible with meditation than committing lessons to memory had been; he could shout and throw stones without thinking about it at all, and his mind was generally occupied by some entirely irrelevant subject. When in process of time he was promoted to other sorts of farm-work, these tasks could often be done in the same automatic way, leaving his thoughts a very elastic tether. Probably he let them range with excessive disregard for the matter in hand; at any rate his reputation as a labourer never stood high, and his employers not seldom spoke of, and to, him as "a quare wool-gathering gomerall."

That character of his had been fairly well

established, as he was a year or so over twenty, when his meditations were again disturbed, this time by—to write large—political events. The local branch of a secret society had felt that stirring of sap, which a while later on put forth leaves, soon blighted, in the shape of the Fenian movement ; and Michael Clohiskey was among those whom something spring-like in the air set dreaming so vividly that they could not refrain from endeavours, however futile and fantastic, to realise their patriotic visions. Yet the enterprise could less be said actually to have obstructed the flow of his musings than to have given them for a time a different and more definite channel. For though he took his due part in illegal drilling and amassing of fire-arms, it was as a maker of songs that he won some distinction among his comrades. They had been at first disposed to consider his adhesion a doubtful benefit. “ Nobody could tell what trouble the great gaby might land them in, and he moonin’ about half the time the way it would be even chances if he knew whether he was talkin’ to a peeler or a priest.” The gift revealed itself suddenly and spontaneously, his earliest lyrics being almost improvisations ; and having once begun, he continued with eager thought to compose his Tyrtaean lays, which he would fain

have sung too, had not nature denied him any adequate voice. It was his cousin, Terence M'Cormac, big and burly, who trolled them out in a sonorous barytone to favourite old airs ; and the author, listening with large bright eyes, like a wistful terrier, had to be content with a modest share of the applause. Michael did not, it is true, in the least grudge Terence his ampler portion, and notwithstanding that he would have liked better to be singing himself, he liked right well to form one of the audience. Perhaps life brought him no happier moments.

These rebel days, however, came swiftly to an end. The spark had been kindled prematurely, and finding no sufficient fuel ready for it, presently blinked out again. And almost before this happened, Michael had met with the gravest interruption to his philosophic mood that it ever encountered. For utterly unphilosophical were the thoughts about Norah Connell which began to fill his mind, both waking and sleeping. Norah was a daughter of Matt Connell, at whose house the conspirators held their most frequent meetings ; and the dark-blue eyes of Norah, and her soft black tresses, and her ray-bright glance, and her honey-sweet voice, were soon sharing his rhymes with the

sorrows and hopes of Erin. On that theme he never satisfied himself by any means as nearly as he sometimes did in his patriotic verses ; still less did he ever imagine himself repeating or mentioning his love-songs to anybody at all. His boldest steps in such a direction were merely wonderings as to what Norah would have thought if he had ever ventured to hint something of his sentiments towards her. What she really would have thought, and how the matter would have ended, had his proceedings been more daringly practical, must now remain always doubtful. But the upshot of it was that while Michael kept on dreaming and adoring, without, as far as anybody could see, so much as "looking her side of the road," Terence M'Cormac had been paying her assiduous court personally, and carrying on negotiations with her parents through a friendly go-between, as etiquette prescribed. Accordingly one fine day into the dim and magically hued mists of Michael's phantasies flared and crashed the thunderbolt announcement that Terence M'Cormac and Norah Connell were "about gettin' married at the Shrove."

For a while Michael felt benumbed and paralysed, and when his ordinary faculties resumed their functions, the revival, as is common in such cases, was

attended by very disagreeable sensations, which made him cast about for something wherewith to distract his thoughts. It was not easy to find, all his romantic dreams being barred, and the verse-making, that had charmed away so many a tedious hour, embittered now by baneful associations. Nevertheless, this it was that gave him a clue to what he wanted. A habit of writing down his compositions had recalled to him his slender stock of learning, and its value now, in the loss of his other few treasures, so rose in his esteem that he resolved to increase it.

Just at this time there had accrued to him his small share of the family property, and he made up his mind to spend it in qualifying himself for the post of national school-teacher. He looked forward to that object indeed with none of his earlier raptures. It seemed to him only the best thing he could do in the circumstances, which were not rapturous at all. But the goal, though it promised none of the delight attached to a successful revolution, or a happy wooing, had like many another humdrum second best the merit of attainability, and Michael reached it in due course. Moreover, after a period of desperate counterfeiting, he was able to kindle in himself some genuine

enthusiasm for the pursuit of knowledge ; and by degrees his love of abstract meditation returned to him. So that after he was appointed teacher of the small national school at Inverdrum, not far from his native village of Clochranbeg, he led a fairly contented and suitable sort of existence, looked up to by his neighbours as a man of profound learning, and none the worse liked because he had the name of not being over sharp-witted or worldly wise.

Close on thirty years passed in this peaceful way, and then an untoward event occurred in the person of a new clerical school-manager, who happened to have in his eye a more congenial, if not more efficient, teacher for Inverdrum. He lost no time in giving effect to his views by an energetic search after reasons for ousting Michael Clohiskey, and he was successful with a thoroughness which once more discredited the oft-refuted fallacy that it takes two to make a quarrel. Certainly Michael was far from desiring one, being attached both to his place and his pupils. But his disposition made him slower than a more wide-awake man would have been to read the ominous signs that might have put him on his guard against surprises, and helped him to maintain his footing longer. As it

was, he found himself dismissed ere he had well begun to suspect that the sour looks and manners of his new superior betokened anything worse than the usual unpleasantness of novelty. Thus Michael Clohiskey departed sorrowfully from his ink-bespattered schoolroom and trim little house, where his successor, Father Crinion's candidate, reigned in his stead.

This disaster threatened at first to supplant all his philosophy by sordid cares about ways and means of subsistence, for his three-score years seemed a hopeless obstacle to another appointment, and how else was his livelihood to be earned? That question, however, was solved by the death of his eldest brother, like himself an old bachelor, who having inherited the Clohiskey bit of land at Clochranbeg, had thriven fairly thereon. The little property now fell to Michael, setting him above the fear of want, but at the same time causing him some perplexity, since to spend the rest of his days engaged in farm affairs, about which he was invincibly ignorant and uninterested, appeared to him a fate not much better than sheer bodily starvation, namely, a perpetual mental fast. Anxiety to avoid it stirred him to an unwonted promptitude in action. His favourite sister, Joanna O'Meara, was

by this time a widow with several grown sons, and he immediately made over to them the management and profits of the farm, stipulating only for the few weekly shillings which he considered necessary for his support. So few indeed were these, that some other members of his family, concerned less on his behalf than at the outrageous good luck of "them O'Mearas," strongly represented to him how excessively bad a bargain he was concluding. But Michael replied: "Sure, so long as I can get me plenty with it, what more could I have, unless something that would be a torment to meself?" And he took up his abode, well satisfied, in a little shanty at Inverdrum in the westernmost corner of Meenaclochran.

There he lived for many a year, albeit on his first establishment he had demurred about the darning of his thatch, on the grounds that "'twas apt to last him what trifle of time he would be stoppin' under e'er a roof, good or bad." All his time was now at his own disposal, barring the necessary household tasks, which his frugal habits simplified and shortened—too much in the opinion of old Mrs. Gahan, his nearest, yet quite tolerably distant, neighbour. She was scandalised at the indifference of a man who would seldom take the

trouble to cook himself a rasher of bacon, “and he well able to afford it, and noways miserable”—by which she meant miserly. Nay, she even avowed her belief that if he could have got them, he would have bought his potatoes “ready boiled, and would be eatin’ them as cowld as the clay they grew in”—than which reckless sloth could no further go.

But though Michael might scamp his cookery, and neglect his opportunities at meals, he did not fail to make the most of a happy chance that came in his way not long after his retirement into private life. There was a sale of furniture at the big house of the neighbourhood, and the contents of the library went for a penny a stone. Of this cheap literature Michael purchased as much as he could carry home with the help of Kit the Fool, who was able-bodied enough; and weighty were the burdens he imposed upon himself and his assistant. None the less he looked with covetous, regretful eyes on the dusty, cobwebby volumes left lying in heaps beyond his means of transport, and never once on the long trudge back did he wish his load an ounce the lighter. His joy in his purchase was fully as intense as poor Kit’s over his guerdon of sugar-sticks, and more enduring by far. His

ponderous pennyworths became the solace of many a lagging winter's night and lonely summer noon.

Yet reading did not fill up the place of his favourite pastime : he left himself abundant leisure for meditations too. Weather permitting, he often carried them on out of doors in a nook much to his mind, situated at the top of a cart-track, which descends steeply to the shore. An unprofitable stone-quarry, soon and long since abandoned, has slightly notched the south end of the sea-fronting cliffs. This recess faces south-westward, looking obliquely over a tract of beach, where the waves march to and fro across sand and shingle, and a wide plough-land, where the white seagulls fly up like foam about the shaggy feet of the trampling horses. Several rough blocks of reddish stone here gave a choice of seats, variously sheltered and surveying, and on one or other of these might frequently be discovered the figure of Michael the Meditator, as he came to be commonly called, small and spare, in his long coat and tall hat, both worn to greenness. There he found at his pleasure seclusion so complete that nothing disturbed him more than the shifting of the lights and shadows, yet not so remote as to hinder him from looking on at what was done and let alone by his

MEDITATIONS

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neighbours, many of whom were his former pupils. If he wished for conversation, he seated himself on a flat-topped stone beside the track, along which there was pretty sure to be some coming and going ; if he preferred silent reflection, he withdrew to another, where, screened by a projecting bank, he eluded notice, unless a whiff from his pipe floated out, and led the passer-by to say at a riskless venture : “ Fine day, Mr. Clohiskey.” The advantages of the place endeared it to him more and more as time went on, and he haunted it with increasing frequency. In doing so his conduct seemed somewhat inconsistent with an aphorism of his own, which ran to the effect that “ it was a bad sign when you could find a body in the one place ever, like as if he had roots instead of feet on him.” But then the persons to whom he applied it were in circumstances not at all resembling his. And consistency is sometimes but pig-headedness writ *fine*.

Occasionally he fell in with an old crony, or a younger favourite, who had some abstruse philosophical theory to put forward ; and when this happened Michael proved himself a good listener, seldom interrupting the longest monologue, and almost always hearing enough of it to enable him

to offer an apposite comment at its close. If any difference of opinion occurred, it was usually rather a lopsided one, so to speak, as his views upon most points were far from positive. It sometimes happened, too, that neighbours, who in ordinary circumstances showed no philosophic bent, were moved by some crisis in their fate to think deeply for themselves, as well as to communicate the result; and these people instinctively resorted to Michael Clohiskey, as to a person of understanding, who would sympathetically receive what they said on its own merits, being nowise pledged beforehand either to approval or dissent. He heard them, as a rule, with considerable interest, often finding his mind thereafter stirred and freshly filled, like a rock-pool, into which a wave had washed. Now and then, at long intervals, some car-owning friend would secure his company on a drive to a fair or a funeral. But he did not greatly enjoy such excursions, and would not be often persuaded, to undertake one. They tended to produce an un-serviceable and encumbering stock of blurred impressions. "Folk that take to going on wheels," he was wont to say, "do be apt to see as little of the nature of things as e'er an ould forty-legs"—a centipede—"skyting along in a hurry in a crevice

between a couple of stones. I'd liefer keep to me two feet and me two eyes." And so he generally did. One way or the other, in fact, he never came short of materials for the meditation in which he took delight, and for which, indeed, ample scope may be provided even by a county-corner much smaller than Meenaclochan.



A CORNER OF A COUNTY

MEENACLOCHRAN, though only a corner of a county, is a wide tract of country, mostly bog and moorland, lying between the Atlantic and a range of hills, which from the ocean's brink look as blue as turf-smoke. Their foot-slopes form the eastern boundary of this district, and to the westward a great sea-fronting cliff runs, a colossal sunk-fence, on the whole in very good repair. Here and there, however, it has sustained a breach, and round about one such clusters the Town, so called, of Clochranbeg. Two or three other Towns of not much inferior magnitude and importance belong to Meenaclochan, lying further inland; but Clochranbeg is recognised as the capital. It makes

the most of itself by a division into the Upper and the Lower Town, part of it straggling in a single row along the edge of the cliffs, and the rest of it perching in scattered nooks and niches beneath, where there are niggardly patches of tillable soil, and liberal expanses of intractable shingle, all close to the head of the little wedge-shaped bay.

This gap in the rock-wall is partially filled up in a rough, makeshift sort of way with various materials, principally sand. Exceedingly fine in grain, and in hue faintly golden, though burning silver-white under strong sunbeams, it is piled high in huge mounds, that oppress the imagination attempting to realise what gigantic toil of carvers in stone must have gone to produce such a vast deal of débris. But that there can at least have been no lack of water-power to set those violent tools in motion seems beyond a doubt, when through a long wild night the breakers thunder on the cliffs with a myriad sledges, and when even in seasons of the calmest weather, the strangely workmanlike tapping and clinking, as of hammers and chisels, is heard to proceed without a pause.

Communication between the Upper and the Lower Town is maintained by means of the *boreens*, which are several narrow, shelving-banked lanes, grooved

in the great sand-hill from its base on the beach to its crest, where it touches the Loughmore road. So incommodious and steep are they, and so deep in sand, that wheeled vehicles traverse them with difficulty, leaving wide furrow-like ruts, and magnified hoof-prints that look as if they had belonged to some prodigious primeval quadrupeds; while, judged thus, their drivers' stature might be pronounced superhuman indeed. Even the solemn processions of grey and white geese, which sway down by this route to graze on shreds of fine-bladed, salt-flavoured grass-sods, record in a curious and misleading manner their passage over this very capable surface. For it takes the impression only of their claws, ignoring the membrane between, and the result is a series of intricate, hieroglyphic-like criss-crosses, which no inexperienced observer would suppose to be imprinted by webbed feet. We may strongly suspect these flocks of a prominent part in establishing the uncanny reputation which has been acquired by the boreens of Clochranbeg. The widespread wings of a large white gander and his company, half flying, half footing it down before the wind, with a fitful dancing motion, as is their custom in blustery weather, might plausibly enough suggest a spectral apparition to the belated traveller

in the dusk, if he is "imagining some fear," as he will probably be doing. When the full moon floats high over the swelling sand-hill, blanching the soft ridges into snowy marble, and blackening every recess with solid ebony shade, those lonesome hollow-ways make a suitable setting for a ghost-story, and that "things do be seen in them" it is almost superfluous to say. If any departed neighbour were disposed to "walk," he might of course reasonably be expected to choose the boreens for the scene of his hauntings, because the inhabitants of both the Towns spend so considerable a portion of their mortal lives in plodding up and down that barren mound.

Their steps sink all the more deeply into the yielding sand when, as is often the case, they are heavily laden. Seaweed is the commonest and most ponderous burden on the ascent. Nobody can tell how many tons of it are carried up every year, dripping dark masses, in creels and panniers and flat oblong carts, which look as if they had been forcibly squeezed through the straitest of gates. In seasons when the gathering and spreading is at its height, the harsh, briny scent of the weed hangs about the boreens, which are bestrewn with the dropped trails and wreaths, and leathery straps

and bands, like a litter of worn-out harness. Down them homewards travel more miscellaneous goods, as the dwellers on the shore fetch nearly all their supplies by that way. Turf, the bulkiest commodity, goes glooming along in black burdens, conspicuous against the silvery banks, and sods that here and there have fallen off the high-piled loads lie with the aspect of discarded brogues "left kicking about."

For the Meenaclochran bogs produce peat darker in hue than the richest plum-cake, and almost as hard as coal, helping to confirm the theory that the worst land and the best turf go together. All around, as in many other places, glory is often given to God for the plenty of peat, which people consider an advantage of such paramount importance that as long as they have a warm fire on the hearth, they are disposed to think the emptiness of the big sooty pot hung over it a comparatively trivial matter. Only when a wildly wet summer and Fall prevent the saving of sufficient fuel by persistently drenching it into a miry paste, they take a hopeless view of the situation, and feel themselves to be in a poor way entirely.

In such hard times, the people who live on the shore have one resource which is not possessed by

their inland neighbours, as the driftwood washed up in tolerable abundance may often be obtained at the cost of some hauling and hewing. Spars and masts and painted planks, left by the fugitive tide, bear witness to bad work out at sea; but who can afford to denounce the misdeeds of an ill wind, which may be said, and that more than figuratively, to blow up his household fire? So the visible evidence for many a tragical history of sea-sorrow melts away in an evanescent column of transparent blue smoke, quivering out through chimney or thatch-hole. Some few of the neighbours indeed do act upon, as well as entertain, a strong prejudice against what they call "drowned wood," or "wreck-wood," and aver that the use of it always brings bad luck about a house. Certain it is that in a scarce season not very long ago, the young Gallahers, who lived on the strand, dragged up to their father's cabin a big square block of smooth grey timber, which for time out of mind had lain, half-buried, in the centre of the little circular, silvery-floored cove at the foot of towering cliffs. The noonday sun was shining cheerfully on the four strong lads as they dislodged the firmly embedded beam, stirring up sudden jets of high-vaulting sand-hoppers; and then amid shouts and

laughter it went, scraping a deep furrow, to the Gallahers' door, where it should be chopped small for firewood. But early next morning it was hurriedly and silently drawn down again along the same track ; and everybody knows how Larry, the tallest and finest man of the brothers, met his death within a couple of months.

Old Jim O'Callaghan, moreover, used to declare that whenever a bit of wreckage did be burning, he would be hearing the most woeful screeches, like as if it was drowned men going under ; and that of an odd while he got a glimpse of something looking in very piteous at the window. But Jim's neighbours said, behind his back, that he had great romancing out of him ; and the threat of such dismal accompaniments, though alarming, was seldom alarming enough to deter folk from the use of these opportune waifs ; while some sceptics went so far as to express an opinion that the wind would be apt to howl and flutter the shadows about whether they burnt a bit of old timber or no. Free-thinking views of this sort are, however, far from common in Clochranbeg, where able-bodied men may any day be found ready to admit that they feel extremely loth to travel through even the shortest boreen after dark, and that should they

deem it necessary to do so, they habitually safeguard themselves with the escort of the youngest child they can procure, capable of walking, in the harmless bodily sense, as the most efficacious protection against ghostly perils.

One of these ill-matched pairs would probably at that late hour fall in with little by the way, except perhaps a stray goat or goose ; but in the daytime there is pretty sure to be something coming or going through each boreen. The weather-fending wayside bank, at the point where two or three of them closely converge upon the Loughmore road, is therefore a favourite lounging place for unoccupied people, and would be an excellent station for anybody whose business or pleasure it was to make notes on his neighbours. Posted there in good time, he would see before the sun went down specimens of every type emerge, ranging from school children in grey or red woollen garments, for the youngest of whom last year may seem an unchronicled Dark Age, to old ancient Christie Mack, whose white beard hangs like a fleecy curtain between the two sticks he leans upon, and who is said to remember the War of '98.

Now and then a boreen will be crowded suddenly with a wedding or a funeral party in their best

attire, the colouring of which would appear sombre in the mass, if the dark cloaks and shawls were not enlivened by the elder women's headgear of bright little kerchiefs, scarlet, white, and amber, put on with a carefully adjusted peak. But their skirts, though not brilliant, have a dusky richness of crimson, purple, and russet, imparted by dyes home-made from native berries, roots, and lichens. The men's grey tweeds are of less account in the spectacle, adding only neutral tints. Foreign fashions have as yet scarcely altered the general aspect of a Meenaclochran crowd, and will no doubt be slow to invade regions where the atmosphere is seldom free from, as Tim Sheehan puts it, such "powerful strong draughts." A girl may here and there be seen in a black straw sailor hat, which is rational wear enough, though not so picturesque as the folded shawl or hood; but any creation of fantastic and wind-catching design would speedily be rapt from the dishevelled head of its owner, and would vanish into the dim distance, swept in irretrievable flight over bog or sea.

The dignity of processional side-cars is sometimes waiting for one of these parties as it comes out upon the broader road. It may be bound—when it includes a bride and bridegroom—only for

the whitewashed chapel close by, or it may have in prospect a long drive across the moor to Kiladara burying-ground, a venerable precinct, which people are deemed lucky to secure for what the old Irish saints used to call "the place of their resurrection." It is a very wide horizon that surrounds anybody who drives over the boglands of Meenaclochran. They stretch on and away towards the wraith-like blue hills, which still form a part of this country, once called Connell's, as do also those faintly outlined headlands melting into the sea-mists to north and south. Assuredly Meenaclochran, in its utmost expansion, is but a small fragment of that big county, the Foreigners' Fort—Dun-na-Gall—called after the Danes' little stronghold on the Easky, that is to say Fishy, River.

Other parts of it there are, more populous and less primitive, to which the foregoing description would not apply. The inhabitants spring from a different race, being nearly akin to their not very distant neighbours over the water in Scotland, of whose qualities good and bad they largely partake. "Dour" folk many of them are, to use their own word, not overmuch given to promiscuous hospitality, and prone to answer a greeting, "Fine day," with the briefest possible "Tuss." The

remark so trite, and, in that climate, probably so untruthful, may not have merited a more gracious response ; but be this as it may, the monosyllable discourages conversation, and often makes a ·rid-dance expeditiously of the stranger.

His experiences would be different among the little dwellings scattered over the dark boglands, or set by the grey-gleaming loughs and foam-rimmed strands of such places as Meenaclochran. For albeit upon their most frequent visitor, the wild west wind, they do persistently turn their backs, so that the landscape is flecked with pygmy pyramids of small lime-white gable-ends, all facing south and north, their doors are rarely closed against any other wayfarer ; and by their hearth-fires, whatever else may be lacking, he is more than likely to find a cordial welcome, and plenty of talk, and many a story.

THE END

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