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MADGE DUNRAVEN,

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MADGE DUNRAVEN.

A Tale.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE QUEEN OF CONNAUGHT," ETC.

> IN THREE VOLUMES. VOL. I.





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PART I.

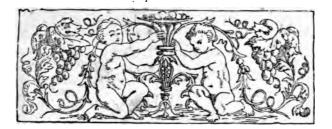
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OLD IRELAND.

'A_people, churlish as the seas, And rude, almost, as rudest savages.' ROBERT HERRICK.

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MADGE DUNRAVEN.

CHAPTER I.

ULTIMA THULE AND A FEW MILES FARTHER.



T was a dark, dreary dawn in October; the air felt miserably damp and chilly, for the rain

had fallen heavily during the night. The low-lying marshes which surrounded the little town of Castleferry, County Sligo, lay buried beneath great sheets of water caused

by the autumn floods. For six weeks the VOL. I. I rain had been falling steadily, but on the morning on which this story opens it gradually ceased. Dawn broke gloomily, with a heavy look of sullen discomfort; but, for a wonder, it was dry.

The long narrow streets were quite deserted; but down at the railway station, which was situated on the outskirts of the town, there was a faint stir of life. A couple of sleepy porters crouched shivering and yawning in a corner of the platform, while another moved slowly about, preparing for the appearance of the early train from Dublin. No bustling movement was apparent, scarcely any sound was heard, save now and then when the wind, which was rising, whistled eerily about the telegraph wires.

The great church clock, which had been sullenly chronicling the half-hours, slowly

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chimed forth six. As it did so, the porters, who were still fitfully dozing in their corner, rubbed their eyes, yawned, and rising to their feet, lazily stretched their limbs, then, folding their arms, they shivered and sleepily stared about them.

The chiming of the clock had ceased, the echoes had died away, silence ensued; yet still the chilly wind blew in gusts, and the raindrops fell with heavy drip, drip upon the ground.

Presently a faint whistle sounded in the distance; a few moments afterwards the puffing of the engine was heard; then the train itself glided slowly up alongside the platform, and stopped. Still no bustle, no confusion. The driver and stoker alighted from the engine, addressed the sleepy porters, and stared moodily at the train : they had reached their destination,

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and were free. One by one the carriagedoors opened, and the occupants came forth. Two women with bare feet, and heads wrapped in shawls; a Connemara boy; and lastly, a gentleman wrapped up in an ulster-coat, who, standing upon the rainy platform, gave one quick glance around, and called aloud:

'Porter ! porter !'

As no porter was forthcoming, however, all having mysteriously disappeared just at the time when their services were needed, he returned to his carriage and drew forth his luggage—a small portmanteau and a travelling-bag—and placed them on the platform by his side. If the call had been ineffectual in attracting attention, the articles in question were more successful. No sooner had they been drawn forth from their obscurity, than the two women and the boy who had alighted from the train paused to regard them; the stoker and driver of the engine strolled up, and one by one the sleepy porters followed; forming a semicircle around the luggage, they stood and gazed from that to the owner, in pathetic silence.

But the stranger, who had evidently been accustomed to receive more prompt attention, grew impatient, and this time almost angrily demanded a car to convey him and his luggage away.

'A car, is it ?' replied one of the porters, who, having by the light of his lantern, caught a glimpse of certain white letters painted upon the stranger's luggage, was earnestly endeavouring to discover what those letters might mean. 'Sorra car, yer honour, to be got at this hour of the morning !' 'Then what am I to do?' demanded the stranger, in a pure English accent; 'am I to stand here shivering till daylight?'

The porter, who had by this time assured himself that the luggage was the property of the 'Rev. George Aldyn' who was a 'passenger to Castleferry,' now raised his lantern and glanced at the gentleman's face.

'And to what part of the country is it that yer honour wishes to go?' he asked.

'To Ballymoy.'

'To Ballymoy, is it? Och, sure then, that's a wild country.'

'You'd serve me better, my man, by telling me how I am to get there.'

'Saints protect us, I was never there myself, thank God! but at seven o'clock the mail car leaves Castleferry; that'll take ye to within fifteen miles of it. If ye wish to catch that same, I'll carry yer luggage up to the inn my own self, and lave ye to the care of the driver. It's one Mick Timlin, a kinsman of me own.'

Here he suddenly turned ferociously upon the boy, who had stood meekly looking on.

'Get out o' that, Tony Bourk, and let the gintleman's luggage alone, will ye!' he said, as he slowly lifted the packages one by one, and strolled leisurely away.

The gentleman following close upon his heels, left the little group upon the platform at full liberty to speculate upon the extraordinary circumstance which could have the power to draw a civilised first-class passenger into the midst of Castleferry.

Quite unconscious of the varied opinions

which were being passed upon him, the stranger continued to follow his guide along a road ankle-deep in mud. Although the approaching dawn was now faintly visible, it was still too dark for him to see his way clearly. Again and again he stumbled and almost fell; his coat was clammy with morning mist and well bespattered with mud, while the chilly whistling wind made him shiver to the bone. A dismal dawn, giving every promise of a damp and dismal day.

After ten minutes' walking they paused before a house which was evidently their destination. The doors were closed and fastened, the windows curtained and dark; the inmates of the house were doubtless wrapped in peaceful slumber. Seizing the bell, the porter began and continued to ring one peal after another without a

moment's interval. The first peal or two brought no response whatever, and the gentleman, instead of restraining the porter's ardour as he at first seemed inclined to do, urged him on to fresh efforts. About twenty minutes passed thus, and then a faint sound was heard inside, a sound of shuffling and grumbling, and turning of locks and creaking of bolts.

'Who's there ?' demanded a sleepy voice through the keyhole.

'It's me, Larry Conningham !' shouted the porter in reply; 'open the door, you spalpeen you !'

Another rumbling and scraping and pulling at the bolts, accompanied with a continued growl of displeasure; then the door slowly opened, and there appeared a man who had evidently been aroused from his sleep, and who had hastily huddled on a few clothes before he came to discover the cause of the unusual noise.

'What the devil do you mane by disturbing the house at this hour of the morning?' he began; but when his sleepy eyes fell upon the gentleman in the ulstercoat, he paused, slouched back, pushed open the door of a room labelled *Commercial*, and entering, lit up one jet of gas.

The room looked desolate enough. The pallid light fell upon a table which was covered with the remnants of a meal; great packages lay here and there about the floor, and the air was foul with the smell of stale tobacco smoke. Turning in disgust from the room, and stepping again into the damp but purer air, the stranger

angrily demanded how long he was destined to wait for the car which was to convey him to his journey's end.

'A full hour,' was the cheering reply, and the exasperated Englishman, turning from the door of the inn, announced his intention of passing the time in the open street.

Still the wind blew with a low mournful sound, and the white mist fell, but the darkness gradually passed away and the streets were soon flooded with the dim uncertain light of day.

At length the long hour came to an end.

The luggage, re-emerging into the light, again became an object of interest to a small crowd gathered upon the pavement, after which it was strapped upon the side of a dilapidated-looking car, and, together with its owner, finally conveyed away; while the crowd stared at the departing equipage in mute and breathless wonder.



CHAPTER II.

SHRANAMONRAGH CASTLE.



HE car was a public one, and bore the mail from the central town of Castleferry to the dis-

tricts which lay around ; but on the day of which we speak, the English stranger was the only passenger whom it contained.

Buttoned up in his thick ulster-coat, which was fast getting wet through, he sat on one side of the car, while his luggage, with numerous other boxes and packages, was piled up on the other; and the driver, perched up in the middle, urged on his horse without once glancing around. Neither spoke. The one seemed of a taciturn disposition, and the other was evidently preoccupied with thoughts of no very pleasant kind. The town of Castleferry was soon left far behind. On either side of the road ran low roughly-built stone-walls, while beyond again stretched sweeps of moorland lying black and desolate beneath a dark and lowering sky. There were few people on the road. Now and then a bare-backed horse approached, bearing a man and a woman riding pillion into town; or a barefooted girl with a wet shawl wrapped well about her head, and her feet and legs stained with the dark bog-water, toiled wearily over the moor, carrying upon her back a great creel of turf. As the car approached, the creel would be dropped, and the girl would stand watching the departing equipage with bovine interest in her eyes. Along the road which led from Castleferry to the wilds of Connaught, passengers were seldom seen, so the mail-car, which made the journey thrice each week, was an object of curiosity to those who happened to pass it by.

At last the long silence was broken. The stranger, turning to the driver, asked abruptly:

'How far do you count it from Castleferry to Ballymoy ?'

'Forty miles,' was the short reply.

'Where do you go to?'

' To Bangor.'

'And how much farther is it to Ballymoy?'

' Fifteen miles.'

'Shall I be able to hire a conveyance at Bangor to take me on ?'

' Maybe.'

Again the stranger was silent. Presently he asked :

'Do you know a place called Shranamonragh Castle ?

This time the driver turned deliberately round, and glared fixedly into the stranger's face.

'Shranamonragh Castle ?' he asked; 'the place that belongs to Mr. Dunraven ?'

'Yes!'

'Sure thin, why wouldn't I know it? And is it to Shranamonragh that yer honour's goin'?'

'Yes.'

'Well, well, and why didn't yer honour tell me that same before?' continued the man, now servilely pulling off his hat and allowing the rain to fall unchecked upon his uncovered head. 'Sure there isn't a boy in Bangor that wouldn't put to his pony and run yer honour down to Shranamonragh Castle.'

Again the stranger, turning from the man, relapsed into moody silence. He had extracted the information which he required, and he had no taste for further conversation. To the great change which had taken place in the manner of the man since he had heard the mention of Mr. Dunraven, he paid little attention. It was only right, he thought, that fitting respect should be paid to a gentleman who occupied so high a position in the country as did his brother-in-law Mr. Dunraven of the Castle.

But although the stranger maintained a VOL. I. 2

moody silence, the driver, who since he had been informed of the stranger's place of destination had evinced a great eagerness to make up for his late taciturnity, continued to talk volubly, nearly all his conversation tending to the one object, namely, the glorification of the Dunravens of Shranamonragh Castle.

Slowly the time passed on. The misty rain still fell; the chilly wind still blew; and as the car passed along, the prospect grew darker and more desolate. The day brightened; then it seemed slowly to fade away. It was about two o'clock in the afternoon when the car, rolling slowly into Bangor, paused before the door of the inn, and the stranger, alighting once more, found himself in an empty-looking chamber, drying his cold damp clothes before a turf fire. The driver of the car which had brought him thus far upon his way rushed hither and thither, helping to prepare the conveyance which was to take him on, while the landlady of the inn was persistent in her offerings of such refreshments as her house afforded. But all the stranger did was to stand like a statue before the fire with his hands crossed behind him. When his car was ready, he took his seat thereon, and was once more whirled away through the drizzling mist of rain.

Wilder and wilder grew the prospect around him; thicker and thicker gathered the mist of rain. Mile after mile was covered; the day seemed slowly fading into night.

Already the objects on the moor became indistinct with the darkening shadows and blurred with the chilly rain. At length,

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when the evening gloom lay thick upon the land, the car stopped upon the summit of a hill, the driver pointed with his whip, and the stranger, turning in his seat and gazing straight before him, saw for the first time the village of Ballymoy.

A cluster of huts, built up of turf and thatched with straw, was set upon the flat summit of a grassy hillock which rose a few hundred yards from the sea-shore. About these stretched land, for the most part flat and boggy and disfigured with unsightly stacks of turf, while here and there, cutting the land up into squares and triangles, were low stone walls.

A little apart from the village, set on a square patch of moorland close to the roadside, was a dwelling which stood quite alone. A tolerably large white-washed building of two stories, with a slated roof. and surrounded by dilapidated out-buildings, which were hardly distinguishable from the dark and desolate bog. To and from this building straggling figures of human beings were going and coming incessantly. From its windows streamed forth rays of light which flickered faintly through the pale mist, lighting up the black wastes around. In glancing at the village the stranger's eyes swept across this building ere he turned to the driver and asked :

'Where does Mr. Dunraven live?'

'Just there, yer honour.'

'Where?' asked the stranger, rather impatiently, as a startled look began to overshadow his face, and he purposely kept his eyes from glancing in the direction which was indicated by the whiphandle.

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'Just *there*!' said the driver again. 'That house on the bogs wid the lights in the windows. That's Shranamonragh Castle!'



CHAPTER III.

A WAKE AND A FUNERAL.



S the man uttered the words, the car, turning sharply into a rough bye-road cut across

the bog, rolled straight up towards the house; and soon the Englishman, alighting, found himself standing upon a flight of stone steps which led up to the threshhold. The door stood open, and within the hall a lamp cast down a faint flickering light, revealing to the gaze only bare boarded floors and cold whitewashed walls.

For a moment the Englishman stood looking confusedly about him: then he raised his hand to knock at the door.

'Och, never stand out in the damp, sor,' said the driver, who was about to lead his horse to one of the buildings at the back. 'Shust step in. You'll find Mr. Dunraven inside, like enough; and if he's not there, sure I'm going to the kitchen, and I'll send a boy meself to find him for ye !'

The driver walked away; and after another moment of hesitation the Englishman entered the hall.

There was not a living soul to be seen; but in the air, there was a faint low murmur as of many voices, while strange, and not altogether pleasant, perfumes seemed permeating the atmosphere of the place. As he stood glancing uneasily from side to side, the low, deep hum of voices grew to a murmur, the murmur to a wail, which was increased and prolonged, and which finally changed into a wild shriek of pain, then died away. For a moment he stood listening; then he automatically pulled off his dripping hat and overcoat, and walked slowly forward in the direction whence the sounds issued.

Proceeding along the chill and empty hall, he reached a half-open door, and gazing straight before him, beheld a scene which caused the look of uneasiness on his face to deepen into absolute amaze.

Within a room, which was lit up with guttering candles, small oil-lamps, and one or two torches of bog fir, gathered a wild crowd of human beings. Men and women, boys and girls, of all ages and conditions, were huddled together, some wailing, others crying, and others whispering ; but all with their faces turned the one way, their wild eyes fixed in the same direction. In the middle of the room, amidst the densest of the crowd, was a couch draped with white damask, and upon this lay the object upon which all eyes were turned.

The dead body of a woman.

Close beside the couch, with his hand placed upon that of the corpse, his head bowed, and his eyes fixed vacantly before him, sat an elderly man. Near to him, kneeling upon the floor, with her face buried in the white drapery of the couch, was a slim young girl. Around these two the living sea of faces gathered, while the murmuring of the many voices rose and fell in a soft unceasing moan.

As the Englishman paused before the door of the room, and his eye fell upon this group, he shrank back into the shadow, while the wondering look upon his face changed again into one of surprise and pain.

Quickly, before he had attracted the attention of any one, he shrank away from the door, and quietly retracing his steps along the hall, entered another room which stood open before him. This chamber was deserted, save for a great clumber spaniel which lay upon the hearth, and the only light was that afforded by the flickering flame of a slowly-dying turf fire.

Approaching the hearth the Englishman sat down, and resting his elbow on his knee, covered his eyes with his hand.

Again that wild wail, which had startled him on his first entrance into the house, rose upon the air. The dog, lifting its head, listened sleepily, then blinking its eyes, lay down again to rest; while the wail grew louder and louder, swelling into a shrill dirge, and again dying away. As it did so, leaving a solemn silence on the air, the stranger rose from his seat, crossed the floor, and was about to leave the room. On reaching the door, however, he found himself standing face to face with the master of the house—the same person whom he had beheld sitting dejectedly beside the corpse.

'Aldyn !' exclaimed this person, without any sign of surprise—' at last !'

'Yes, I have come—as she wished,' said Mr. Aldyn, in that subdued tone which people unconsciously assume when speaking in the neighbourhood of the dead.

'You've come just two days too late,' was the reply. 'It's all over. Clara is dead.' Mr. Aldyn drew a deep, laboured breath.

'Yes, I have seen her,' he said; and then, as the other seemed about to lead him away to the death-chamber, he added: 'I think I will not go there again.'

'No? Well, please yourself. But you've come from Castleferry—you want something to take.'

'No, I want nothing,' said Mr. Aldyn, glancing round the wretched room with a shiver, and at the same time shrinking from the touch of the man who stood by his side. 'But I am tired; I should like to rest.'

Without a word of remonstrance, Mr. Dunraven took a candle and led the way upstairs. Pushing open the door of the first room he reached, he handed the candle to his guest, and after again grasping his hand, and begging him in vain to refresh himself after the fatigues of the day, he withdrew.

When the last echo of his retiring footsteps had died, Mr. Aldyn locked his door, and advancing into the middle of the room, held his candle on high and looked round.

The room was large and lofty, but the first glance made him shiver. Again he beheld bare, whitewashed walls, and a cold, uncarpeted floor. The uncurtained window was thrown open, and a cold, clammy air crept into the room.

'Shranamonragh Castle!' he exclaimed, as he set down his candle and closed the window. 'Great heavens! it's more like a beggars' den. And to think that these people are related to *me*! To think that I have been dragged from my home to

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gaze upon this! Poor Clara! my poor sister! Your rashness has been punished indeed!

Far into the night the Englishman paced the room with slow and measured steps. The hours dragged wearily on; the candle flickered down, flared out, and died, and the air grew bitterly cold. At length, however, exhausted nature gave way. He threw himself, dressed as he was, upon the bed, and slept.

When he awakened it was broad day. Faint sunrays crept through the panes, and lay upon the cold bare floor. The sleep had refreshed him; but the gloomy pictures of the day before had left their mark upon him. His head was aching; and though he had shed no tears, his eyes burned like balls of fire.

He rose, and throwing up the window,

looked out. No rain was falling; but heavy clouds had gathered in the sky, white steam hung above the hilltops, and a thick vapour was drifting in across the ocean. Ragged forms, pinched with famine, shrinking from the cold, looking like dark shadows through the driving mists, peopled the desolate road, toiling on slowly and wearily towards the house. Around the building a great crowd gathered, talking volubly in a tongue which he could not understand.

'My God!' he murmured involuntarily, as he glanced keenly around, 'what a country to live in !'

So saying, he closed the window. After making the best toilet that he could, he left the room and descended the stairs.

The front door was partly closed, but the chilly wind swept freely in. Several ragged figures lingered in the hall. As Mr. Aldyn appeared, he received a 'Cead fealta, yer honour!' from one and all. One or two open hands were impulsively extended towards him, then, after a moment, hastily withdrawn.

With a cold look of surprise in his eyes, and an inclination of his proud head, he passed silently along the hall, sought the room where the great crowd had been collected, and paused before the open door. As he did so, his face contracted with a momentary spasm of pain. The room was almost empty. Chairs and benches were scattered about; there was no fire; but cold dead ashes lay grey upon the hearth; and the sunrays, creeping in through the panes, fell across the floor and lit up the empty bier. The damask curtains still hung there like snow, but the wild flowers which

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had adorned them had drooped and died; the wake-lamps flickered faintly from amidst the drooping flowers, but the cold dead form was gone.

With his eyes still tearless, and a look of stern sorrow upon his face, Mr. Aldyn turned away, and, walking along the hall, glanced keenly about him.

If the house had looked dilapidated by night, it had even a more deplorable appearance when seen in the light of day. It was a good-sized building; the hall was roomy, the rooms large, lofty, and wellproportioned; but there was a look about it of broken-down gentility, which told a sorry tale. A desolate old family dwelling it seemed, musty with centuries of neglect, where generations of Dunravens had been born, lived, and died, each and all of them with means insufficient to sustain in all its glory the family name. All the furniture, and even the paper on the walls, gave evidence of poverty and decay. Nay, more, all the rooms were characterised by a wild uncleanliness and slovenliness which was well calculated to offend the taste of the fastidious Englishman. Nothing seemed to be in its right place, chairs were tumbled here and there, hassocks were tossed on to sofas, and tables were piled with medleys of eatables, drinkables, and wearables.

In the room where he had sat on the preceding night, he found a little more order. A bright fire burned in the grate; the table in the middle of the room was spread with food. In this room were collected a couple of priests, a clergyman with his clerk behind him, Mr. Dunraven, and several others whose names and callings could not be guessed.

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When Mr. Dunraven caught sight of his kinsman, he shook him warmly by the hand; and, laying his hand kindly and familiarly upon his shoulder, introduced him to those present as 'his brother, the Rev. Mr. Aldyn, rector of Armstead.' The company bowed, and Mr. Aldyn, involuntarily shrinking from the touch of his host, gravely bowed in return, and then took his seat at the table. When he had broken his long fast, the party joined the gathering outside, and the whole crowd set off to pay the last respects to the mistress of Ballymoy.

Whither they went Mr. Aldyn could not tell: he was conscious of stumbling along a rough uneven road; his ears were deafened by the murmuring and moaning. of the crowd around him; his eyes were dazzled with staring at the black pall which

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covered the burden they bore. When at length he shook off the apathy and looked about him, he found himself standing in a great green meadow, which stretched down to the sea beach. In the middle of this meadow was a small whitewashed chapel, built by the Dunravens long ago, and still sometimes used for service on special occasions. Attached to this chapel was a graveyard—a square patch of wild land, already too well filled with decaying dead. In one corner a small space was railed off with rusted, broken-down iron railings, and a rude wooden cross, ready for erection, lay beside the rusty gate. Around this little enclosure the crowd assembled. The coffin was lowered into the newlymade grave; the clergyman began in a clear voice to read the service : the crowd reverently bowed their heads; and Mr.

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Aldyn, leaning as if for support against the railings, listened like one in a dream. Then he himself—for he was in holy orders —came forward, and said a prayer for the dead; after which a great wail arose on the air; and he turned, perhaps to hide the sorrow in his face, and fixed his eyes on the cold, grey, glistening sea.



CHAPTER IV.

MR. ALDYN MAKES A PROPOSAL.



HAT day passed slowly enough to Mr. Aldyn; but at length evening came. When the hands

of the hall-clock pointed to six, the curtains were drawn across the windows of Shranamonragh Castle, lighted candles had been placed on the table, and Mr. Aldyn and Mr. Dunraven sat facing each other upon the hearth.

The house was tolerably quiet now.

Most of the tenantry had returned to their huts, and the few that lingered were in the kitchen, talking in such subdued tones that their voices scarcely reached the occupants of the parlour at all. Mr. Aldyn, having thrown himself into an easy-chair, shaded his eyes with his hand and quietly watched the face of his kinsman. It was by no means an unpleasant face; indeed, it had once been handsome, but now it was marked by premature lines and wrinkles, which gave it the appearance of age. Mr. Dunraven, however, was under fifty years old, a tall, athletic man, with a powerful physique and a plentiful supply of irongrey hair. His clean-shaven face was burnt brown, his hands were broad and brown too, his dress was wild and careless, his manner bluff and unrefined : but there was an air of manly sorrow about him which went far towards melting the ice around the Englishman's heart.

At last Mr. Dunraven rose, and putting one hand on each shoulder of his guest, gazed into his face with such a look of piteous welcome as he had never seen on any countenance before.

'It does my heart good to see you here,' he said, 'though I could have wished that you'd have come at a better time. It would have gladdened *her* heart to have seen you before she went away.'

Mr. Aldyn moved uncomfortably on his chair, and his fingers closed upon his aching eyes. Was that dreary feeling of remorse never to be uplifted from his heart? The words were kindly spoken, and kindly meant, but they hardened him not a little against the speaker. Had it not been for this man, he reflected, his sister would never have left him, and they might have been happy till the end. For some minutes he was silent; then he asked suddenly:

'Well, what are you going to do?'

Mr. Dunraven looked amazed; the cool, matter-of-fact manner of the Englishman rather startled him. He had never been in the habit of mapping out his campaigns, and he did not think it necessary to do so now. Hitherto things had always managed to adjust themselves somehow or other, and he supposed they would do so still. What was he going to do? What a question to ask a man who only a few hours before had laid his wife in the cold ground.

But when Mr. Dunraven broke into some impatient exclamations on the distastefulness of discussing his prospects in life while his wife was just lying in her newly-made grave, Mr. Aldyn lifted up his white hand to silence him, and continued as calmly as before :

This time Mr. Dunraven offered no remonstrance. He looked at the speaker in a dazed sort of manner, then turned his head away. Still the Englishman sat apparently unmoved, his handsome, cold, marble face set into a look of proud enduring sorrow. After a few moments' silence, he spoke again :

'When my sister felt her end drawing

near, she wrote to me, as you are probably aware, begging me to come here. In that letter she gave me to understand that you were in some great trouble, which I might be able to alleviate. I am willing to comply with her request as far as lies in my power, and give you a helping hand. I suppose,' he added, involuntarily glancing around the room, 'you are not over rich ?'

• Rich ? God help me, no !'

' This estate round about here is yours ?'

' Mortgaged, every acre of it !'

'Humph! Clara did not exaggerate in what she said then. Well, you had better be frank with me, and tell me candidly how matters stand.'

At this there passed over Mr. Dunraven's face a look like that of a frightened child.

'I couldn't give you any particulars if you were to hang me for it. Clara managed all the business matters, and I know nothing at all, at all.'

'But how am I to help you if I don't understand the state of your affairs? Haven't you any of the mortgage papers?

'Papers!' said Mr. Dunraven, relieved. 'Indeed I have, then, enough to make a bonfire for St. Patrick's night!' So saying, he unlocked a cupboard which was skilfully concealed by the papering of the room, took out an armful of rolled-up parchments, and deposited them on the table before his guest, after which he returned to his chair, and looked on as if he were merely an independent spectator of some interesting scene.

Mr. Aldyn, grave as a judge, untied the pink tape first from one roll, then from another, and carefully scanned every page. After about half an hour of this work, he

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looked up and found the eyes of his kinsman roving carelessly about the room.

'This is a bad job, Dunraven!'

' I suppose it is,' returned Mr. Dunraven. 'But 'tis not the worst, let me tell you.'

'Good God! it can't be much worse than this.'

'Well, that's a matter of opinion,' returned Mr. Dunraven, 'so we won't quarrel about that. But, to my thinking, it's more important to have a roof to cover you than it is to own a few acres that came to you through no merit of your own.'

'Why, you surely don't mean to say that the *house* is mortgaged ?' asked the amazed clergyman.

'Indeed I do, then, and every stick in it. Come and look here.' He opened the door and led the way along the hall, his kinsman following him. They came to the kitchen, and Mr. Dunraven pointed in.

A tall, raw-boned man of forty sat by the fire smoking his pipe, while a slatternly but good-natured looking woman moved about, attending to two shabbily-dressed men who sat at the table taking their tea.

'Those boys came here two days before she died,' whispered Mr. Dunraven, 'and devil a soul but myself and Biddy there, and Andy, who have been in the family since they were boy and girl, knows what for. They're decent lads enough, and were well known to myself in former days, when the Dunravens were better off than they are now, God help us! So just to please me, and not to grieve *her*, they hung about the place as any other lads might, looked on, and held their tongues.' Mr. Aldyn's stern face grew woefully dark. Impatiently turning away, he returned to the parlour, followed by Mr. Dunraven, and closed the door. For some time he said nothing. He carefully rolled up the papers which were scattered about the table, and placed them again in the cupboard from whence they had been taken; then he walked for some time up and down the room. Presently he paused before Mr. Dunraven's chair.

'You have got into a terrible plight; but, as I said before, I am willing to help you to the best of my ability. Fortunately for you, I am able to be of some use. I will pay off this mortgage for you, and receive the rents of the estate until the loan is refunded.'

'I would do as much for you.'

' No doubt, no doubt.'

Again there was silence. It was again broken by Mr. Aldyn:

' My sister has left children----'

Mr. Dunraven's face lit up immediately.

'One child. I wish there was a dozen more.'

'You'd find it rather difficult to keep them, I think. Is it a girl?

'No; a boy. But I've got a little girl-God bless her !--- a niece of mine, that's just like my own daughter. In troth, I don't know which I love best. Conn or Madge. She has lived with us ever since my poor brother died, ten years ago.'

Mr. Aldyn looked annoved. The reckless way in which Mr. Dunraven evidently undertook responsibilities he was so ill fitted to sustain, seemed to him little short of absolute insanity. How VOL. I.

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could a man have been better situated than the creature before him? He had been blessed with an heir, but had been spared the trial of younger sons, which, alas! so often follows; and yet he had the thanklessness to wish for more children; and because, forsooth, the Almighty had been wiser than he, he must burden the family with a girl who had no possible claim upon it at all. Heaven only knew what further disclosures he might make before this beggarly business was brought to an end!

'Well, well, I will tell you what I'll do,' said Mr. Aldyn at last, remembering that if the old man was little or nothing to him, the heir to the estate was his sister's only son. 'I will not only clear off the mortgage, but I'll relieve you of the boy. I'll take him with me to England, and do my duty by him as much as if he were my own son !

As the Englishman uttered these words Mr. Dunraven stared at him aghast for some minutes. When he paused, he rubbed his eyes and looked again.

'Maybe I'm a bit thick-headed to-day,' he said, 'and don't rightly understand. Do you mean to say that, now I have lost my wife, you mean to rob me of my own boy? of all I have left in the world?'

Mr. Aldyn planted his feet firmly upon the rug, and crossed his hands behind him.

'If you say so, well and good,' he replied coldly; 'but I regard the matter in a totally different light. I merely wish to relieve you of a responsibility, that is all. If you do not care to have your son well provided for, why that is another matter.'

Mr. Dunraven did not reply. Without

once looking at his guest, he walked to the door, opened it, and called :

'Conn, Conn I come here !' Then leaving the door open, he returned to his seat and sat down in silence.

A moment afterwards steps were heard in the hall; they paused before the open door.

'Did you call me, Uncle Patrick ?' asked a low, gentle voice, from the shadow.

Mr. Dunraven shook his head.

'No, Madge; I called Conn. But come in, darling; I may want you, too.'

As he spoke, there entered the room a tall, slim girl of sixteen, neatly dressed in black. She glanced wistfully at the Englishman, whose cold eyes swept over her face without recognition of any kind; then walking up to Mr. Dunraven, she took her place by his side. Mr. Aldyn's gaze, travelling past the girl, was drawn to another figure which at that moment entered the room. At the first glance, Mr. Aldyn conceived the figure to be that of a fully-developed man, but at the second he perceived it was only that of a lad some twenty years of age, tall and powerfully built, with a strikingly handsome head and face. His eyes were red, as if he had been weeping, and with that instinct so common to strong men, he hung his head, as if to hide the marks of the sorrow which he had not been able to suppress.

'That is my son,' said Mr. Dunraven, as the youth paused just within the doorway. 'Shake hands with your English uncle, Conn, and tell him yourself whether you'd like to go with him to England.'

'Go to England, father! What do you mean ?' asked Conn, as he stepped into the

room, still painfully conscious of his red eyes and tear-stained cheeks, and gave his hand to his kinsman. Then as he looked for an explanation of his father's words, Mr. Dunraven told him all, adding:

'I leave you to judge for yourself, Conn. Go, if you please, my boy. *I'll* never stand in your way.'

Conn stood and listened with his eyes on the ground, his face half shaded from the stranger's sight. Even when his father had finished speaking, he did not stir; he seemed as if he were weighing the matter in his mind, and hesitating as to what he should do. All the time the girl kept her eyes fixed earnestly upon him. When silence ensued, and still he made no movement, her face began to work convulsively. At last she exclaimed : 'Oh, Conn, you won't go! Sure you couldn't leave us here alone !'

And Conn, turning from the stranger, said :

'Of course I shan't go, Madge. If I went away, who would look after father and you ?'

At this Mr. Dunraven's face brightened, and Madge, half smiling, but with tears upon her cheek, slipped one hand round her uncle's neck, the other in her cousin's palm. Mr. Aldyn looked on a little impatiently.

'Very well,' he said at last, 'if you won't accept my help, there's an end of the matter, I suppose.'

'But we will take your help, sir, if it's properly given,' said Conn. 'It isn't likely that I could go away with you, and leave my father and Madge here to starve; for, if you took the rents, I don't know what they would have left to live on. But my father is able to work as well as I am, if he could only get something to do. Why not let us all go over? We could keep ourselves, and you could take the rents till the mortgage is paid off.'

Mr. Dunraven, who never thought for himself, but was profoundly impressed by thought in others, looked questioningly at Mr. Aldyn, who bit his lips and said nothing. It must not be supposed that such an idea had altogether escaped him. Since he had read those mortgage papers, and learned the true state of the family funds, the idea of lifting the family from this squalor, and planting them on civilised soil, had more than once entered his mind. But he had persistently thrust it back, and had finally resolved to offer for the only one in whom he could possibly feel any interest. It was bad enough, he thought, to be connected with such a family, even when the sea parted them; but to have them close to his very threshold, to let them run riot in the little village where he had been looked up to and respected for years, why the idea was too ridiculous to be seriously entertained. Ten to one they would disgrace him, and make him repent of his folly before they had been there a month.

And yet what was he to do? He could not, with that piteous appeal from the grave still ringing in his ears, belie the trust which his dead sister had reposed in him and desert her only child. It was clear the boy was clannish, as most of those Irish were, and would not move unless with a trail of relations at his heels.

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It was also clear that if he remained there, he would have neither a roof to shelter him nor a bed to lie on, when the week was out. To be sure, if he took Conn away, Mr. Dunraven and Madge would be in a bad enough plight; but then, he thought, that was no affair of his. He felt bound to provide for his sister's son, not for her husband, and a girl who had no possible claim upon her at all.

But Conn spoke again, and vowed with such determination that he would go with his father, or not at all, that Mr. Aldyn came to consider his words. For fully an hour he hesitated; he weighed the *pros* and *cons* in his mind; he drew forth a letter and read the words which his dead sister had written ere she finally closed her eyes. 'Be a friend to my dear husband, George; a second father to my poor, dear, motherless boy.' Such words, coming, as it were, out of the grave, for the moment softened Mr. Aldyn's heart. After a lengthened period of hesitation, he yielded.

' I suppose it will be best for you all to come; so, for my poor sister's sake, I will try to get you both employment in England. It is a good opening for you; you can make just as much and just as little of it as you please.'

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PART II.

BEAUTIFUL ENGLAND.

' I_learnt to love that England.

* * * * * * * Such an up and down Of verdure—nothing too much up or down. A ripple of land; such little hills, the sky Can stoop to tenderly and the wheat-fields climb; Such nooks of valleys, lined with orchises, Fed full of noises' by invisible streams; And open pastures, where you scarcely tell White daisies `from `white dew.'

AURORA LEIGH.

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CHAPTER I.

UNDER THE GREENWOOD TREE.

HERE came to the land a poor exile of Erin, The dew on his raiment was heavy and chill;

Of his country he sighed, when at twilight repairing, He wandered alone by the wind-beaten hill. But the day-star attracted his eyes' sad devotion, As it rose o'er his own native isle of the ocean, Where oft in the pride of his youthful emotion,

He sang the bold anthem of Erin-go-bragh.'

The singer was Madge Dunraven. She sat upon the grass with her lap full of flowers, her eyes fixed dreamily upon those which grew around her feet.

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She was by the trunk of a great oak tree, in the middle of a grassy dell, which was set close upon the margin of an extensive wood. All around her the grass was luxuriant, very thick, very tall, and of a rich emerald green; but now and then the soft westerly wind, creeping through the thick foliage of the trees, swept the tall blades apart, revealing, as it did so, glimpses of deep purple wood violets, tufts of pale primroses, and delicate patches of green and golden woodland moss. Upon the grass deep shadows lay, but the sun-rays crept through the thick-foliaged boughs which formed a canopy overhead, falling like a golden hand upon the girl's dark hair.

In the air there was a sense of peace. Continuously the girl's ear caught the twittering and singing of innumerable small

birds which were hidden in the foliage of the wood, while beyond, again, the woodlarks sang with that sweet sound which is only less 'sovereign' than that of the cuckoo.

But when Madge's clear voice awakened the echoes, the other sounds seemed hushed; the voice of the human creature was paramount, and all the other music died, while all the other musicians listened.

'Beg your pardon, miss; but what are you doing in here?'

Madge turned and started up, while her flowers fell in a shower around her feet.

Before her stood a man, tall and muscular, with a dark forbidding countenance. He wore a coarse fustian dress, and carried several great iron traps in his hand. Touching his hat as if involuntarily, and VOL. I.

with a certain sullenness, he repeated his question.

Madge laughed, and shook her head.

'Indeed, I don't know why I came,' she said; 'but the road was hot and hard, the grass was soft and cool, so I strolled in among the shadows.'

'Didn't you see that, miss?'

Looking in the direction indicated by his uplifted finger, Madge beheld, stuck up on the outskirt of the wood, a small white board, on which was written, in great black letters : 'Trespassers will be prosecuted.'

'No,' she said carelessly; 'I did not see that before.'

'Well, I wish people would use their eyes, that's all,' returned the man, curtly. 'What's the good of my having boards put up at all, if they beant attended to ?'

'Well, you need not be so cross; I have

done no harm. I did not think of looking for any board, since I was accustomed to go wherever I liked when I was in Ballymoy.'

'Ballymoy, miss ? — where may that be ?'

'That is my home; over there, in Ireland.'

The man looked at her more attentively, and his cheek wore a grim smile; but the sullen look did not leave his eyes.

'Well, this beant Ballymoy, miss; but Armstead,' he said. 'You must keep to the high-road *here*, I reckon, else go into a field where there be no warnings put up; because, if ever you're caught again, you'll likely get prosecuted for trespass, and the law don't spare persons. Lord!' he exclaimed, suddenly catching sight of her

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feet, 'if you ain't been walkin' about here with neither shoes nor stockings!'

Madge blushed, and drew her feet back as if to hide them; then she stooped, and lifted from the ground her shoes and stockings, together with some of her fallen flowers.

'I like to feel the grass about my feet,' she said.

'You'll feel something else, if you don't look out,' said the man, with a grim smile. 'Don't you know that there be snakes about here ?'

Madge started, as if one had suddenly stung her, and repeated :

' Snakes !

'Aye, the long grass is full of 'em. Don't you try that game again, miss, or, as sure as you're standing there, you'll be stung and get your death.' 'Thank you,' said Madge, moving hurriedly away; 'I will not come here again.'

Passing swiftly across the plantation, she crept through the railings which enclosed it, and disappeared. The keeper stood for a moment, regarding the traps which he still held in his hand; then he knelt on the ground, and set one of them near the trunk of the tree where Madge had rested.

Pausing on the other side of the iron railing, Madge sat down again upon the grass, and drew on her stockings and shoes; and, gathering up into a bunch her scattered flowers, she walked swiftly across the meadows until she reached the dusty road. Then, climbing up to the top of a grassy bank which shut in the highway, she shaded her dazzled eyes from the sun's rays, and looked around.

What a scene met her view! For a time she could scarcely pick out one prospect from another; all seemed one luminous vision of yellow corn-fields, dark waving woods, green meadows rich with aftermath, and stretches of dusty road. Presently her eye picked out the river, a rapid stream winding right through the open valley, and spanned at one point by a crumbling twoarched bridge. Right above the bridge, on a steep hillside, hung the villagequaint old gables, roofs of red tile or grey thatch, walls of red brick and dark stone. gardens laden with fruit, and, on the summit of the hill, the church with its shining spire.

As she stood listening and shading her eyes, faint sounds were wafted to her ears—the far-off call of human voices, the rumbling of a wain just then crossing the bridge into the village, the waggoner's eager cry as his horses faced the hill. All seemed drowsily glad and sleepily beautiful. Over all shone a bright blue sky, such as she had seldom seen in Ireland, with here and there a moveless cloud of spotless vapour softly dissolving into feathery film.

Though the sun was fast sinking, the air was still very hot. The roads were hard, dry, and very dusty; but in the meadows, where silvery runlets came bubbling from the earth, and in the great shadowy woods beyond, there was a sense of peace.

Removing her hand from her eyes, Madge was about to pass from the dusty road to the meadows lying beyond. Suddenly she paused. Before her, like a pallid spectre casting a ghostly gloom upon that bright scene, rose another lean white post, on the top of which was nailed another board, on which was repeated, in great black letters, the menacing words: 'Trespassers will be prosecuted.'

The letters danced ominously before her, as if they mocked her. Beyond the board stretched meadows where waved the long cool grass, sweet with clover and bright with scarlet poppies, while, farther away still, sparkled a crystal stream. Before the board wound the dreary dusty road. Madge looked this way and that, read the words again, hesitated, and finally, restraining her impetuous longing for the meadows, slowly sauntered along the highway.

It was very hot here.

On either side the road was enclosed by high banks and hedges, with here and there a tall green sapling, and ere Madge had gone many yards she was enclosed in a golden cloud—of dust. The sun's rays beat upon her head, her hands became hot and damp, while the flowers which she held drooped and died. At last she sat down upon the bank beneath the shadow of a great lime tree, and, placing her drooping flowers upon her lap, rested for a time.

When the flushed heat of her face and neck had somewhat subsided, and her whole frame was cooler from its bath of shadow, she gathered up her flowers and went on. Still glancing from side to side at the bright flowery meadows, and cool rippling streams, still looking impatiently at the great white boards, which, rising before her sight, for ever warned her vagrant feet away. Madge sighed and shrugged her shoulders.

'I don't like England,' she said. 'I do not feel half so free as I did at Ballymoy!'



CHAPTER II.

MADGE GIVES A DANCING LESSON,



RESENTLY the lane came to an end.

Madge emerged into the broad street, where carts and waggons rolled along, scattering the light dry dust like smoke. After walking for a few hundred yards down the hill, she came to a little low white wicket-gate, and, opening it, she passed through.

Some little distance from the main road,

surrounded by a lawn, which was, in its turn, enclosed by a wire fence and the white gate, was a two-storied cottage, built of red brick, smothered, in those summer days, with green creeping plants and white and red roses.

Looking across the lawn, beyond a tract of cornfields, Madge could see a glimpse of the heath, lying covered with golden gorse, beneath the summer sky.

On the white stone steps which led up to the door of this dwelling sat Conn, grown bigger, broader, and in every way more manly since we last beheld him, surrounded by fishing-tackle, and busily employed in tying trout-flies. Stretched on the grass beside him were a fawn-coloured greyhound and a brown-and-white clumber spaniel. At the first sound of Madge's footsteps the dogs sprang to their feet, ran towards her, and began licking her hands, while Conn, pausing in his work for a moment, glanced quietly up.

'Why, Madge, what makes you so late ?' he said. 'Father has been home an hour or more, and we've had our tea.'

Madge only laughed, and stepping lightly over the tackle which was scattered upon the steps, passed her cousin by, and entered the house.

Crossing the little hall, Madge turned the handle of an oaken door, and entered the dining-room, a small room covered with a thick carpet, and filled with oldfashioned oaken furniture. The large window which fronted the lawn was thrown open; in the middle of the room stood a table covered with the remnants of a meal. At this table Madge sat down, and pouring out some tea and breaking off some bread, began to eat, pausing occasionally to throw scraps of bread to the dogs, which had followed her in, and now sat on each side of her chair. When the first cup of tea and two thick slices of bread had disappeared, Madge left her chair, shook the crumbs from her dress, took up a book, and sitting down upon a hassock opened the volume out on her lap, while the two dogs, finding the supplies suddenly stopped, licked the girl's soft cheek and trotted off again.

Madge had not sat long, however, when the sound of music floating in through the open window struck upon her ear. She listened; a bright smile overspread her face. Throwing her book aside, she made her way again into the open air. The sun had almost set, leaving the heavens ablaze with crimson beams, broken here and there with bars of slate-coloured cloud, portending a rainy morrow. Slantwise across the lawn lay the streams of fading light, bathing the figure and touching the hair of Conn, who sat on the white steps of the dwelling still busy with his work. By the angle of the house sat Biddy, the slatternly-looking woman whom Mr. Aldyn first saw in the kitchen at Shranamonragh Castle, dressed yet in the slipshod fashion of Ballymoy. She worked away at some coarse knitting, and tapped her foot and nodded her head to keep time to the music. The musician, no other than Andy, the old Irish manservant belonging to the Dunraven household, stood at her elbow, while a few yards off, reclining upon the grass and holding an open newspaper in his hand, was Mr. Dunraven. At sight of her uncle, Madge's face grew bright; she ran across the lawn, snatched away the paper, and seized his hand.

'Uncle Patrick, come and have a dance !' she exclaimed, pulling with all her might and main to help him to his feet.

'Easy, easy, Madge!' cried Mr. Dunraven. 'I'm not so young as I was, and my bones are tender. Play away, Andy, my boy,' he added; 'give us "Haste to the Wedding."'

The music changed; in two minutes Madge and her uncle were dancing busily upon the lawn.

In choosing her partner, Madge had been unfortunate. After the first few minutes Mr. Dunraven paused, wiped his scarlet face, and gave out the forlorn information that he was not so young as he once had been, while Madge glanced disappointedly around. As she did so, her eyes were attracted towards the road, and she saw for the first time several boorishlooking figures, carters and farm-labourers, who, with clean-washed faces and hair sleek and smooth, stood smoking their pipes, leaning upon the fence which enclosed the lawn, and staring with great cow's eyes full into her face. Almost at the same moment Mr. Dunraven saw them too, and laughingly addressed them.

'Now, boys,' he exclaimed, 'don't stand looking on, but come in and welcome; show that there's metal in your heels.'

'To be sure,' cried Biddy, whose face had brightened up wonderfully at the prospect of a bit of fun, 'don't be lettin' the mashter ask ye twice, ye great louts you!' while Madge chimed in :

'Oh yes, come over and have a dance; Andy will play for us!'

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The men, thus addressed, looked at each other, then at the ground, rubbed their heads, shuffled about a bit, and replied severally, one after another :

'We bean't accustomed to dancing, master.'

'Then 'tis time you were,' replied Mr. Dunraven, who was mentally comparing these loutish figures with the merry though ragged boys of Ballymoy; 'over with you and take a turn.'

Again the men looked at one another, smiled sheepishly, and glanced longingly at the trimly-clipt lawn. Then one of them, as if fired with tremendous courage, slowly put his leg over the railing, and alighting on the grass, stood and grinned and scratched his head. Laughing heartily, Madge took his hand and drew him along the lawn; and while Andy struck up 'St. Patrick's Day,' she placed herself before her partner and began to teach him how to dance an Irish jig. For a minute or two the great clumsy fellow stood sheepishly watching her; then he began to knock his hobnailed boots together, trying in vain to follow her agile movements. But Madge was patient, and very soon she got her partner to move with some swiftness, if with little grace.

When the ice was once broken, and the merriment really begun, the men grew bolder. One by one they got over the railings, and one by one they took a turn at the dancing with Madge, until quite a group was gathered upon the lawn.

When the fun was at its height, Mr. Aldyn, passing along the road on horseback, and attracted by the sound of the music and mirth, reined in his horse close

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beside the railing which enclosed the lawn, and looked frowningly at the group gathered beyond. A boy in a smockfrock was getting over the railing to the lawn; he touched him with his ridingwhip.

'What are you going in there for ?'

'Dunno, yer riv'rence!' he replied, drawing back and servilely pulling his forelock. 'The old master there-----'

'Be off-do you hear!' and the boy, looking at the lifted riding-whip, drew his leg slowly off the railings and slunk away.

Mr. Aldyn watched him go; then, when there came a pause in the music, he called out:

'Is there anything the matter, Dun-raven?'

Mr. Dunraven, perceiving the horseman

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for the first time, strolled up to the railings and replied :

'Not at all. We're just having a bit of a frolic. Will you come in ?'

'No!' was the short reply.

'Will you take a glass of grog, then ?'

'No, no !'

The reins were gathered up, and the horse cantered away, while Mr. Dunraven, strolling back to his guests, dismissed both horse and rider from his mind.

It was long past sunset; the air had grown dark and chilly, and a heavy dew was lying on the grass. The bright summer day was succeeded by a sombre evening; the blue sky darkened over and was soon covered by clouds heavily surcharged with rain. None had noted the growing blackness, for none had anticipated a storm; so the assembled people were soon surprised by the sudden bursting of a heavy shower.

'Come in, boys, come in !' cried Mr. Dunraven, leading the way into the kitchen.

Obedient to his will, they followed him, and soon stood in the comfortable kitchen, listening to the pattering of the rain upon the roof.

'It's only a summer shower,' said Mr. Dunraven. Then turning to Madge he added: 'Fetch the whisky, darling, till I give these boys a glass.'

A great black bottle of whisky was produced, and each man received a glass; and when the rain was over and the night had grown clearer, Mr. Dunraven, in wishing them good-night, clapped some on the back and shook hands all round, while Madge laughingly nodded to them and asked them to come again. Andy generously volunteered to teach any of them how to play on the tin whistle, in order that they might have dances in their own houses, as the boys had over there in Ballymoy.

When all were gone and the doors of the house were closed, Mr. Dunraven and Madge returned to the dining-room, where they found Conn sitting beside the open window.

'I think I'll go to bed, uncle; I am tired,' said Madge, taking his hand in both of hers.

'Good-night, mavourneen,' said Mr. Dunraven, gently kissing her cheek.

'Good-night,' said Conn, stealing his strong arm around the girl's waist and fondly kissing her; 'mind you dream of me, Madge!' he added, whispering low. Without a flutter at her heart or a blush upon her cheek, Madge returned his fond caress, gazing down into his bright eyes and letting her hand linger lovingly upon his shoulder. Then she turned away. As she passed into the hall she found the front-door still open. As she was still warm with the dance, she stepped out to inhale a little fresh air before going to bed. She had walked half-way across the lawn when the sound of voices arrested her steps. She paused. Several dark figures were making their way slowly along the road.

'That was a queer start, William Jones,' said a voice Madge recognised as belonging to one of the rustics whom her uncle had just entertained.

'Queer enough,' returned the phlegmatic individual addressed.

'Be they gentlefolks, think thee ?' queried another.

'I dunno.'

'Guess not,' put in the first speaker; 'gentlefolks don't take up wi' the likes o' we !'

Madge's face darkened as the heavy footsteps went tramp, tramp along the road and died away. Re-entering the house, she glided noiselessly up the stairs and got to bed. Falling into a restless, fitful slumber, she dreamed that she was back in the dear old home which she had left behind her, far away in the wilds of Ballymoy!



CHAPTER III.

THE DUNRAVENS IN ENGLAND.



EANTIME Mr. Aldyn hurriedly pursued his way along the dusty lanes. His brow was knit, and

when he had reached home, given his horse to his waiting groom, and entered the Rectory where his wife awaited him, the traces of anger had not disappeared from his face. His wife, a tall, graceful woman of about fifty years of age, sat upon the sofa reading a book. When the door

opened and her husband entered the room, she gently let the book fall upon her lap, fixed a pair of glasses upon her nose, and looked at him.

'Is anything the matter, Aldyn?' she asked carelessly, noting his darkened face.

Mr. Aldyn sat down in his easy-chair and ran his fingers through his hair.

'The matter ?—yes,' he returned ; 'as I rode home to-night, what do you think I saw ?—Dunraven lying on his lawn, his man-servant playing on a tin fife, and that girl Madge dancing like a show-girl with a lot of Lord Rigby's labourers !'

The lady, raising her eyebrows, gave a supercilious smile.

'Really? If you remember, I anticipated something of the kind when you first brought them over. Those kind of people never do to dwell in civilised districts; you would have done better had you left them amongst the bogs !

'Nonsense, Ada! if they don't knowbetter they must be taught.'

Again that cynical smile.

'If you reserve the part of teacher to yourself, well and good, but I really don't see how even *you* can turn black to white.'

With this the lady resumed her reading, and her husband, quitting the room, shut himself up alone and sat down to think.

The Dunravens had only been six months in Armstead, yet already the rector had bitterly repented of his rashneas in bringing them over. He had done for them all that a man could do. He had not only taken the management of the Irish estate into his own hands, but he had secured good and fairly remunerative employment for Mr. Dunraven and Conn, and he had even gone so far as to interest himself in Madge to the extent of getting her daily tuition in a neighbouring school, in order that she might finish the very imperfect education which she had had at Ballymoy. Yes, his generosity had even surprised himself; and how, he asked himself, had he been repaid ? First his intentions respecting Madge had been coolly set aside by the girl herself, who had boldly set her face against attending a Protestant school, and, in defiance of his wishes in the matter, had gone, with Mr. Dunraven's consent, to receive daily tuition in a Roman Catholic convent which stood like a lonely ruin among the outlying village fields. Well, after all, Mr. Aldyn reflected, this disobedience was of no very great moment, and might be easily overlooked. The girl was nothing to him beyond the fact that

she hung on to the skirts of his relations. But it was quite another thing, and Mr. Aldyn thought that his good-nature had been decidedly imposed upon, when he found that those relations themselves were doing their best to drag him down into the mud. Mr. Aldyn was a proud man, and hitherto his position in the village had been a lofty one. He was the rector, and, excepting perhaps Lord Rigby, the richest and most important man in Armstead.

Of his antecedents no one knew a word; like a true Englishman, he lived secluded amongst his flock, giving no information, and asking none. He laid down hard and fast rules of life, to which he held. He was a staunch supporter of Church and State. He religiously upheld the game-laws, gave little away in charity, but paid his bills every quarter with praiseworthy punc-

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tuality. He believed in the distinction of classes; he had a great contempt for the lower orders, though, as in duty bound, he coldly attended them when necessary to the portals of the next world; but in his heart the golden calf was set up for worship, and he gave his devotion like the rest of mankind.

His indignation was great, therefore, when he saw that ere Mr. Dunraven had been many weeks in Armstead, he was hail-fellow-well-met with everybody, quite irrespective of social position; that, while taking his place amongst the 'gentry' and boldly avowing his kinship to the rector, he was not above familiarly slapping the rustics on the shoulder or drinking a glass of grog in the company of the small farmers who assembled in the cosy parlour of the inn! What was the rector to do? It was clear that if this sort of thing went on, he would soon be unable to hold up his head amongst his own congregation. He had remonstrated already; the scene which he had witnessed that night showed him only too plainly that his remonstrances had been vain.

Again the scene flashed vividly across his brain. He saw the ragged servant playing, Mr. Dunraven strolling aimlessly about the lawn, the gaping labourers nudging one another, and Madge, that brown evil spirit who seemed to be the very imp of misrule, dancing frantically like a gipsy on the grass !

For a moment his anger almost overcame him; he moved towards the door, half resolved to cast off the whole family and send them back to starve amongst the bogs.

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'No, no,' he murmured, pausing suddenly; 'I won't do that. Perhaps, after all, they may improve. I'll give them another chance, and try!'

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CHAPTER IV.

INTRODUCES A JUVENILE CYNIC.



GNORANT of the pangs of shame which her innocent evening's amusement had

caused the rector to endure, Madge went cheerfully to her lessons on the following day. By four o'clock her tasks were over, and she stood with her back towards the closed gate of the convent, shading her eyes with her bare hand, from the dazzling sunlight. The brightness of the day had not waned, but a sense of coming coolness was diffused through the heated air, and the sounds of labour seemed growing faint. How bright and beautiful everything looked ! even the grey old convent, covered with its ivy and soft moss, seemed revivified by the sweet kisses of the sun; the fields looked their greenest around the little old farms which were set here and there in the valleys; the fruitful orchards clustered, and the great oak and lime trees waved; the ponds and tarns lay placid, but the streams leapt brightly down the hill-sides and flowed through the fruitful valleys.

As Madge, leaving the convent, walked quietly along the road, and looked with dreamy eyes at the fair prospect around her, she thought that never, even in her most enraptured childish dreams, had she pictured anything so fair. What a change was it from the dreary landscape of Connemara! There were no ragged peasants here—no starving, half-clad children! It seemed to Madge a land of peace and plenty, such a place as she had often fancied heaven must be, when her childish imagination had taken a flight upwards as she had wandered amidst the dreary boglands of Ballymoy.

She had walked some little distance along the road when she came to a rough wooden stile which led into a field. She paused then, mounting on the first step of the stile, she sat down. She was not tired, but it was pleasant to linger there, with the thick hedge on either side of her and the green field behind, and to watch the sunrays twinkling across the valley, the evening mists gathering about the hollows of the deep meadows, and to listen in a strange dreamy way to the distant village sounds, the shouts and laughter of children, the heavy roll of waggons, and the tramp of horses' feet.

Madge had sat listening and looking on for some little time, when a sharp click and a merry ringing laugh made her start and look round. About a hundred yards from where she sat were two figures—one a lady seated on horseback, the other a gentleman who stood holding open a gate which led into the opposite field. The lady passed through the gateway, turned to wave her hand to the gentleman who raised his hat, tightened the reins of her horse, and cantered away.

The gentleman closed the gate, stood for a moment watching horse and rider, then he too turned, and walked slowly along the road towards the spot where Madge still lingered. For some time the hedge screened her, but presently his eye, which was carelessly roving about, met hers. He smiled and raised his hat again. As he did so, Madge stepped down from her stile and gave him her hand. She had recognised George Aldyn, the rector's only son.

'Don't disturb yourself,' he said, smiling pleasantly, and holding her hand in both of his. 'I like evening solitude as well as you. Sit down; I'll sit beside you.'

Madge shook her head.

'No, indeed; I am going home!'

'Ah !' he replied, smiling again (what a strange smile it was, she thought; halfcynical, half-curious, and wholly selfpossessed), 'you are not a philanthropist, I observe; you would have kept your seat if you could have had the stile all to yourself, but because I ask the half of it you throw it up; but never mind!

'Indeed,' answered Madge, looking puzzled, for there was something about the way in which this young man conducted himself which always puzzled and very often annoyed her, 'you can sit on the stile if you choose; it is nothing to me!'

Then she held out her hand and said good-bye.

'Wherefore good-bye?' asked her companion.

'Because I am going home,' said Madge, rather irritably; 'it is foolish to stand talking like this.'

'Then since you think me so foolish,' returned George Aldyn, 'you will perhaps object to my walking home with you, Miss Dunraven.' Madge looked puzzled again.

'Why should you walk home with me?' she asked.

He shook his head.

'Indeed, I cannot tell; but, incredible as it may seem to you, I came along here for that very purpose.'

'To meet me?

'Exactly; and you think me an ass for my pains, I see!'

Madge drew back her hand.

'It was kind of you to come,' she said; 'I am sorry if I have annoyed you;' and then she walked slowly along the road, and George Aldyn took his place at her side.

He was a tall, slim, gentlemanly young man of about three-and-twenty, not quite so handsome in the face as Conn, and a child to him in point of physical strength, but endowed with a good deal more natural grace and artificial polish of manner. When she had first seen him, Madge had been made painfully alive to her cousin's deficiencies, and she had heartily wished that Conn had been something like the rector's son. But she had soon ceased to wish that. Accustomed as she had always been to the buoyant, straightforward, headstrong manner of her Irish cousin, she was a good deal irritated and puzzled by the cynical bantering tone of this young Englishman. She was seldom comfortable while in his company, and when they separated they generally did so in irritation, if not in anger.

It was very good of him to come and meet her, Madge thought, but she would much rather he had stayed away. She was afraid to hazard any remark lest she should get a bantering reply, so she walked on in silence. Presently some magnetic influence made her turn her head, and their eyes met. He smiled.

'A sixpence for your thoughts,' he said, spinning the silver piece into the air and catching it again.

'I was wondering who that lady could be who left you in the road and cantered across the field.'

He laughed outright this time, and Madge's face grew dark.

'And I was wondering,' he said, 'how long your woman's curiosity would let you refrain from asking that very question;' then, as she remained silent, he added: 'Well, since you have seen her, I may as well tell you, Madge. That is the young lady my father means me to marry.'

'Means you to marry?' repeated Madge, more astonished than before.

'Exactly. My father, with that admi-

rable foresight which characterises all his actions in life, planned the match for me several years ago.'

'Why, I did not know that you were going to be married !'

'Did you not? well, you know it now; and some day you shall get a nearer view of the object of my—or rather of my father s —choice.'

'But if you are going to marry her she must be your choice. You are very fond of her, are you not?'

He smiled, shrugged his shoulders, and replied :

'She has a good many thousand pounds !' Madge's face flushed up.

'And you are going to marry her because of that ?'

'I did not say so; but naturally, if I marry the lady, the money will fall to my

share too! Why, Madge, you look angry; what is the matter?

'I am not angry,' said Madge, 'but I am sorry; I did not think you were quite so bad as that.'

Bad ?'

'I never imagined you would sell yourself.'

'Nor would I,' he returned indolently; 'say ten thousand pounds—pshaw! I believe if I were put up to auction, Madge, I should fetch at least twenty. But you are angry still; what *is* the matter ?'

'It is such a contemptible thing for a gentleman to marry for money!'

'Ah, that idea weighs upon you, and, I see, by no means operates in my favour; but let me assure you, my romantic little kinswoman, that, young as you are, you are sadly behind the age. Not marry for money? why, nobody does anything else now-a-days; the age of romance and all that sort of thing is past. Just as railways have supplanted the old stage-coaches, so money takes the place of love. You see I only conform to the prejudices of the age in which I live. A little sober affection is all very well in its way, but fancy how a fellow's constitution must suffer when he has to pass through all the stages of romantic passion-when his heart bounds, his nerves throb, his eyes burn, and all that sort of thing! Oh, I mean to go through my life tranquilly enough, and just you see if I don't develop into a fine, fat, placid man of forty !'

All this time Madge's dark, earnest eyes had been fixed upon his face as if she were endeavouring to read a puzzle. When he paused, she said quietly : 'You have not said anything about the lady yet; is she going to marry you for your money?'

'Certainly not,' he replied, lifting his hat for a moment and running his fingers through his hair. '*She* will marry *me* for love !'

'She admires you, then ?'

He just glanced at her and smiled again.

' I perceive there is a certain amount of malice in that question. Now do you conscientiously think she could know me and not admire me ?'

'Yes, of course I do,' returned Madge, promptly; 'I know you, but I do not admire you at all !'

He raised his brows and shrugged his shoulders, but his irritating good-humour did not desert him. 'And that's all the thanks I get for coming to meet you?'

'I did not ask you to come and meet me. I would much rather you had stayed away.'

'Well, that's frank, at any rate. Ah,' shaking his head, 'I am afraid the Irish have no gratitude.'

'At any rate, they have some heart,' returned Madge, excitedly. 'They are not cold and calculating like you English; they have genuine affections and kindly feelings. If an Irishman were starving, he would not sell his soul as you English would.'

He had touched the right chord at last. As he looked at the bright, beautiful, flashing face, his own lethargic features grew animated. He ceased his bantering tone and became more serious. 'And so you really think that I would sell my soul, Madge—if,' he added parenthetically, 'I really possess that little article.'

'I have only your word for it. If you choose to libel yourself it is no affair of mine.'

Her head was turned away now, and, hard as he stared at her, he could not draw her eyes to his face.

'Will you take my arm, Madge?'

'No, thank you!'

' Let me carry those books for you?' 'No.'

'Ah! I perceive I have offended you, as it is always my luck to do. Oh, Madge, I see you have an Irish heart; I fear you will have a stormy life.'

- 'I hope so.'
- 'What!'

'I do not wish to be an icicle. I would much rather have a stormy life than not be able to feel affection for anything on earth. I would not be like *you* for the world.'

By this time they had reached the great green gates which shut in the grounds surrounding the Rectory. Madge paused, for at that moment Mr. Aldyn drew up his horse close to where they stood. He shook hands with Madge, and asked, in a kind but condescending tone, how she got on with her studies. Madge answered glibly enough, and his eyes, wandering about her while she spoke, presently fell upon her ungloved hands.

'Have you no gloves?' he asked.

'Yes, indeed,' returned Madge, suddenly remembering that she wore none. 'I have them in my pocket.'

' Then why don't you put them on ?'

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'Indeed I don't know; I suppose I forgot. I seldom wore gloves when I was in Ballymoy.'

An ejaculation was on the tip of Mr. Aldyn's tongue, but he only frowned slightly and said :

'My dear child, you must try to forget what you did *there*. It is not the custom in England for a young lady in your position to walk about like one of the lower orders.'

Mr. Aldyn always spoke of the 'lower orders' as if they were quite beyond the pale of ordinary humanity. Madge pulled her gloves out of her pocket and began to draw them on, for she had noted at a sideglance that George Aldyn's hands were encased in black kid.

When she raised her eyes to his face, she found that he was smiling to him-



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self and curling his proud lip, so, wishing both the gentlemen 'good-night,' and refusing George Aldyn's escort farther, she walked away.

The last gleam of sunlight had faded from the meadows, and far away in the west the sun had sunk to rest in the glow of its own splendour. The mists of coming twilight gathered about the mountainpeaks, the air was cool, but myriads of insects floated before the girl's face. She walked on quickly across the fields, and soon reached her home. As she passed the kitchen-door she saw a beggar-woman crouched upon the ground, holding a baby in her arms. When she saw Madge she rose to her feet and shrank away; the next moment she boldly stepped forward and held forth her hand.

'One penny, my pretty lady,' she 8-2 said, 'to buy food for my little child.'

Madge felt in her pocket and found it empty.

'I have no money,' she said ; then, opening the kitchen door, she added : 'but go in, you can get some food.'

The woman looked startled. Was the girl joking? she thought, or was it merely a ruse to get her caught and handed over to the police for mendicancy? She was well initiated into her trade, and she knew the manners and customs of rural England. She had travelled the country for years, and she had never before even been invited to warm her half-frozen limbs by an Englishman's fire.

'Will you not go in ?' asked Madge, observing her hesitation. 'Biddy will give you some tea and bread if you are hungry. and I will ask my uncle for a sixpence for you, as I have not one.'

The woman looked at her again; this time she crossed the threshold. Biddy, who, as usual, was very dirty and very busy, placed a chair for her at the table; but Madge passed on into the parlour, where she found both Mr. Dunraven and Conn.

Madge got her sixpence, and after she had given it to the beggar-woman, who was quietly taking tea with Biddy in the kitchen, she returned to the parlour.

'What makes you so late, Madge?' asked Mr. Dunraven.

'I was talking to George Aldyn,' returned Madge, quietly taking her seat at the tea-table.

During the meal Madge was very quiet, and after it was over she rested her elbow on the table, her chin in her hand, and 118

began to think, wondering whether this same Englishman would always be a puzzle to her, or if she would some day be able to read his character aright.



CHAPTER V.

UP AT THE CASTLE.



HILE Madge and George Aldyn were discussing the pros and cons connected with a mer-

cenary marriage, the young lady who had unconsciously given rise to the discussion was making her way across the fields. She seemed to be in no hurry, however, for, after she had crossed the first meadow, she leaped her horse lightly over a low grassy bank, pulled up suddenly in the middle of the road, and throwing the reins loosely on the horse's neck, allowed him to walk quietly along, whilst she, resting her cheek on her hand, relapsed into a dream.

It was very pleasant on the highway, very cool and quiet. The road was dusty beneath her horse's feet, but the great green banks which shut in the meadows on either side were covered with dog-violets, speedwells, and primroses, and the intertwining boughs of the tall beech-trees formed a canopy for her head. Before her, across the white road, the sunrays fell and the shadows lay; the drowsy hum of bees, which hovered above the sweetscented banks, filled her ears with music, while the butterflies and blue moths floated thick in the air before her and settled about her dress.

She neither saw nor heard: there was a



look in her eyes and a quiet expression on her face which showed that her thoughts were far away, and that the present, with all its sunshine and beauty, was quite obliterated from her mind.

What a beautiful face it was! Every feature was perfect, from the soft, rounded chin to the broad white brow, smooth and delicate as marble. Her cheeks, usually pale, were now flushed with heat and exercise, and there was a tremor about her mouth and delicate pink nostrils. An ideal soul seemed now reflected in the girl's countenance.

A stumble of her horse, a faint sound of voices, recalled her to herself.

In a moment the whole look of the girl changed. She laughed a pretty but not very pleasant laugh, straightened her body, and threw up her head. Her lip curled slightly, and the light in her eyes grew cold. Gathering up her reins, she urged on the animal, and then drew up near an open gate, and looked over.

In the neighbouring field, a few yards from where she sat, were the figures whose voices she had heard. One she recognised as Lord Rigby's head-keeper, the other—no other, indeed, than Conn Dunraven—she never remembered to have seen before. Conn's right hand held the mane of a bigboned horse which stood beside him, his left was outstretched towards a shaggy greyhound which crouched at his feet.

'I tell you you are wrong,' he said decidedly; 'the dog never poaches; but the hare crossed his path, within an inch of his nose, and what could he do but run it? Poor old fellow, *he's* not to blame—he hasn't got into English ways yet. He

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generally had three good days a week when he was at Ballymoy, but he's never had a course since he left home.'

'It don't matter to me what the brute's been accustomed to,' returned the keeper, angrily and rather insolently; 'but I know what I've got to do, and I'll do it. A poacher's a poacher—it don't matter to me who he be; and if I can't keep 'em off the land, the law will, that's all.'

'Be civil now,' returned Conn, hotly, 'or you'll find your match, Mr. Keeper!'

'You'll have that dog shot!'

' I'll see you d----d first !'

'Very well then,' returned the keeper, doggedly, 'let me catch him on this land again, and I'm d-----d if I don't shoot the brute myself!'

Conn put his foot in the stirrup and mounted his horse.

'Harm that dog,' he said decidedly, 'and it will be the worst day's work you ever did. I'd put a bullet into the man that killed him.'

Touching his horse with his whip, he turned towards the open gate, near which the young lady sat on horseback, a calm spectator of the scene. At this unexpected apparition he started, then he lifted his slouch-hat, passed quietly by, and whistling up his dog, galloped quickly down the road and disappeared.

When the sound of his horse's hoofs had died away, the young lady turned to the keeper.

'What was it all about, Scott?' she asked.

The man lifted a dead hare from the grass, and touched his hat as he came forward.

'It's them confounded Irish, miss,' he said; 'the Lord only knows what they've been used to in their own country, for they don't seem to know how to behave like Christians now they're here. They calls themselves gentlefolks, I'll be bound; but *I* never saw a lady that roamed about the woods with nothin' on.'

'With nothing on-what do you mean ?'

'Well, next to nothin', begging your pardon, miss. She hadn't got a bit of shoe nor stocking on when I caught her in the plantation yesterday, making noise enough to frighten all the birds within half a mile of her; and now this young chap comes running his hound in the preserves. But it's the last time he'll hunt here, I can tell him. If he wants a shooting, why don't he rent 'it, as any decent gentleman would ?'

The girl laughed, and, nodding abruptly

to the keeper, touched her horse with the whip and cantered away.

She had gone about two miles when she suddenly pulled up again, this time before two great iron folding gates. A small, low-roofed lodge stood just within on one side, and as the hoofs of the lady's horse clattered up, a woman came out of the lodge, curtsied, and threw the gates wide. Entering, the lady trotted slowly up a broad avenue lined with tall beech-trees. and soon came within sight of a great, grey, battlemented building, faced by expansive lawns, and having for a background several well-stocked orchards and numberless outbuildings. The front entrance was approached by a flight of stone steps, on each side of which crouched a lion. A red flag waved from the towers, and caught the full rays of the setting sun.

At the foot of the steps the lady dismounted, and, as a groom led her horse away, she ran up the great stone steps and entered the house.

'His lordship was asking for you, miss,' said the footman, who held the door wide; 'he wants to see you before dinner.'

'Very well; where is he?'

'In the library.'

'Say that I will be with him immediately. Nay, never mind,' she added quickly, as she passed on. 'I will send Osborne.'

She ran upstairs, and rang to summon her maid. In a quarter of an hour she herself was standing before a great mirror, surveying herself from head to foot. She was dressed in a robe of spotless white, without ornament of any kind. Her glistening golden hair was coiled around her head, while here and there a stray tress lay upon her brow. Her grey eyes calmly surveyed the outlines of her slim figure, her soft white throat, full red lips and delicately-carved nostrils, then a look of thorough satisfaction stole over her face, and she smiled.

'That will do, Osborne,' she said, without even glancing over her shoulder; 'go and tell his lordship that I am at his service.'

In five minutes the maid returned, and the proud girl left the room, ran downstairs and entered the library. As she held back her hand to close the door gently behind her, her eyes swept the room in one comprehensive glance; then they settled upon the only inmate, a tall, thin, nervous-looking man, with a face white as alabaster. His eyes were small and cat-like, his nose high and thin. A white moustache covered his mouth, and his hair was of a light straw colour. He did not appear old, and his white skin was not marred by a single wrinkle.

As the girl entered he was tapping the floor impatiently with his foot.

'Where have you been, Rosamond ?' he asked, rather irritably.

'I have been riding, my lord,' returned the girl quietly, with a slight curl of the lip.

'Dear me, I know that. I learned that when I sent for you an hour ago. Why is it you are always riding when I want you ?'

' I was not aware that I was wanted.'

All this while the girl had not advanced a step; her hand was on the white and gold handle of the closed door, her eyes roaming carelessly about the room; but

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when Lord Rigby said in a fretful voice, 'Come here, Rosamond,' she crossed the room and sat down in the chair which he pointed out to her.

'I have had Aldyn here to-day,' he said, 'and we have been talking over that arrangement which was entered into three years ago. Dear me,' he added impatiently, 'I shall be glad when it is all over. You cause me a great deal of anxiety, Rosamond.'

He paused; but the girl said nothing, neither did she make a movement. Her half-closed fingers supported her chin, and her eyes still roved carelessly about the room.

'We were talking it over,' continued Lord Rigby, 'and I quite agree with Aldyn that it is about time the promise was fulfilled.'

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'What promise, my lord?'

'Why, Rosamond, how dull you are! Have you forgotten that you promised to become young Aldyn's wife?'

'Indeed, my lord, I don't think the young gentleman ever spoke to me upon the subject.'

Her companion looked at her as if he would like to shake her, but he was too well bred to lose his presence of mind even for a moment.

'You were fortunate in having your affairs arranged for you,' he continued quietly. 'It is a very good match for you, indeed; for what are you but a penniless girl, dependent upon me for all you will get? You always have been dependent upon me, and I have done my duty by you, Rosamond. You cannot deny that,

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though you are, and always have been, ungrateful!

The girl's proud lip curled.

'I have always obeyed you, my lord.'

'Obeyed me ? yes, you were obliged to do that; but after living with me for nineteen years, one would think you would have shown me something more than obedience. Rosamond, you are a heartless girl !'

Rosamond laughed outright, then she rose from her seat and walked a few steps towards the door.

'I beg your pardon, my lord,' she said, 'but I could not avoid laughing. You uttered a stale truism with such an air of originality that it quite amused me. I have given you my obedience all these years; I am willing to obey you still, even to the extent of marrying Mr. Aldyn, but if you ask for sentiment, I tell you frankly I have none to give; for that you come several years too late. But I have not heard what you wish to say to me,' she added; 'you sent for me, my lord, to discuss, I presume, my contemplated marriage? Well, as all the preliminaries are complete, I suppose the sooner I am disposed of the better ?'

Lord Rigby rose and bowed formally.

'You are perfectly right,' he said; 'the day you leave this house will be the happiest day of my life.'

'And I need not say anything more definite now? I may have a little time to reflect?'

'Certainly, but let the delay be as brief as possible. You are acquainted with my wishes; we need not discuss the subject again !

With another bow he resumed his seat,

while the girl, curtsying low, passed silently out of the room.

Without pausing in the hall she ran swiftly up the stairs, and locking herself in her room, sank silently into a chair which stood by the window, and gazed out upon the great green woodlands which surrounded the castle.

'I wonder *who* I am?' she murmured dreamily, tapping her fingers on her fair cheek. 'Had I ever father or mother, or did I grow, like Topsy in the tale? I know I am a dependent: Lord Rigby has taken care to remind me of that fact almost every day of my life. As if I were ever likely to forget it! as if I ever put a piece of bread in my mouth without thinking, "That is the bread of charity, that was bought, and is given, very grudgingly too, by a cold-blooded English lord!" The hypocrite! to come to me at the eleventh hour and ask for affection. I *have* none! If I had, if I was possessed of a heart like any other human being, I should not marry George Aldyn! I have no heart! he never spoke a truer word than that!'

And yet, if the truth must be told, there had been times when she herself had yearned for affection; when she had stood trembling before that cold, fretful, formal man, praying that he might stoop to kiss her; when she had held those icy fingers between her little hands, sobbing passionately; when her little heart had almost burst to see the cold looks which were cast down upon her. But her heart had been chilled since then. The icy temperature of her home had effectually frozen the fountains of love that had once bubbled up within her. 'I wonder what claim I have upon him?' she continued; 'he is not the man to feed and clothe me, and give me several thousand pounds of a fortune to boot, if I had not some claim. Can he be my father? Impossible! Well, I'll have it all out of him before I marry I'

Here the sound of the dinner-bell cut her meditations short. She rose, and without once looking in the mirror, passed down the stairs.



CHAPTER VI.

AMONG GREEN LANES.



HE next afternoon, as Madge was returning from the convent, she found the stile, where she had been accustomed to rest, occupied. George

Aldyn sat there. He looked at her calmly, as she advanced, and held a white handkerchief on high.

'A flag of truce,' he called out, as soon as she came within hearing; 'will you meet me half-way, Madge? or do you hold off and declare war to the knife?

Madge came quietly forward and held out her hand.

'Why have you come to meet me again to-day ?' she asked.

'Not for any stray compliments there might be floating about,' he returned; 'for I never find any in your neighbourhood, Madge.'

'I would not compliment you even if I thought of it: you have had too much flattery already.'

'How do you know?'

'Because you are so conceited.'

'I conceited ! preposterous ! Explain !'

'Indeed I shall not; you are too fond of talking about yourself; it is the only topic that interests you. Besides, I shall not linger talking to-day, the sky is growing so dark, it may rain before I reach home.'

So saying, she turned away, and her companion rose from his seat and strolled along by her side.

'Confess you were angry last night, Madge,' he said.

'I was not !'

'Then why did you banish me so peremptorily, and refuse me permission to see you home ?'

'Because there was no necessity for you to come when I had only a few yards to walk. It is stupid to think I cannot go about by myself. Why, in Ballymoy I used to roam miles across the mountains, and never get sight of a soul.'

'My dear child,' replied the young man, mimicking broadly his father's voice and manner, 'this is not Ballymoy. In *England*, young ladies in your position are not supposed to roam about gloveless and without protectors.'

Madge stole a look at him, but said nothing then. When she did speak, it was only to express a wish that she were at that moment in her Irish home.

'Why, Madge, I thought you liked England?' he said, suddenly abandoning his *blasé*, sarcastic tone.

'So I do. I was not thinking of the place, but the people.'

• 'Complimentary: do you know that I am one of them ?'

As the conversation was in danger of becoming personal again, Madge made no reply. She was in no mood that night either to take or give compliments, and the badinage of this conceited young man annoyed her more than usual. Perhaps he



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saw this, for when he spoke again he had assumed a more serious air.

'Don't you get on with the people, Madge?' he asked.

'No, I don't think we do; at least, we do not understand their ways. The life here is very different to that we led at home, and it will take a time before we get well used to it. It is very dull for Conn and my uncle, having no one to take a glass of grog with them of an evening, and the kitchen is always empty besides.'

'Would you have it full, Madge?'

'Yes, it was always full at home. The boys would drop in of an evening for a dance, and my uncle and Conn and I used sometimes to go out and dance too; but now people seldom cross our threshold, and if they do, some harm is sure to come of it. Why, only last night, after I left you, I found a poor beggar-woman at the kitchen-door. I told her to go in; Biddy gave her some tea, and Conn sent her sixpence. An hour after she was gone, Biddy missed the best table-cloth that had been lying rolled up on the dresser, as well as the knife and fork and spoon which were on the table when she took her tea.'

'You don't mean to say that you allowed a wandering beggar-woman to be alone in your kitchen ?'

'Yes, she was alone. It was while Biddy was in the parlour making tea for us that she went away with the things.'

After this announcement George Aldyn was affected with a prolonged fit of laughter.

'Verdict of "served you right!"' he exclaimed, as soon as he could speak.

'What do you mean?'

'That, with such temptation before her,

you had no right to expect that she would act in any other way.'

'No right? why, she had as much as ever she could eat, and a sixpence besides: why did she steal?'

'Doubtless, at first, because nobody gave to her, then it grew into a confirmed habit, and *now*, I suppose, she can no more help stealing than the sun can help shining. Depend upon it, Madge, if you begin harbouring beggars and letting them walk into your house without so much as "By your leave," you will soon find it empty !

'Surely they are not all like that!'

'Probably no, but the chances are, yes. There's no greater scamp walking the earth than your English tramp. It may be all very well in Ireland to practise indiscriminate hospitality and all that sort of thing, but depend upon it, it won't do here. Shut your doors against the whole race, and you'll be safe.'

'Shut a beggar out? I could never do that. Besides, that would be the way to make him steal.'

'Not at all: say rather it would keep him from the temptation of committing a crime.'

Madge made no reply, and for a time the two walked on in silence. Even now she could not make out whether her companion was jesting or in earnest; whether he really felt and meant all the cold and calculating things which he said, or whether he had in his own breast some extenuating pity for the faults of his poor countrymen. She would have liked him better, she said to herself, if he had defended them, instead of which he was harder upon them than she—she who might reasonably be supposed to have little sympathy with people of the Saxon race.

She did not understand that the life which they led in Ireland could not be practised here. Ever since she could remember, Shranamonragh Castle had been a refuge for the starving and destitute; any wandering beggar could rest his weary feet at their threshold, or entering in, allay the pangs of hunger and cold. Why should they not do so still? From the first, her uncle had seen no reason why, in changing his abode, he should alter his mode of life. What did it matter whether he was surrounded by the poverty-stricken bogs of Ballymoy or the succulent soil of England? Charity and good-fellowship were the same, he thought, all the world over, and he saw no reason why he should renounce these simply because he had cast

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his lines among people of a chiller, prouder. blood.

But very soon Madge began to observe that their own mode of life marked them out as glaring exceptions to an oldestablished rule—that English and Irish manners were two very different things, in fact. An Englishman's house was his 'castle:' beggars were never harboured about his door, nor were shivering outcasts allowed to take refuge by his kitchen fire. Those were things which were quite inconsistent with English prejudices.

Not even the rector broke through the rule; and now here was his son, even at the age of three-and-twenty, denouncing the very principles of Christianity which in less than another year he would stand in the pulpit and uphold.

Charity and benevolence seemed to be

unknown in Armstead; it was all a scramble for self. When a man was once possessed of a comfortable homestead, he saw no reason why he should impoverish himself by sharing it with homeless outcasts, who might have been in the same happy position had fickle fate not willed it otherwise.

All this Madge had not yet learned; it was only beginning to dawn upon her, but already it checked her keen enjoyment of the natural beauties which spread enchantingly everywhere around.

The sun had nearly sunk to rest; ominous shadows darkened the landscape; a chilly wind swept across the skies, drifting up from the west banks of cloud heavily surcharged with rain. The trees seemed to rustle their branches and groan beneath some heavy invisible load. In the valley before them lay the village, like

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a bird with folded wings, and the church spire pointed like a finger to a bar of sable broken clouds which gathered just above.

It was as if a heavy weight hung above the earth. Woods and waters seemed agitated; cattle ran madly about the fields or stood beneath the trees, lowing softly; the sheep, pent up in their folds, huddled close together and bleated; even the birds, with ruffled feathers and folded wings, crept into the thickest part of the hedges and branches, as if for shelter.

For a time Madge had forgotten the approaching storm: she noted the signs now, and quickened her steps.

' I shall not reach home before the rain comes on,' she said.

George Aldyn took her hand and drew it on his arm.

'We will turn down this road, Madge, and then one short cut across the fields will bring us to your door.'

The road was narrow, just broad enough for the tree branches to touch overhead; a tall hedge shut them in on either side, pressing so closely upon them that Madge had sometimes to push away the protruding foliage with her hand. She clung close to her companion's arm.

'I do not like to hear you talk like that,' she said presently.

'Like what, Madge ?'

'Like you did just now. Surely on such a night as *this* is going to be, you would not turn a beggar from your door.'

The young man laughed lightly.

'How earnest you are, Madge! Do you want to solve the problem of life and regenerate the world? because if you do, you'll simply be a martyr—a little speck swallowed up in the great abyss of human woes. Christian charity is all very well theoretically, but practically it won't do; let every man take care of himself, and the devil take the hindmost !'

'That is a very bad principle!'

'Perhaps; but those who practise it get on, as we see every day of our lives. Contract an affection, it will only become an additional source of pain; and you yourself discovered only last night how charity is rewarded.'

'The woman stole—you said yourself she could not help it. Should we make others suffer for what she did?'

He shrugged his shoulders.

'Treat every man as a scamp till you know him to be an honest man; keep your doors well secured; bank your money; go regularly to church; look after your own interests in life, and you'll do.'

A rustle in the hedge, a movement close to her feet, made Madge start. Turning quickly, she encountered a pair of eyes.

Crouched upon the ground, close up beneath the hedge, was a man weary and travel-stained. His boots were dusty and very old, his clothes were rent and darned; a bundle and a stick lay on the road beside him; he was gnawing at a crust of dry bread. He returned the looks of Madge and George Aldyn with a sullen, halfinsolent stare.

'About what o'clock might it be?' he asked, in a forced rather unnatural voice.

'A quarter to five,' returned George Aldyn, taking out a great gold huntingwatch and springing open the lid. 'What are you doing here ?' he asked, snapping it to again and returning it to his pocket.

'A man can rest on the king's highway,' returned the other. 'I've been on the tramp since dawn. I'm making my way to Armstead.'

'I would advise you to push on then; this premature darkness means thunder and rain; every honest man ought to be at home to-night!'

'And what about the others?' asked the man, with a sly sidelong look into the young man's face.

'They? Oh, I suppose the devil will take care of them !'

He put his finger and thumb into his waistcoat pocket, drew out a shilling and tossed it to the man; then he took possession of Madge's hand again, and the two walked swiftly away. 'Since you do not believe in charity why did you give the man that money?' asked Madge.

'Because I had no particular use for it, and he looked as if he would have. He hadn't the grace to thank me for it, however; and if I were to take him into the house and feed him, he would probably reward me by stealing anything that came in his way !'

He paused, opened a great white gate which at this point divided the hedge, and the two left the road and followed a narrow footpath across the field. In two minutes more Madge stood with her companion on the threshold of her home. They were none too soon. There was a moaning and rustling in the air; a heavy torrent of rain fell upon wood and water; a flash, vivid and dazzling, parted like a fiery brand the gathered bank of cloud, a crash loud and deep followed.

'Come in, come in !' said Madge, and George Aldyn, pushing her across the threshold, followed her into the house.

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CHAPTER VII.

ENGLISH HOSPITALITY.



HE fiery tongue of light seemed to cut the heavens in two. It illuminated the roofs of church

and dwelling, now dripping with the heavy downpour of rain; it quivered across rivers, lakes, and fields; it flashed its deadly flame into the eyes of a man, almost the only one abroad that night.

The approaching storm had been noted, and the villagers had fled. Some had sought refuge in their homes, others had withdrawn into cowsheds or such places as were safe and afforded shelter, while others had repaired to the inn, and were enjoying the cosy brightness of the parlour when the rain began to pour upon the roof.

But the man, into whose eyes the lightning flashed, crouched still beneath the hedge where Madge and George Aldyn had left him. He did not gnaw his crust now; it was gone. The shilling which George had thrown him was safe in his pocket; he had drawn his bundle and stick nearer to his side, but he did not attempt to move.

""All honest men ought to be at home to-night," 'he murmured, glancing in the direction which George and Madge had taken. 'You were right, my fine swell; but I wonder how many rogues are safely housed down there?... Who could he be, I wonder? Never saw his face before, to my knowledge; there was something about him that seemed to call up to my mind that old rogue Aldyn the vicar. The cold-blooded, hard-hearted devil!

The lightning flashed into his eyes, and almost blinded him; the heavy rain fell like a torrent upon his threadbare coat; the thunder pealed loud above him. For a moment he veiled with his hand his dazzled half-blinded eyes, then, as the light quivered and faded, leaving the prospect dank and blackened by the heavy streams of rain, he thrust himself farther under the hedge, in the hope of finding shelter. But the heavy raindrops penetrated the thick hedge and soaked his skin; the dusty road was already thick with 158

brown mud; every rustle of the boughs shook down an additional shower. Still, there was no better shelter nigh, and to make his way now towards the village would be madness. So he drew up his knees, crept closer beneath the rain-sodden hedge, while the water ran in a stream around him from the turned-down brim of his old felt hat.

'It's just like my luck,' he muttered. 'The weather could keep fine for five or six weeks at a stretch when I was in quod, but because I'm out, thunder and rain comes on. It's not enough for a poor devil to be homeless and a beggar, but he must be beaten down with bad weather besides. It's a bad thing for a man to be poor in England; he might just as well be a criminal, for that matter. It was because I hadn't a penny that the girl at the farmhouse set the dogs at me this morning; not because she saw my cropped head, and knew I'd just come out of gaol.'

The heaviest rain had ceased, and the air seemed growing brighter. Several vivid flashes had followed the first, but now they too had faded, and the thunder could now be heard faintly crashing afar off. The air was cooler, it seemed cleansed and purified. A thin mist fell, veiling the earth in a mantle of gossamer. The man rolled up his frayed trousers, unfastened a piece of rag which was tied round his right leg just above the ankle, and disclosed a jagged wound.

'Curse the dog!' he muttered; 'the brute had sharp teeth and no mistake: the wound's deep.'

The rag which he had removed was

saturated with dark blood; he threw it aside. Then he tore a strip off the handkerchief which held his small store, moistened it with the cool, fresh raindrops which still fell from the hedge, and bound it round his leg. Then he scrambled to his feet, and, taking his stick in one hand and his bundle in the other, limped slowly along the road.

'Lord Almighty!' he muttered, 'I'm not the man I was. Three years of prison fare and prison work have told on me, and two nights in the open air don't seem to have done me much good. I wonder who'll give me a lodging to-night? P'r'aps I'll have to sleep under one o' them damp hedges, unless I make my way to the castle yonder and get the protection of his lordship. Ha, ha, ha! it would be quite a pleasant surprise for him, seein' *me* ! Don't think he'd get over much sleep after it though. Ah well, I've got a shilling in my pocket to-night—thanks to my fine young swell, whoever he be—and if the very worst happens and I have to camp out, why I can get a glass of grog to warm me.'

Muttering thus, he limped slowly along the road towards Armstead. His tall, thin, angular frame was beginning to shiver and shrink from the clammy touch of the garments which clung about him, and upon which still fell some glittering drops of rain. His cheeks were sunken, and his eyes stared leadenly from beneath his heavy, square brow; he looked fitfully on either hand, but presently he concentrated his dull gaze upon the village.

Although the storm had abated, premature darkness had come on, and the falling

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rain glimmered in the air like starlit dew. Already he saw faint gleams of light issuing from beneath the slated eaves of the houses and troubling the dreary prospect without.

Before entering the village, the man sat down to rest himself again upon the roadside, and, pushing back his hat, drew the wet sleeve of his coat across his forehead.

'I hope to God they won't refuse me shelter to-night,' he muttered, 'for I'm well-nigh beat. I was always neighbourly with them, and never did *them* any harm. I'll give my last shilling for a stretch by some fire. I'm used to hard beds, but I'm almost past bearing much now.'

He rose once more to his feet, and, still leaning on his stick, with a slouching, limping gait, entered the village.

No one seemed abroad; the lanes and

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narrow streets were almost as deserted as the wide-spreading fields: now and then a labourer appeared hastening home. his clothes drenched, his hat pulled low down upon his head, emitting a thin stream of water from the brim. He answered the "good-night" that was given him, and, without further parley, passed on. A small row of houses stood now on the man's right hand, poor two-storied buildings inhabited by the men who tilled Lord Rigby's land. Would he knock at one of the doors? It seemed not: he hesitated. and as he did so he heard a footstep behind him. The figure of a man approached and paused on the door-step of one of the dwellings. Our traveller addressed him.

'Can you tell me where I might get a night's lodging, neighbour ?'

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' Noa.'

Ere he made the request, our traveller had a faint hope that the person addressed might probably have the humanity to offer him shelter for the night. But the reply was short, sharp and decisive, and quelled the hope at one word.

There was a pause, during which the two men regarded each other.

'I haven't a place to rest in, friend; I'm cold and drenched to the skin.'

'Be you a beggar?'

A slight movement of the head gave assent.

'I'm lame and almost dead beat. I've been on the tramp since dawn.'

'And on the treadmill, too, I reckon,' returned the man. 'Likely you'll find some old barn about that you can lay in; you'd better be off out of this. Honest folks don't like such as you to hang about their doors.'

He lifted the latch, entered the house and closed the door behind him. In doing so he addressed some one inside.

'Be the boys in, Milly? then I'll just shoot the bolt. There be queerish people hanging about the roads to-night, and tain't safe to leave the fastenings out. Just put the ketch in the winder and push to the shutters. That'll do; we're safe anyhow.'

If this speech was intended to reach the ears of the traveller it served its end. He stood for a moment, then limped on.

Three doors from the one which the man had entered he paused again. An uncurtained window was before him; he peeped in. He saw a bright, clean kitchen with sanded floor, and shining plates smiling from the dresser against the wall. Beside a well-swept hearth sat a woman nursing a child; several other little ones clustered around her, while a girl of more advanced years was moving about preparing supper. They were speaking: the man pressed his ear close against the window-pane and listened.

'Pest upon thy father for stopping out so late. Look out, Betty, and see if thou canst see him comin'.'

The girl opened the door and looked out. She gave a start—a scream.

'What is to do now?'

'Tis a beggar man, mother!'

'A beggar at this hour? Shut the door!'

But the beggar had his stick in the doorway, and the behest could not be obeyed.

'I'm seekin' a night's lodging, mistress,' he said. 'I've been on the tramp since dawn, and I'm well-nigh beat. I'm soaked with the rain; only let me lie beside your kitchen fire to-night, and I'll give you a shilling-the last shilling I've got-and I'll go away and beg my breakfast in the morning !'

'This ain't a lodging-house,' returned the woman; 'be off, or I'll call up my good man-he's only upstairs washing hisself. Ezekiel! Ezekiel!' she called at the top of her voice.

'Don't turn me away, mistress; 'tis a cold wet night abroad. Only let me rest here to-night; I'll go away before dawn.'

'I'll be bound you will, and take what vou can lay your hand on beside! Be off-be off, I tell you! Ezekiel! Ezekiel! smiling from the dresser against the wall. Beside a well-swept hearth sat a woman nursing a child; several other little ones clustered around her, while a girl of more advanced years was moving about preparing supper. They were speaking: the man pressed his ear close against the window-pane and listened.

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But the man was desperate; the cold wild rain beating down upon him, the dreary stretch of country around, made him long for warmth and shelter.

'I'm no thief — I don't want to steal from you, so help me God! I only want a night's lodging, and,' he added, like a man who is reduced to his utmost extremity, 'I never did you any harm, mistress. Don't you know me?—I'm Matthew Dalton!'

The woman started, and stared in the direction whence the voice proceeded. Had the man proclaimed himself a murderer, she would not have started more.

'Mat Dalton come *here* again!' she exclaimed. 'Him that led my poor boys into trouble, that well-nigh got 'em into gaol, come sneaking back to make more mischief, I'll be bound. Be off! be off! or I'll call them that'll make ye !'

The stick was removed, the door slammed to, the bolts fastened, the shutters shut, and the man stood again alone.

The rain had now almost ceased to fall, but daylight had faded into evening grey. Masses of broken cloud drifted tumultuously across the heavens. Now and then a star, slipping from the troubled masses of rain-charged vapour, shot silently down upon the earth.

The man sat upon the doorstep and shivered, for the wind, creeping stealthily down the narrow lanes, pressed upon his shrinking frame clothes still heavy with the recent rain. One by one the lights began to glimmer around him, sending forth their comforting rays into the comfortless night. The curtained windows glowed a deep crimson; shadows moved hither and thither upon the blinds; doors were locked and bolted; all seemed comfortably housed—but one. He sat for a moment bewildered; a sharp twinge of pain recalled him to himself. He rolled up his trouser again and undid the bandage from his leg; the blood was flowing freely; the sight of it almost made him faint.

'It's the tramping and starvation that's done it,' he moaned. 'If I sleep out tonight, it'll kill me, and what's a poor wretch to do? Devils! they'll all turn on me now, I see. When a man's down, kick him — that's what they say here! It seemed like coming home when I was on the tramp, but now every door is shut against me; and what have I done? worked the treadmill for two years for giving a blow or two to a blackguard that tried to strangle me! Well, I can't go much farther to-night. I'll have a glass of grog at the inn, and then—a night under a wet hedge, and perhaps death in the morning !

He bound up his leg again and hobbled on, leaning heavily on his stick; for he was footsore, and his keen eyes began to stare like those of a famished wolf. He had had his punishment; been hunted like any other animal. 'Surely it was over,' he said to himself as he drew near to the inn.

He peeped in at the window; the room was pretty well filled. Small farmers and farm labourers surrounded the table, drinking from pewter pots and discussing the state of the crops between whiles, but —what was that? The man started, his hands grew icy cold, his legs trembled under him. He had fixed his wild eyes upon one figure in the room; a man who stood bolt upright facing the window. The very man upon whom his blows had fallen two years ago, the very man through whose malicious evidence he had spent two long years on the treadmill. Scott, the head gamekeeper on Lord Rigby's land.

Instinctively the man shrank back, trembling in every limb; starvation and persecution had done much for him, for at heart he was not a coward. In two minutes he had recovered himself; walking forward he crossed the threshold and entered the room.

He slunk in, dropped on to the nearest

bench, and turned half away from the eyes of the company. A few looked straight at him; others lifted their jugs to their lips and stared at him over the brim with a soulless bovine stare; but the brim of his hat was turned down and partly concealed his features. He rapped on the table:

'A pint of porter and some bread and cheese,' he said. 'Hasten, mistress, for I'm almost starved!'

He was conscious of a start among the company, and, although he could not see, he felt the fierce black eyes of the keeper burning upon him. What had he to fear? Nothing. Were it not that he was starving, weary with travel and sick with cold, he would fearlessly have looked them all in the face. His infirmities made him shrink away cowed.

' Matthew Dalton !'

He started, shrank for a moment, then pushing up his hat, stared at the man with some of his old defiance in his look.

'And if I am Matthew Dalton, what then?'

The keeper but wanted his suspicions confirmed. He strode across the room with clenched fist and set teeth; it seemed as if he would have struck him, but he forbore.

'Get out of this!' he said. But the man kept his seat and stared defiantly back. 'Do you hear?'

'Yes, I hear. Lay a hand on me, my man, and you'll be hauled to gaol this time. I'm a free man !'

The keeper clenched his teeth.

' I'll settle off my score yet. By God, I won't bear your mark for nothing!'

A movement of his hand swept off the

other's hat. Dalton's eyes flashed fire, his square jaw set, he half raised his hand to strike the keeper; a moment's reflection, however, assured him it would be madness. Quivering with rage and exhaustion, he shrank back. Hitherto the other occupants of the room had been silent: the sight of Dalton's bare head seemed to bring out the conversational powers of one, at least.

'Why, I'm blowed if his head bean't shaved just as clean as the rind of a Dutch cheese !

A general laugh followed.

Were the men going to befriend their old comrade? The wretched man looked helplessly around. One or two men he recognised as those who had narrowly escaped sharing his prison-bed. These men had been hob and nob with him 176

before; now, in answer to his looks of entreaty, they turned away. Might is right everywhere: to hold in with the strong seems the way of the world, and these men were no better than their neighbours. They knew they had once been friendly with the man, but that was in the wild days of their folly. Two years had passed since then, and while the victim of the village riots had been working the treadmill, the village had grown more peaceable, and his confederates had developed into virtuous married men.

'Get out o' this, measter; we don't harbour no tramps here,' was the verdict uttered by several mouths.

But with opposition such as this, the dogged nature of the man asserted itself.

'I've as good a right to sit here as any one of you,' he said, and kept his seat. The altercation sent a flush to his sunken cheek, but it did not stay the gnawing at his heart. Many hours had elapsed since he had tasted food, even so much as a dry crust of bread, and hunger was beginning to tell upon him. The girl returned with his bread and cheese and beer; he seized the jug with eager, trembling hands, and half raised it to his lips: the next moment the jug lay on the floor, its contents staining the white sand.

'Get out o' this! d'ye hear ?---quick, or you'll repent it !'

The man did not glare defiantly now, hunger had tamed him: he held out his trembling hands as if to shield himself, and whimpered like a child:

'Let me eat the bread, and I'll go. I've only had a dry crust these four-and-twenty hours, and I'm spent with hunger. I don't

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want to stop here — I'll sleep in the fields; but I can't starve, mates — I can't starve !'

As well might he have spoken to the dead. The vindictive face of the keeper fell darkly upon him. He appealed to the men.

'Look here, mates, if the gaol-bird won't go, turn him out—that's the way. Now, then, be off! be off!

The man saw that further remonstrance was useless; but in his desperation he clenched his fist and set his teeth, glaring at his old comrades with wild, hungry eyes like a hunted animal at bay.

'By God, I'll remember this! Beasts! to kick a poor devil when he's down. You know I'm starving: I don't want you to give me bread, but you won't even let me eat. Our day of reckoning 'll come,



Master Keeper; as sure as there's a God in heaven, you shall pay for this!'

The men had risen from their seats, and pressed upon him : the keeper held him as if he would choke the words in his throat. The man staggered to his feet, seized his stick and bundle; the next moment he lay flat upon his face before the closed door of the inn.

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CHAPTER VIII.

THE DUNRAVENS TO THE RESCUE.



OR a time he lay dazed and half stunned; then he lifted his head, and, gathering himself together, gradually rose from the ground. He sat down upon the doorstep and pulled off his boots. They were full of holes, and pressed hard upon his tender feet.

He stuffed the articles forming his bundle into his pockets, tore the handkerchief in two, and bound one half around either foot before he resumed his shoes again. That was better; he limped horribly, for his feet were blistered; still, he could manage to crawl along. The blood from the wound in his leg was now soaking through his trouser; he had no rag to stanch it, and it must flow.

The hunger was the worst; with the loss of blood and want of food he was beginning to feel quite faint. And he had not a crust left. His shilling was like so much dross; they would not even *sell* him bread. To seek food again would be useless: every door was locked against him, and his like, to-night.

Where to go? what to do?—he did not ask himself the questions. All around him were comfortable homesteads, every door of which was closed against him. Beyond, again, stretched fields and woods, wet, it is true, with the rain, but affording solitude and protection. Nay, he could not even enter those, for if he slept, and were found there, he would be driven off with wild imprecations as a tramp, and probably sent back to gaol as a trespasser. There was the king's highway, that was all. The hard road, and probably, the wet hedge to cover him.

It was growing towards the end of July, but the night was long and clear. The darkness of the storm had now quite worn away; every cloud had drifted past, and the church spire pointed now to a vault of evening-grey which stretched for miles around. Beyond the peak of a distant hill rose the moon, silver-bright and crystalclear, sailing softly on her cloudless course, and pouring her white rays in a flood upon the village roofs and rain-sodden fields.

Everything was clearly distinguishable for miles around: the cows in the meadows, the sheep in the folds, and the man, more homeless and destitute than they, dragging his weary blistered feet along the road.

He had left the inn far behind him, and stood now upon the main thoroughfare which led through Armstead. He had thought to turn aside, to seek the protection of a by-lane, and die, if necessary, in a ditch, but alone. Yet now he felt that his feet would go no farther, and he sank down to rest. The gnawing at his heart grew worse; he felt his leg, it was drenched with blood; a faintness overcame him, he leaned his head against the hedge which ran along the roadside, and closed his eyes. Sleep came to him at last.

An hour passed, he was sleeping fitfully; but it seemed that overmuch of this blessing, which was given even to the beasts of the field, was to be denied to him. A shout, long and loud, pealed through the air : he awoke, and started up in terror ; a loud uproarious peal of laughter roused his slumbering faculties, then came a few lines of a song.

The wretched man began to tremble in every limb; the inn had emptied its parlours, and the bacchanalians were close upon him. Quite a crowd of figures, reeling, stumbling, and plunging: to run before them would be madness; he crept close into the hedge, hoping to remain unseen as they passed by.

And so indeed he might; the ale had

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affected their vision as well as their legs. But there was one amongst them whose perception was keener than the rest. The men came in a crowd along the road; some of them had already passed the wretched, shivering creature, when suddenly he felt that a pair of eyes had found him.

They were those of the keeper. He, too, had imbibed more than was good for him; his passions seemed even less under his control than they had been before. He gave a kick at the figure crouching by the moonlit road.

'Move on ! we don't harbour tramps about our village.'

The drunken men staggered back and stared at the wretched creature.

'Ha, ha, ha ! why, if it bean't the gaolbird !' 'The bed's over-hard for him; help him on, mates,' said the keeper.

'Let me alone, let me alone !' cried the man; 'I haven't got a place to rest my bones in; I can't move on !'

A wild burst of laughter followed; a great stone whizzed passed his cheek, and went right through the hedge behind him. He scrambled to his feet, and limped a few paces away; the drunken clowns laughed again, and, urged on by the keeper, pressed forward and drove the trembling wretch along.

His wild, ragged appearance and cries for mercy seemed only to rouse their brutality, and they still hooted him on. Some one threw another stone, it missed again; but a shower of missiles followed, and he was struck several sharp blows.

'Devils !' he shrieked, ' let me alone !'

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His skeleton hands clenched again, his teeth gnashed, and his wild eyes glared with rage.

In his desperation he faced his pursuers, and called again for mercy.

'Hold off, I say! I never harmed one of you;' then, fixing his burning eyes upon the keeper, he cried: 'Hell seize you for this! As sure as I live through this night, I'll hang for you !'

Another stone, coming from he knew not where, struck him on the shoulder.

'We don't want no tramps; move on !'

Wild faces pressed upon him; seized with a sudden panic, he screamed aloud, and fled. Whither he knew not: the prospect seemed swimming before him, he heard the footsteps of those behind staggering on his track. Showers of stones were shed around him: some struck him, others fell harmless at his feet. Some superhuman hand upheld him, but he felt that he must soon fall.

In his wild terror he stared around him. He was nearing a house which stood on a lawn a few yards from the road. The small white gate which led to it was open; it seemed to offer protection; he rushed in.

'God help me!' he shrieked, holding out his hands as if to keep his pursuers at bay. 'Don't let them kill me! don't let them stone me! Help! help! help!

His voice shrieked, trembled, and died. It sounded across meadows, hills, and woods; it ascended to the sky.

For a moment the ruffians paused outside the gate; then, with the blind impulse of drunken brutality, they rushed again upon the man. Just as they did so, another voice, answering his cry, called out in terror:

'Oh, uncle! Conn, Conn, come here!'

Immediately the house-door flew open, a figure with white hair, looking wild and fantastic in the moonlight, ran swiftly across the lawn, seized up the stick which the hunted man had let fall upon the grass, and leapt right into the midst of the crowd. Once there, he laid about him with veritable fury, while the men, utterly staggered by the sudden attack, uttered frantic yells of wonder.

'Out with ye, out with ye!' he cried, using in his excitement a strong Irish brogue; 'or I'll bate your brains to a jelly. Take *that*, and *that* ! I'll lave my mark on every mother's son !'

The blows which descended as he spoke proved that his threats were not idle words. The crowd retreated in helpless terror, and in two minutes the lawn was almost cleared. Suddenly the keeper, his ill-favoured face rendered even more forbidding by ungovernable anger, came up quietly behind the old man and raised his clenched fist as if to strike him down. Before he could do so, however, he received a blow which felled him to the ground.

'Hurroo!' cried a voice from the threshold of the house; 'down wid him, Master Conn.'

Rising to his feet, the infuriated keeper found himself face to face with his assailant.

'It's you, is it?' he hissed, as he recognised Conn. Then he seemed preparing for a spring, but glancing around he saw the lawn deserted, and Mr. Dunraven standing at the gate wildly waving his stick.

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'Unless you want a good hiding you'd better get out of this,' said Conn, quietly; 'but perhaps you've had enough.'

'Hurroo for Ireland!' cried the voice of Andy Brady.

With a strong effort the keeper controlled his passion, and turned to go away.

'It's like you to harbour gaol-birds,' he said; 'you've the best of it this time, but I shan't forget.'

Conn only laughed and turned to his father, who came up laughing and wiping his brow with his pocket-handkerchief. With many angry murmurs and oaths, the crowd outside the gate, now joined by the keeper, moved slowly away.

'Faith, 'twas as good as a fair!' said Andy Brady, gazing with looks of undisguised admiration at the figures of Mr. Dunraven and his son. 'If the mashter could now and then get a few turns at the stick, Mistress Bridget, 'twould remind him of old times, God bless him! and do him a power o' good.'

'Troth, an' I think you're right, Andy,' answered Biddy quietly, smiling. 'It's but a poor, dull life he's had to lead since he came over here, and not one that's fit for a merry gentleman like himself. It's my opinion he'll never be the gentleman he was till we leave England altogether and settle down again in Ballymoy.'



CHAPTER IX.

COMFORTABLE QUARTERS.



EANTIME they had almost forgotten the man.

Madge was the first to remember, and then the whole party gathered in a semicircle about him. He sat upon the grass, his thin hands clasped around his legs, his chin resting upon his knees, his whole body quivering and shaking as if with cold. When the little party collected around him, he turned to them

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a face ghastly and terrified. Ere any one could address him, he spoke eagerly, as if to justify himself before his judges, rubbing his hand meanwhile across a cut in his temple which one of the stones had made.

'I never did them any harm, d—n them!' he said; 'but they hunted me because I'm weak and sick. Don't you turn me out,' he cried, with sudden energy; 'I've slept under a hedge many a time before, but I couldn't do it to-night; I should die!'

'I don't mean to turn you out, my man,' said Mr. Dunraven, kindly. 'Thank God, we've got a roof to shelter you; come in !'

The man scrambled to his feet, staggered, and fell against the gate.

'They've taken pretty nigh all the

strength out of me,' he exclaimed, with a low, hysterical laugh. 'Ah, yes, I'm almost done !'

'Why, you're not able to walk to the house,' said Conn; 'lean on me!' He wound his strong arms around the man's body and assisted him into the dwelling.

Although it was summer-time, a bright fire burnt in the grate, for the evening had been damp and chilly. The ruddy glow which played cheerfully upon the oaken doors, and sent forth lights and shadows to the very threshold of the house, seemed to act as a lure to the wretched man's. feet. Still leaning upon Conn, he entered. the room and sank down shivering upon the hearth.

'Bring hot water and glasses, Biddy, quick !' commanded Mr. Dunraven; for as the warmth of the fire touched the garments of the man, the steam which arose from them enveloped him in a mantle of mist. A glass of hot whisky-and-water was put into his hand; he stared at the giver, then drank it off in one draught, and began to eat the bread which was given to him. His cheek flushed, his eye began to brighten; he looked at each face in turn, then gloomily turned away.

'Do you live in this village?' asked Conn, leaning forward, resting his elbow on his knee, and looking carelessly at the man.

' No-yes-I did live here-once!'

'You've got relations here, then ?'

The man started violently; glanced keenly into Conn's face, and then sank down sullenly in his place again.

'I didn't say I had !'

'George Aldyn said he was a beggar,' whispered Madge. 'I passed him on the road this afternoon.'

Mr. Dunraven still sat looking steadily at the man; he did not well know what to make of him. Of one thing only he felt certain: if the man were homeless, *he* would never turn him away.

' I thought you said you had no home?' queried Mr. Dunraven.

'No more I have, God help me!' he cried, with sudden energy; 'if you turn me off I shall have to sleep in the fields. I've been on the tramp for three days; I've had to sleep in barns and cow-houses, and I'm done up with rheumatism. I used to be a strong man once, but this work is finishing me off I'

'Well,' said Mr. Dunraven, 'you've got a good roof to shelter you to-night, anyhow; and the sooner you're into bed the better, for you're shivering, I see, and you're soaked to the skin. Madge darling, go and tell Biddy to make up a bed by the kitchen fire—'twill be warmer there than anywhere else; and if he has anything to tell, it will keep till the morning !'

Madge immediately withdrew to the kitchen, where she helped Biddy to prepare a bed for the outcast. When all was ready, and Conn had assisted him to the kitchen, Andy produced a bowl of warm water and washed his blistered feet, while Biddy herself carefully wiped the blood-stains from his face. Five minutes later he lay in the bed wrapped in a heavy slumber.

Then, as it was past ten o'clock, and in order that the man might not be disturbed,

the two servants went to bed, Biddy giving into Madge's hands the drenched coat and waistcoat to hang before the parlour fire when they should all have gone to rest. Mr. Dunraven and his children returned to the parlour. He and his son took an easy-chair each, while Madge sat down between them and put her hand on her uncle's knee.

'You say you saw him before, Madge ?'

'Yes, uncle, when I was walking home from school with George Aldyn. George gave him a shilling, and said——.'

'What ?'

'That that was the only way to be charitable here—that men of that class, if you took them into your house, always repaid you by robbing you !'

'I am afraid George Aldyn makes his

theories suit his inclination, Madge,' said Mr. Dunraven.

Conn shrugged his shoulders and sneered :

'George Aldyn is a conceited fool,' he said; 'the fellow affects fine gentlemanly airs, and has no more manliness about him than a puppy dog! Don't quote what *he* says as gospel, Madge.'

Conn rose, and both he and his father took their bed candles. Madge wished them good-night; when they were gone she put more coal on the fire, and spread out before it the soaking rags which had been taken from the man: then she took up her candle and passed out of the room. Her foot was on the first step of the stair; she paused, drew back, passed quickly along the passage and pushed open the kitchen door. A lighted candle stood on the table, and Conn himself was leaning over the stranger's bed. As she entered he looked up.

'What do you want, Madge?' he asked.

'Nothing; I just came to see if all was right. I thought you were in your room.'

'So I was; but something seemed to draw me down here again, and I came, just like you, for nothing. Poor fellow, he is sleeping quietly enough now! come and look, Madge !'

'Poor man!' she sighed, involuntarily creeping nearer to her cousin, and pressing her warm, soft cheek against his shoulder. 'Oh, Conn dear, I hope you'll never be wretched like that!'

'I might some day; no man knows what's before him.'

Madge shivered.

'Don't say so, Conn; it makes me feel as if it might come true! I wish you would promise to give up your old wild ways, Conn, for sometimes I think they'll bring you into trouble. The people here regard things as crimes that we thought nothing of at home.'

Conn laughed.

'Oh, I'm all right, Madge. I haven't cast a fly for a month, I've never handled a gun since I came here, and the last row I had was—yesterday, when that brute of a keeper threatened to shoot Foam.'

The man stirred and moaned, the voices were disturbing him; so the kneeling figures at once rose, and, leaving the kitchen, went quietly up to bed.

As soon as Madge was alone in her room, she knelt by her bedside and prayed, not only for the wretched outcast man, but for her cousin Conn; for in looking into the man's unconscious face that night, she had seemed to read, not only of the woes through which he had been made to pass, but of the cloud of trials which was even then gathering above her and hers.

She passed the night in restless, fitful slumber, which was now and then harassed by strange dreams. Through all her visions the face of the man gleamed pale and spectral; when she awakened it was still before her. She dressed hastily, went downstairs, and there learned that the man was gone.

He had crept away in the early morning before any one was astir, and had left no trace behind him. But, although he was gone, Madge felt that the dark shadow which he had brought had not altogether disappeared.



CHAPTER X.

ROSAMOND.



HILE the outcast was creeping like a criminal through the

lonely fields of Armstead, choosing instinctively the most sequestered way, and afraid to raise his face to the sky which smiled above him, Rosamond Leigh stood upon the steps of Rigby Castle, blinking her bright eyes in the sunlight, and opening her delicate nostrils to inhale the soft summer breeze. She was dressed for walking, and she held a volume beneath her arm, but she seemed in no hurry to depart. A step crunching the gravel attracted her attention; she ran nimbly down the steps and nodded carelessly to the new-comer.

'Good-morning, Scott.'

'Good-morning, miss. Is his lordship in?'

'No; he went to town last night. Do you want him?'

'Well, I did want him, miss.'

'Is it anything particular? because I shall be writing to him, and can tell him.'

'Well, 'tis not so particular as that. 'Twas only about a bad character that came back into the village last night, and one that'll cause a deal o' mischief afore he's done. There was a regular row, miss. The people wouldn't have nothing to say to him, and rightly too; and we should have been rid of him clean, but them Irish folks must needs interfere and take him in.'

The girl laughed merrily.

"Them Irish folk" seem to be putting their fingers into everybody's pie and causing a revolution in the village. It's quite refreshing."

'You wouldn't ha' thought so, miss, if you'd been there last night.'

To this the girl deigned no reply. Still laughing low to herself, she set off, and left the keeper standing alone.

She walked across two great meadows, sweeping down the grass with her dress and trampling under foot the tall orchids and sweet-scented clover; then, regardless of the great white boards which warned less privileged people away, she entered a green plantation.

There was a sense of coolness here which was gratifying and enticing. Sunlight and shadow trembled and changed before her; from time to time her footsteps, crackling the fallen twigs and rustling the leaves, startled some living thing: now a rabbit would creep tremblingly across her path and disappear among the ferns and long tufts of grass, which afforded it safe shelter; birds fluttered among the boughs, sometimes almost brushing her cheek as they passed by; but the pheasants, sitting amidst the long grass, would stretch out their necks to look at her or perch fearlessly on the boughs which rocked just above her head. Presently the wood came to an end, and she found herself again in the open meadow, standing near the source

of a swift, deep river, which rolled down from the mountains beyond. Grass and corn lined its banks, and here and there a dwarf birch or willow tree stretched heavyfoliaged boughs across the pools, darkening the water with black shadows.

Still in a listless, half-dreamy mood, the girl continued her way along the banks of the stream, pausing now and then to look at the village which lay dim in the distance, to watch the trout lazily breaking the oily surface of the pools, or the great water-rat crawling along the banks and plunging into the darkness of some deephole. Between her and heaven the lark sang, poised high in air, and by her side innumerable birds twittered and chirped, making the air merry with their gladness.

The landscape changed; cornfields and **VOL. 1.** 14

orchards, fruitful meadows and stretches of corn, no longer flashed back the golden brightness of sun and sky; the road became hard and difficult to tread. Patches of grey-stone sparely covered with grass, which had reddened with the summers' suns and whitened with the winters' snow and withered; ranges of hills with stony summits mingling with the white masses of summer cloud; streams winding like silver threads through the fruitful valley just below.

Again her path was blocked. A patch of covert fringed for a quarter of a mile the rippling river; then, branching out, covered a portion of the hillside. Rosamond paused; then she sat down on the grass, leaned her back against the trunk of a tree, opened her book and began to read. But reading was not ROSAMOND.

much in this young lady's line. After she had turned a few pages her attention began to wander from the book to the scene around her.

'Heigh-ho!' she murmured, yawning, and toying with the leaves of her book; 'how quiet it is here! I almost wish I had gone down to the village, after all. I might have had a chance of witnessing some Irish "shindy," which would be preferable to the solitude I have to bear!'

She took some biscuits out of her pocket and began to nibble them, leaning forward as she did so, and impatiently pulling up the grass with her roving hand. Some green linnets which had watched her from the boughs now began to gather around her, picking up the crumbs which she sowed like seed; she broke up the remaining biscuits in her hand and cast the fragments forth; she watched the birds greedily clear them away; then she returned to her book again. She had not read long when her attention was again distracted by a sound of footsteps and voices close behind her and ever coming nearer. A moment after, two men in hot discussion emerged from the shelter of the wood.

She recognised them both at a glance. One was Scott, Lord Rigby's head keeper, the other was the young Irishman whom she had seen just once before. Conn held in his hand a fishing-rod which the keeper was evidently bent upon getting possession of. He put his hand upon it, but Conn held all the tighter.

'Give up that rod!'

Conn laughed with irritating goodhumour. 'Take it if you can, but you won't find it so easy.'

The man cast on him a look of sullen dislike.

'Damn you! you won't laugh like that when you're in the dock! Give me the rod, or I tell you I'll take it by force.'

Conn's face darkened ominously.

'Look here, Master Keeper, keep a civil tongue in your head or we shall quarrel. If you mean to make it a trial of strength, I don't think you'll get the best of it.'

'Give me the rod!'

' I'll see you d----d first !'

With one powerful tug Conn freed the rod from the man's hand; the keeper staggered back, then, recovering himself, with his face flaming with fury, he clenched his fist as if to strike. Neither of the men had noticed Rosamond, but she had attentively watched them; and now, as the altercation threatened to become serious, she rose and stepped forward, putting her body right between the two.

'Scott, what is all this about?'

The keeper staggered back as if he had been shot, while Conn stared at her as at some supernatural vision. The keeper was the first to speak.

'The man's been poaching, miss. He won't listen to my warnings, and I must do my duty.'

'Judging from what I saw, you do your duty in a very unseemly manner, I think. Is it consistent with your duty to strike a. gentleman?'

'I never struck him.'

'No, for I happened to come between

you. You have to thank me for saving you from imprisonment !'

'The gentleman has no business to be here. He knows as well as I do that the river's preserved, and that's why he comes to the loneliest part to fish.'

'Pshaw! don't make a mountain out of a molehill,' said Conn, who had by this time recovered his equanimity. 'Why, I haven't a single fish; and, if it comes to that, you don't know that I was fishing at all!'

'That's a lie — I saw you cast the line !'

Conn gave a long low whistle, threw up his head and laughed; then he saw that the girl's eyes were fixed intently upon his face. The moment their eyes met she withdrew hers, and, moving a few steps away, spoke quietly to the keeper. 'You must say no more about this, Scott—Lord Rigby would not be pleased. The gentleman is a nephew of Mr. Aldyn!'

The keeper stared aghast. True, he had known this before, but in his rage and pride of office he had quite forgotten the rector's influence.

'Well, miss, it don't matter to *me*; only I am head keeper here, and responsible for poachers.'

'Of course, of course; but this is an exceptional case. There,' she added aloud, 'that is all settled. You may go with an easy mind, Scott; and,' she added, smiling archly and gazing full into Conn's wondering eyes, 'if you have no objection to walking with me, I will show you the best way off the estate.'

'Thank you,' said Conn, frankly, 'but I

think I need not trouble you. I know the way pretty well, and can find it alone.'

Her cheek flushed slightly; she drew herself up haughtily, and replied curtly:

'As you please !'

Something in her looks, more than her words, arrested Conn's attention, and he at once perceived the unintentional rudeness in his blunt reply. He dropped his rod on the grass, and was by her side in a moment.

'I hope I haven't been rude!'

'Rude? not in the least; what makes you think so, pray?'

'Well, to tell the truth, I thought you looked as if I had. I'm not up to compliments and that sort of thing. I'm better at casting a fly, or running with the hounds.'

'Neither of which accomplishments you

must practise here, or you will get into trouble. You seem to have a great facility for that, Mr. Dunraven!

Conn stared.

'You know me?'

She laughed lightly and pleasantly.

'The marvel would be if I did not. Why, everybody knows everybody else here; we should have nothing at all to interest us were we not to talk a little scandal about our neighbours.'

'I don't know who you are!'

She laughed, a bright, merry, silvery laugh, and with a haughty, half-coquettish and wholly captivating glance, fixed her eyes for a moment on his.

'Is that a challenge? If so, I shall not accept it. It will give you something to think about; that is, if your thoughts ever return to me at all.'

The keeper had gone his way and they had gone theirs. By this time they had reached the verge of the wood which fringed the stream. Rosamond, gathering her dress close about her, was about to enter between the stems of the trees, but Conn put his hand out to detain her.

'Stop a bit; it won't be very pleasant for you going through there. Is there no other way?'

'Not unless we add some five miles to our walk and go right round the wood.'

'Humph, that won't do. Can't we cross the river?'

'Hardly; at least, I could not; but there is a tolerably shallow spot up there between the two pools where you might cross.'

'And leave you to go on by yourself? That will never do. Suppose I carry you over?' 'Carry me? and let me fall, perhaps!'

'Not at all! I'm used to that sort of thing. It wouldn't be the first time I had carried a colleen across a brook.'

'A colleen—what's that?'

Conn's face flushed, as he replied rather awkwardly:

'Why, a girl—I mean a young lady!'

Her face fell. All the smiles faded from her lips, all the arch brightness from her eyes.

'Oh !' she said indifferently.

Conn was puzzled; he could not understand her: at one moment she was smiling upon him; the next, for no perceptible reason, she froze to ice. He only felt that these strange fluctuations of temper, this brightening and darkening of her lovely features, acted more powerfully upon him than any tender glances could possibly have done. Conn had always been very loyal to women, even to the peasant girls at Ballymoy, so, despite the fickle behaviour of the girl, he stood his ground.

'Let me carry you over,' he said, coming nearer to her side, and gazing down into her face, suffused in sunlight and bathed now in smiles. Then, as she gave no denial, he raised her in his powerful arms and transplanted her to the other side of the brook. When she was set down on dry land again, Rosamond bowed very graciously and held forth her hand.

'Good-bye,' she said; 'I shall never be able to forgive myself for getting you such a wetting!'

Her little hand reposed peacefully in Conn's palm.

'Good-bye,' he returned, making no attempt to let the slender fingers go. 'Do you often walk by the river ?' Rosamond gave a little start, which was quite imperceptible to her companion.

'Pretty often,' she replied, with wellassumed innocence; 'there are so few pleasant walks in Armstead, and I am so much alone. But while I am answering your questions you are catching cold,' she said; 'au revoir.'

And with a little wave of her hand, and a bright glance over her shoulder, she hastened away.

For a time Conn stood watching the girl's slight figure as it faded amid the green foliage of the fields and became dim in the distance; then, turning his head, he was startled to find that another pair of eyes had been watching it too. Not a hundred yards from where he stood, his body concealed behind a hedge which divided the meadows, his white face

eagerly raised above the foliage, and his wild eyes fixed upon the retreating figure of the girl, was none other indeed than the wretched beggar who had been hunted about the village only the night before.

'Hullo!' said Conn, 'what are you doing here, my man ?'

The man started, and slunk away.

'I'm taking a rest,' he said sullenly, almost defiantly.

'Ah, you're making your way out of the village, I suppose,' said Conn; 'well, here's something to help you along.'

He pressed some silver into the man's hand, and shouldering his fishing-rod, walked swiftly away.



CHAPTER XI.

'I WANDERED BY THE BROOK-SIDE.'



OR many hours after the two had parted in the meadows Conn thought little of his meeting with

Rosamond Leigh. All the evening he had to pull up arrears of work, and by ten o'clock the next morning his horse was brought round to the door. He had to collect some rents in a village lying some twelve miles beyond Armstead, and he had promised to be home for dinner at

four. It was dull for Madge and his father when he was not at home; especially for Madge, since she could not go down to the inn as his father could and sometimes did, and drink a glass or two with the farmers. Madge liked the three to sit together during the evening, and talk of the old times that had fled, and the bright ones that were to come.

So Conn rode away full of spirits, waving his hand to Madge who stood at the door, and never once letting his thoughts wander to Rosamond. By two o'clock he had his work done, and was trotting on the road home. He had come to within four miles of Armstead and had let his horse go into a slow trot, when he heard the clatter of hoofs behind him, and the next moment another horse ploughed up the dust by his side.

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'Good-afternoon, Mr. Dunraven,' said a clear voice he knew well, and, amazed at the sudden apparition, Conn pulled off his hat in silence. 'Don't let me detain you if you are in a hurry,' added Miss Leigh, bringing her horse as she spoke to a slow walk, and evidently expecting Conn to follow her example. 'The roads are almost too dusty for riding, are they not?' she said, when the two horses were walking comfortably side by side. 'I do not wonder that you prefer fishing up among the meadows. Ah, that reminds me,' she added, 'you have Lord Rigby's permission to fish the river three days a week, if you care to.'

' I have?' said Conn, amazed.

'Yes.'

Rosamond watched him quietly from beneath the brim of her beaver hat; still,

she was unprepared for the question which came :

' Do you know Lord Rigby ?'

Rosamond bowed.

'And do you happen to know who got the permission for me?'

'If I do?'

'I hope you'll tell me; I like to know my friends.'

Rosamond smiled and was silent. But Conn was pertinacious, and asked again, until she said :

'Well then, since you must know, I asked his lordship myself!'

Conn leaned forward in his saddle and looked direct into her eyes.

'Thanks,' he said; 'it was kind of you; but why did you take so much trouble for me?'

'It was no trouble,' she said, laughing,

and making her horse prance proudly; 'you attach too much importance to small matters. It was more for myself than anyone else, I am afraid, for when I am reading, I hate to be disturbed by hot-headed young gentlemen who will poach.'

Conn laughed and blushed as awkwardly as if he were a boy. He forgot all about the dinner at home, which had already been waiting for him an hour. The remaining two miles of the road seemed to him the shortest of the whole journey, yet when he came within sight of Armstead he heard the church clock chime six.

'I shall be home just in good time for dinner,' thought Rosamond, as she wished Conn good-bye, put her horse into a canter, and disappeared.

All that evening Conn was silent and

preoccupied, for, despite himself, his thoughts would wander to Rosamond. Was he flattered? Probably. Many a less unsophisticated man than himself might have been both flattered and pleased at interest being shown in him by so winning a girl. For she was evidently no ordinary young lady, no wild rose which might be found blooming upon any English hedgerow; there was such a proud distinction in her bearing, such a refinement of beauty about her face! and in thinking over the interview of that day, Conn believed that there had been a genuine show of interest and sympathy in her beautiful eyes as they had rested upon his.

The next day, when he took his rod to avail himself of Lord Rigby's offer, he thought considerably more of Rosamond

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than he did of the fish. Should be meet her there? it was not improbable; she was evidently fond of wandering by the waterside, for it was there he first beheld her. First-why that was only two days ago! Two days! and yet how everything about him seemed changed since then. Already he felt like another being; a feverish sort of delight had taken possession of him, given a buoyancy to his spirit, and an elasticity to his tread. Had permission to fish been accorded him a week before. when he had never seen Rosamond, he would have asked Madge to go with him, as she had nearly always done at home : for in her quiet way Madge was almost as fond of field sports as Conn himself. She liked to try the pools while he was resting, to gaff his salmon when he got one; and above all, she loved to be with

him. Conn knew this as well as any one; still, curiously enough, he did not ask her to go.

What astonished Madge more than all, was that Conn should choose a day when the earth lay basking in the sunshine, without a shadow anywhere. But he had speculations and expectations in his mind of which Madge knew nothing.

When he reached the river and saw the pools lying calm beneath the glare of the sun, reflecting his own face when he bent above them, and mirroring the overhanging banks, he was by no means disappointed; his face did not fall until he had looked around for Rosamond, and could not see a soul. There was the place where he had first beheld her; there was the grass which had been pressed by her foot when she had stepped between him

and the angry keeper, and-yes-there were some of the flowers which, on that occasion, had evidently fallen from her Conn picked them up, pressed book. forget-me-nots-delicate, fragile things like she herself, and pregnant with the sweet perfume which had issued from her dress when he had held her in his arms. He put them in his waistcoat-pocket, and as he did so his fingers almost trembled. It was absurd to think of fishing that day; the surface of the water was like a mirror. So Conn did not untie his rod, but walked slowly along the banks of the stream looking about for his new friend.

Thus he came to the spot where he had carried her across.

A small white object lay on the grass at his feet; he picked it up; it was a handkerchief, the one which Rosamond had

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dropped when he had lifted her from the ground. Oh yes, it must be hers, Conn thought; no other person would possess a thing half so frail, so unsubstantial. When he held it up to the light, it seemed no thicker than a cobweb, and it was adorned with delicate lace, and richly scented. He had heard of the nobility, the grace and refinement of English girls, but he had never imagined anything so pretty and refined as she. What a noble, beautiful soul she must have, with such a face! There was no treachery or falsehood there, not even a shadow of meanness or deceit!

But why had she not come? thought Conn, looking round. Could he have misunderstood the look in her beautiful eyes? had she no more friendly feelings for him than for any other stranger who might happen to cross her path? Probably 234

not, and yet the lingering doubt made him fretful and ill at ease. He continued pacing the banks of the stream until it grew quite dark, then, sick with hopes ungratified, he went away.

Several days passed thus, and easy, good-natured Conn grew fretful and irritable. Had he enjoyed Rosamond's presence daily, it is probable he might have thought less of her than of his sport ; as it was, his thoughts were constantly occupied with her alone, and he began to think with dread that she might never come again. But in this he was wrong. She had not got him permission to fish, for nothing.

One evening, as Conn was tying up his rod and walking with quick, impatient strides along the bank of the stream, he came upon a figure sitting upon the grass, with her head resting against the trunk of a tree, and her eyes meditatively regarding the twilight stars, which shed a dim grey light upon her. In a moment Conn recognised her, and as he did so his heart gave a bound, his pulses began to throb, and his feet clove to the ground.

Rosamond did not, or would not, see him at first; but presently some sound attracted her, and she turned slightly, looked over her shoulder, and their eyes met.

'Ah, Mr. Dunraven,' she said; 'is it you? I thought I should have the meadows to myself at this hour, or, at least, that I should have to share them only with fairyfolk. You are an enthusiastic fisherman to stay so late !'

By this time Conn stood before her, holding her warm white hand.

'I don't care half so much for the fishing,' he said, 'as----'

'What? I hate half sentences!'

'Meeting you!'

Rosamond laughed.

'It's well seen you are an Irishman,' she said; 'but you must not flatter me—it would be dangerous!

' I never do flatter !'

'Worse and worse!' said Rosamond. 'Help me to my feet, please. I am chilly, and must be getting home.'

'Do you live far from here?' asked Conn, as they walked away side by side.

'Not very far,' returned the girl; 'why do you ask ?'

'Curiosity, I suppose. I don't even know your name!'

She laughed.

'I am not at all sure of it myself!'

'What! you don't mean to say that you don't know your own name?'

'I only know what I am told.'

'Well, that's the way with all of us.'

'Not at all: you can verify your suspicions. You have your parents.'

'And have not you?'

Rosamond shook her head; her face had grown wonderfully sad, and her beautiful lips began to quiver.

'I never saw either of my parents : I do not even know who they were. It is certain there is not one person in the world now who cares two straws whether I am alive or dead !'

'Don't say that,' said Conn, heartily; 'everybody has some one in the world to care for them.'

'That is a fallacy!' returned the girl, hysterically, and turning away her head that he might not see that tears were gathering in her eyes. 'You know very little of English society if you think that. We are cold and heartless, and have no feeling for any one but our own. If I had known my mother, doubtless *she* might have loved me; all creatures, human or otherwise, have a love of offspring implanted in them, but that is no merit of theirs.'

'I shouldn't think one would find it very hard to love you,' said Conn, coming to a standstill beside her.

They had reached the plantation, and the bend of the river where Conn had formerly carried her over, and could go no farther. Rosamond laughed nervously again, and continued to keep her face averted. She was half ashamed of her emotion, yet she had no power to restrain it, and perhaps she had no wish

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so to do. Her nature was made up of strange contradictions which puzzled even herself, and these fits of depression which occasionally came over her were perhaps more incomprehensible to her than to The few words which she had most. had with Lord Rigby before leaving the castle that night had made her hysterical, and caused her to bemoan a life which she did not altogether regret. Had a change been offered to her she would not have accepted it; so far she was tolerably well satisfied with her lot. but an inordinate self-love as well as a craving for admiration prompted her to call forth the tender light which she had already seen once or twice in Conn's eyes.

'Do you hear that?' she said, as the voice of the nightingale came faintly from the heart of the wood. 'I often think I should like to live in a wood like that !

'Alone ?'

'Yes, quite alone. I am sick of society; it is such a hollow mockery and a sham. You will soon get sick of it too, I am sure, and be glad enough to go back to your Irish home.'

Conn sighed, but said nothing. There had been a time when his whole thought, his whole wish, had been to get back the old acres and return to his home; but now —already all the old associations seemed gradually becoming obliterated from his mind—and why? because he had accidentally been thrown in the way of a girl who would not even tell him who she was.

'Good-bye,' said Rosamond, breaking the silence, and Conn started as from a dream.

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'We've got to cross the stream yet,' said Conn, taking her up in his arms.

'Good-bye again,' she said, holding forth her hand to him when she was on the other side; 'you must hasten home now, for you are wet.'

Conn held her hand in his.

'Just tell me your name!'

'Really, I cannot well, it is Rosamond.'

'Rosamond!' repeated Conn, tremulously ; 'and may *I* call you Rosamond ?'

'Yes, if you care to.'

Her hand which lay in his was ungloved : as he repeated her name, Conn inadvertently pressed it, and squeezed the flesh against a diamond ring which she wore upon her third finger. There was only the slightest twinge of pain, but Rosamond almost angrily snatched her hand away, for

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the accident, trifling as it was, reminded her that she was the promised wife of George Aldyn. Yes, that ring had been placed upon her finger when the marriage had been arranged three years ago.

'Is anything the matter?' asked Conn, amazed at the change which had come over her.

'Not much,' returned Rosamond, now scarcely at her ease; 'you have powerful hands, that is all, and you have pressed my ring against my finger!'

Conn was going to examine her hand, but she quickly pulled on her glove and walked away, leaving Conn utterly perplexed, and wondering whether the whole interview had been more than a dream.

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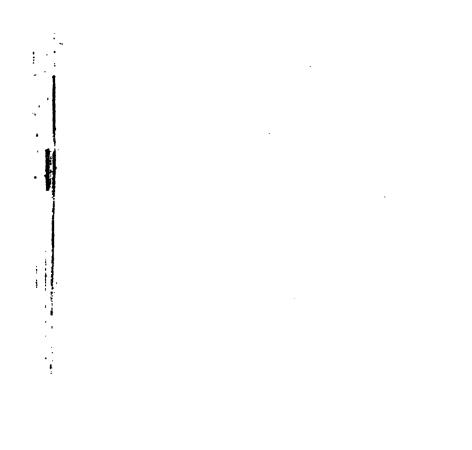
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