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A novel

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THE EARL’S PROMISE.
A Novel.

BY

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AUTHOR OF
“GEORGE GEITH,” “TOO MUCH ALONE,” “HOME, SWEET HOME,” ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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OF
THE FIRST VOLUME.

THE EARL’S PROMISE.

CHAPTER I.
KINGSLOUGH _née_ BALLYLOUGH.

Kingslough at high noon was ordinarily the stupidest, dullest, dirtiest little town that could have been found in the Province of Ulster. On market and fair, and party-procession days, the inhabitants seemed to expend the whole of their strength. An almost unbroken calm ensued after wild excitement, a death-like stillness followed the shouts and cries of faction, the shrieks of drunken merriment, the shrill piping of fifes, the braying of trumpets, and the bang-banging of drums.

Excepting on such and such-like festive occasions as those above enumerated, the town, figuratively speaking, looked as though it had gone to bed to sleep off the effects of its last excitement or debauch.

In the bright sunlight it appeared like a place deserted by its population—a place rich in every natural beauty, which there was neither man nor woman to admire.

So far as position was concerned, Kingslough had nothing left to desire. Situated on an arm of the sea, the town, well sheltered from the wild north winds by hills and far-spreading plantations, nestled its houses snugly along the shore, while the blue waves rippled gently in over the red sandstone beach.

Nature had indeed done everything for the little watering-place, and man had, as is usually the case, done his best to spoil Nature’s handiwork.

Seen from the sea Kingslough lay tranquil under its hills, the perfection of an artist’s ideal; but a nearer view dispelled this allusion, and it appeared to eyes from which the glamour was removed, just what it has already been described, the stupidest, dullest, dirtiest little town in Ulster.

Here was no dark Moorish architecture, lighted up by the bright costumes and brighter eyes of the Galway women. Here were no fantastic houses, no

picturesque surprises, no archways lying in deep shadow, no recessed and highly ornamented doorways, no rich carvings, no evidences of a wonderful and romantic past. Everything was straight, strictly utilitarian, mean. The best houses presented outwardly no sign of the amount of actual accommodation they contained.

They were old, but they had not grown grey and softened with the lapse of years. The prevailing “finish” amongst the better class of residences was paint or rough-cast, whilst the dwellings inhabited by the trading and working members of the community were periodically covered with lime-white, which the rain as regularly washed off.

The side-paths were uneven, the streets unlighted, every sanitary regulation either unborn or in the earliest and weakest stage of infancy. From a picturesque point of view the fishing-boats drawn up on the beach formed a pleasing foreground to a charming landscape, acceptable to the eye; but the neighbourhood of these boats was disagreeable to the nose by reason of cods’ heads, and other fishy matters, that lay decomposing in the sun.

Time had been when Kingslough was known by a more distinctively Irish name, that of Ballylough, the A being pronounced very broad indeed, while a fine guttural sound was imparted to the “ough,”—as indeed is still the case with the terminal letters in Kingslough.

At that period, Ballylough was a very modest Bally indeed, and the lodgings it let in the boating season to strangers from Glenwellan were of the most primitive description.

The villa residences, the rows of terraces, the sea-wall, the grand promenade overlooking the bay, all of which now delight the eyes of tourists and others, had not yet emerged from the then future that has long since become the past.

The occasion on which the tiny seaport came to be re-christened, was that of the first gentleman in Europe succeeding to the British throne.

Mighty things were, by certain people and classes in Ireland, expected to result from that event.

His visit, when Prince of Wales, to the Isle of Saints had excited high hopes in the hearts of many of his Hibernian subjects.

The liberalism exhibited by the heir-apparent would, they felt satisfied, be brought into practice by the sovereign in remedying the wrongs of Ireland.

The Roman Catholics believed they should now have a friend and partisan in the highest places, able and willing to redress their grievances. The trading portion of the community, deceived by the fact of the honour or dishonour of knighthood having been conferred on a few Dublin shopkeepers, trusted the hour was at hand when commerce would be recognized as a power in Ireland; and that a good time was coming, when money made in mills and offices might be pleasantly spent in crushing the pride of those “aristocrats,” who spite of their poverty persisted in holding a semblance of state on their unproductive acres, and extending such hospitality as their narrow means permitted, solely and exclusively to those they considered born by God’s grace in the same rank of life as themselves.

As for the dissenters in the north,—that numerous and remarkable body to which successive monarchs and prime ministers have paid a curious amount of attention ever since the time of William the Third, who established

that _raison d'être_ of many a shabby, poorly attended place of worship, the Regium Donum—as for the dissenters they cherished a vague idea that, although his Most Gracious Majesty George IV. might be styled "Defender of the Faith," which was not in some respects exactly their faith, still the light of his glorious countenance would not impossibly be lent to them for the purpose of placing those who worshipped in meetinghouses and other conventicles on a par, socially and pecuniarily, with their old enemy the Church as by law established. The labouring classes commonly cherished a conviction that an immediate rise of wages must follow the coronation; in fact, amongst those of the Irish who wanted and hoped for anything, there was a noisy and expectant accession of loyalty: and as a small evidence of this, the municipal rulers of Ballylough convened a meeting, at which with the almost unanimous consent of the inhabitants it was decided that for the future—

"The important seaport town of Ballylough, possessed of an almost natural harbour, situated on the direct route to America, in the centre of a supply of herrings practically speaking limitless, boasting a beach unrivalled in the three kingdoms, and which presented facilities for bathing unsurpassed by any other watering-place, having likewise in its immediate neighbourhood manufactories of no mean extent" and so forth, should for the future be known to those whom it might, and those whom it might not concern, as Kingslough.

In liberal and democratic matters the rulers over the town were strong. Amongst others of less note may be enumerated a woollen-draper who in the course of a long and laborious life had made much money, and what was more to the purpose, kept it when made; a certain sea-captain called Mullins, reputed to be worth nine thousand pounds, every sixpence of which he had made by smuggling; an apothecary; a Mr. Connor, who resided a little way out of the town, and who, possessing an income of one hundred and thirty pounds a year, did nothing, as his fathers had done before him.

These men, being ardent lovers of their country, its traditions, Brian Baroïhme, the Irish melodies ("Boyne Water" and "Protestant Boys" excepted), illicit spirits, and the Old Parliament House on Stephen's Green, were, as might have been expected, uproarious with delight when this graceful tribute to the virtues of their new monarch had been offered.

From the demonstration, however, all those who belonged to the powerful though comparatively small Tory party held resolutely aloof.

They could generally, not always by ways and influence that would have borne the light, materially assist in sending one member for the county at least to the House of Commons, but in local and municipal matters they were impotent.

Ballylough was owned by the Earl of Glendare who to the disgust of Lord Ardmorne, his relentless political opponent, chanced to be ground-landlord of almost every house and public building the town contained.

For centuries the Glendares had been connected with that part of the country. All those members of the family who died in any place reasonably accessible to Ireland were carried up a very steep hill overlooking Ballylough, where among the ruins of Ballyknock Abbey the curious stranger could obtain an exquisite view over land and sea, and behold at the same time sheep nibbling the short sweet mountain herbage beside the family vault which contained all that death had left of youth and beauty—of rank, wealth, and earthly consideration.

It was a mighty strange contrast to meet Lady Glendare in her grand coach, a very Jezebel made up of pride, paint, deceit, extravagance and heartlessness, and then to toil up to that burying-place lying lonely among the desolate hills, and think of those women—once haughty and sinful, just like her, in life knowing no rest, making no happiness—who lay there mouldering into dust.

At the time of George the Fourth's accession to the throne, Charles, the eighth Earl had not long succeeded to the title and estates of his father, and so far from objecting to Ballylough being changed into Kingslough gave the project his warmest support, being moved thereto by the reasons following.

First, because he trusted his eldest son, no longer a young man, would sooner or later hold an appointment about the Court of the new monarch; secondly, because a builder, who proposed the wild speculation of erecting a terrace of houses, and was willing to pay a handsome sum down for a lease of nine hundred and ninety-nine years, signified his belief that houses, and land intended as sites for houses, would let better if the place were, as he expressed himself, "given a fresh start;" and thirdly, because he knew the change would annoy Lord Ardmorne.

So the name was altered, and the town, after a sleepy, inconsequent sort of fashion, grew and prospered; so that by the time this story commences, it had established for itself the name of a highly respectable, not to say aristocratic, watering-place.

Travelling then was not what it is now. People did not go whisking about like comets; a journey was attended with many discomforts; the nearer home anxious mothers could obtain sea-bathing for their darlings, and change of air and scene for themselves, the better they were pleased; and accordingly, in the season, Kingslough was crammed from parlour to attic, and even ladies who, having seen better days, spoke much about their papas and mammas, and a radiant past which had once been theirs, did not disdain to let lodgings, or it might be to accept invitations during the summer months from various relations and friends, so as to leave their houses and furniture free for the use of Mr. and Mrs., or Sir and my Lady, at so much per month.

But even in the season it was not a lively place. People went there to bathe, not to form acquaintances. Let Mrs. Murtock, wife of Murtock, the great distiller, don what gorgeous array she pleased, not even a glance could she win from one of the upper ten as they sat in church trying to look blandly unconscious of her existence.

People made no experiments in acquaintanceship at Kingslough. The world, according to the then social gospel extant, meant the old stock and the new; and whenever the new held out the right hand of fellowship to the old, it got, metaphorically speaking, so cruelly slapped, that the experiment was rarely repeated.

Not a dweller in the Faubourg St. Germain was in reality one whit more bitterly proud than those Irish ladies, so charming in their manners to high and low, to those on the same rung of the social ladder as themselves, and those at the foot of it; but who refused to recognize even the existence of "such people" as the wives and daughters of men that could, to use the expression which frequently fell from their lips, have "bought and sold" the lands and goods and chattels of the old stock without a misgiving as to where the money was to come from to compass so laudable a purpose.

Altogether, unless a human being was excessively fond of his own society and natural scenery, Kingslough could not have been accounted a

desirable place in which to settle for life.

Its aboriginal inhabitants—those, that is to say, who resided there all the year round, were principally a well-developed race of marvellously healthy, dirty, poor, ragged, happy children, shoeless and stockingless as regarded their legs and feet, soapless and combless as concerned their heads and faces.

From early morning till late at night these picturesque urchins held high revel in the gutters and along the side-paths of the poorer streets; scores of them disported themselves along the beach, wading out into the sea as far as their clothing—scanty enough, Heaven knows—would allow them, and when the sea, or tide as they called it, was out too far to be waded into, they pursued the entrancing amusement of hunting for crabs and periwinkles on the sands.

At intervals, shrill cries from some woman, got up in the costume of her class—a large white cap, with immense coiffured frills on her head, and a very small plaid shawl over her shoulders—shrieking for the return of her offspring, interrupted the pastimes indulged in by youth at Kingslough.

Occasionally these cries from the parents were succeeded by bitter lamentations from the children, who were not unfrequently hurried back to the duties and realities of life by slaps, and threats of more serious punishment.

Towards evening, young men and old men, who, following fishing as a profession, spent a considerable portion of the day in bed, appeared upon the scene. Stalwart weatherbeaten men, attired in pilot-coats and sou'westers, they made their way to the shore, where great tub-like smacks lay waiting their coming.

These fishers were brave and patient; kind, tender husbands to wives, who soon lost their good looks in that hard northern climate, and grew prematurely wrinkled and aged with the battle of life; good sons to widowed mothers or aged fathers; faithful lovers to girls who boasted exquisite complexions, tall, erect figures, and a wealth of beautiful hair rarely to be seen amongst their Saxon sisters; a grand, sturdy, hard-working race, who feared God exceedingly, and went out in the wild, dark winter nights to war with the winds and the waves as undauntedly as though each season did not leave some maid, or wife, or mother desolate.

Next to the fishermen came the shopkeeper class, who differed from each other as stars vary in magnitude, from Widow McCann, who set out her cottage-window with sweets, and cakes, and apples for the children, and who sold besides, halfpennyworths of everything that could possibly be sub-divided into that value, to Mr. Neill, proprietor of _the_ shop of the town, a place where everything, from an ounce of tea to canvas for sails, from a boy's kite to a plough, could be procured at a moment's notice.

Mr. Neill at one time entertained ideas of making his way into drawing-rooms where only the _élite_ of Kingslough society was to be found; but his pretensions being firmly and, truth to say, not over courteously repudiated, he afterwards revenged himself by buying from the Encumbered Estates Commissioners a great property in Munster, where, though it was darkly rumoured that he once stood behind a counter, impecunious gentry—_real_ gentry as the poorer classes call them—made friends with his sons and daughters, hoping that the marriage of blood with money might yet save the rushy acres they lacked capital and energy to drain.

Time has done wonders in Ireland. It has taught the “old stock” that if they want money, and unhappily they cannot do without it, they must tolerate the people who have been able to make money.

But they do not like those persons yet, except as a means to an end; and possibly the faculty of adding sovereign to sovereign and acre to acre is not exactly that calculated to render a man socially popular anywhere.

The Kingslough upper ten held that opinion at any rate. They longed for Dives’ possessions, but Dives himself they would have consigned to a deeper hell than that mentioned in the parable, had their theology contained it.

Above the shopkeepers ranked the manufacturers, men who attended closely to their business, associated freely amongst themselves, and on the occasion of public dinners, meetings, and the like, were shaken by the hand by Lord Glendare, Lord Ardmorne, and the remainder of the élite of Kingslough.

They did not presume on these privileges. Residing out of the town, they came little in contact with its inhabitants, and were content with such civilities as the worthies of Kingslough thought fit to accord.

If they could afford to keep good horses, their sons followed the hounds; and they generally were able to give dowries to their daughters, when in due course of time they married men who likewise were connected with manufacture, either far off or near at hand.

They were select people, keeping themselves to themselves, marrying and intermarrying amongst their own class, neither meddling nor intermeddling with the affairs of their neighbours.

They gave employment and they paid good wages, and took care that neither their smoke nor their refuse caused offence to Kingslough.

The town might claim them, but they did not claim the town. If they interfered in politics, and had strong opinions about the return of members for the county, it was but human and Irish. As a rule they were quiet enough, harmless as doves, busy with their own gathering and storing of honey as bees.

Higher than the manufacturers, who? Old maids and poodles. The Court Circle at Kingslough was composed almost entirely of ladies who wore fronts, and fat, snapping wretches of dogs who had too much hair of their own. The men belonging to these women were dead, or serving the king in India, or captains on board men-of-war, or constabulary officers in remote parts of Ireland, or barristers in Dublin, or even it might be solicitors in the same city, who had a large connection amongst the landed gentry and were learned in the mysteries of conveyancing.

These men did not often visit Kingslough, but on the rare occasions of their coming, the sensation produced by their presence was profound.

Kingslough rubbed its eyes, so to say, and woke up, and the opinions and facts then brought from the great and wicked world to that garden of Eden where so many elderly Eves congregated, furnished conversation for years afterwards.

In addition to the inhabitants already enumerated, Kingslough reckoned amongst its gentry a clergyman, whose cure was four miles distant; a curate, on whose shoulders devolved the spiritual responsibilities of a rector, who was continually absent from his flock; a colonel, who had

never been in active service, but who, on the strength of his rank in the army, was so fortunate as to marry an English lady possessed of a comfortable fortune; a priest, the soul of good company; a remarkably acute attorney, Lord Ardmorne's agent; the police officer, and, may I add, the doctor?

Hardly. He attended all the population, gentle and simple, and was popular alike amongst high and low. He knew the secrets of most households, was personally acquainted with the history and appearance of those skeletons that do somehow contrive to get locked up in the cupboards of even the best regulated families; but he had sprung from the bourgeois class, he had relatives very low down in the worldly scale, he had friends whose existence and status could not be overlooked by old maids and old women of the other sex, and therefore, and for all these reasons he was socially only tolerated by his best patients.

Curious stories he could have told concerning some of them—stories compromising the honour of many an ancient house, but his name had never been tarnished by any indiscreet confidence.

Even to the wife of his bosom, a woman of an inquiring, not to say inquisitive turn of mind, who had as many wiles as a poacher, and changed her tactics as often as a fox, he presented an invulnerable front of lamb-like innocence.

Trusting her ostensibly with everything in and out of his professional experience, he kept her in a state of actual ignorance, worthy of admiration in these latter days.

The moment he started on his rounds in the morning, she started on hers—telling this, that, and the other as the most profound secret to each one of her acquaintances, who laughed at her when once she left the house—for had they not heard all she was able to communicate, and more, hours previously, from Molly the fish-wife, or Pat O'Donnel, one of the privileged beggars and newsmongers of the town?

So ends the list. If tedious, it has been necessary to indicate the history of Kingslough and glance at the élite of Kingslough society in order to save stoppages by the way hereafter.

After this needful digression, let us revert to the first sentence in this story once again, and enter the stupid, dull, dirty little town of Kingslough at noon.

CHAPTER II.
WHERE CAN SHE BE?

Something had on that particular day, at that special hour occurred to disturb the customary serenity of Kingslough. Spite of the sun which flared upon the terrace, blinds were drawn up and heads thrust out.

People stood in knots upon the Glendare Parade talking eagerly together, and looking down into the sea. At the doors of the houses in Main Street servants occupied the door-steps and gaped vaguely to right and left as though expecting the coming of some strange spectacle.

In the middle of the horse-ways poodles, unexpectedly released from durance in stuffy parlours, yelped at other poodles, and fought and ran or were carried away. The young ladies who attended as day-boarders that

select establishment presided over by the Misses Chesterfield having been accorded a half-holiday, came walking through the town to their respective homes, thereby adding to the tumult. Thundering double knocks resounded momentarily at the door of an insignificant-looking three-storey house on the parade, in the lower room of which a very old lady, feeble though voluble, sat wringing her hand, bemoaning her fate, and appealing in turn to each of her visitors to “do something.”

“They are turning the water out of Hay’s mill-pond, and all the fishermen are down on the shore, and Colonel Perris has taken his groom and gardener to the Black Stream, and oh! my dear friend, let us try to hope for the best,” said Mrs. Lefroy, one of the annual visitors to Kingslough, acting with a wonderful naturalness the part of Job’s comforter to the decrepit, broken woman she addressed.

“You may be quite sure, dear Miss Riley, that everybody is doing their best,” added Mrs. Mynton kindly, if ungrammatically.

“And whatever may have happened,” broke in the clergyman who did not reside in his parish, and never visited it save on Sunday mornings, “whatever may have happened I need not remind so thorough a Christian that—”

“How can you all be so silly as to frighten the poor old lady in this absurd manner,” said a deep stern female voice at this juncture; “the girl will come back safe and sound, never fear. Girls do not get murdered, or drowned, or kidnapped so easily at this age of the world; she will return about dinner-time, if not before, mark my words.” And the speaker a hard-featured woman of more than middle age, who possessed a kindly eye as well as decided manners, looked round the persons assembled as she finished, as though to inquire “Who is there amongst you that shall dare contradict me?”

For a moment there was silence, and then uprose a confused murmur of many voices—amongst which one sounded shrill above the rest.

“If ye think ye are in England still, Mrs. Hartley—” commenced the owner of that cracked treble in a brogue which made one at least of her auditors shiver.

“Pardon me, Miss Tracey, I never indulge in day-dreams,” interposed Mrs. Hartley, rustling across the room in one of those stiff black silks, which were at once the envy and the condemnation of feminine Kingslough, “but whether people are in England or Ireland, I consider it very foolish to meet trouble half way. Particularly in this case, where I hope and believe the trouble is all imaginary.”

“Ah! and indeed we hope that too, every one of us,” said Mrs. Mynton, who was regarded in Kingslough as a sort of peace-making chorus.

“Perhaps _you_ know where Nettie is, Mrs. Hartley,” suggested Mrs. Lefroy, who on the score of her husband’s name claimed a relationship with various distinguished members of the bar which it would have puzzled the king-at-arms to trace, and adopted in consequence a severe and judicial deportment amongst her acquaintances.

“I know no more of Miss O’Hara’s movements than you do, perhaps rather less,” replied the lady addressed, “but until I am positively assured some accident has happened to her, I prefer to believe that, finding she was too late for school, she took a holiday, and has walked up to the Abbey to sketch, or gone to see some of her young friends, who may perhaps have induced her to spend the remainder of the day in forgetfulness of backboards and Cramer’s exercises.”

“Ah! you don’t know Nettie.”

“Indeed, you don’t know Nettie.”

“You know nothing at all about Nettie,” broke forth Miss Riley’s visitors, whilst Miss Riley herself, shaking her poor old head, mumbled out from jaws that were almost toothless, “Nettie would not do such a thing, not for the world.”

For a moment Mrs. Hartley remained silent; but she was a person who did not like to be beaten or to seem beaten, and accordingly, with a sudden rally of her forces, she inquired,—

“Had the girl any lover?”

Now this was in reality the question which every woman in the room had been dying to put; and yet so unquestioned was Miss Riley’s respectability of position and propriety of demeanour during seventy years or thereabouts of maidenhood, that no one impressed by the Hibernian unities had ventured to put it. Mrs. Hartley was however a “foreigner” and audacious. “Had the girl a lover?” she asked, and at the mere suggestion of such a possibility, the curls in Miss Riley’s brown front began slowly to slip from their tortoiseshell moorings, whilst her wrinkled old cheeks became suffused with a pale pink glow, just as though she were eighteen again, young enough to be wooed, and won, and wed.

“I am astonished at such an idea entering into the mind of _any_ one who ever beheld my grand-niece,” she remarked, the very bows in her cap trembling with indignation and palsy. “Nettie is only sixteen—a mere child—”

(“With a very pretty face,” remarked Mrs. Hartley, _inter alia_.)

“Who has never, so far as I know,” went on the octogenarian, “spoken half-a-dozen words to a—a—gentleman since she was ten years old.”

“And pray, my dear Miss Riley, how far do you know about it,” retorted that irrepressible Englishwoman. “How can you, who never stir out of your house except for an hour in the sun, tell how many half-a-dozen words a young girl may have spoken to a young man. Have you asked that delightful Jane of yours if she ever suspected a love affair?”

“You can have in Jane, if you like,” said Miss Riley. “If anything of that sort had been going on, Mrs. Hartley, Jane was too old and faithful a servant to have kept it from me.”

“I wish we were all as sure Nettie has met with no accident, as we are that she has always behaved, and always will behave, like the good little girl we know her to be,” remarked Mrs. Mynton.

“It is natural though,” began Miss Tracey, “that seeing Mrs. Hartley is an Englishwoman, she—”

“Nonsense,” interposed the lady, thus disparagingly referred to. “No one can think more highly of Nettie than I; indeed if I had a fault to find with her manners, it was only that they were too sedate and quiet for such a young creature—such a very pretty young creature,” added Mrs. Hartley reflectively.

“It is very hard upon me at my time of life,” said Miss Riley with a helpless whimper, and the irrelevance of incipient dotage.

“Indeed it is; indeed we all feel that, but you must hope for the best. We shall see Nettie come back yet safe and sound.” Thus the chorus, while Mrs. Hartley walked to the window and looked out upon the sea, a puzzled expression lurking in her brown eyes, and an almost contemptuous smile lingering about her mouth.

“Can you not throw any further light on this matter, Grace,” she asked at last turning towards a young girl who sat silent in one corner of the room.

“I never saw Nettie after she left our gate at nine o’clock this morning,” was the reply accompanied by a vivid blush. “I wanted her to come in, but she said she was in a hurry; that she wished to get to school early, so as to speak to Miss Emily about a French exercise she did not quite understand.”

“And when you reached Kingslough House she had not arrived?”

“No, ma’am.”

“I believe Miss Moffat has already told us all she knows on the subject,” interposed a lady who had not hitherto entered into the conversation.

“I believe Miss Moffat knows more than she chooses to tell,” retorted Mrs. Hartley, with a brusqueness which caused the eyes of every person to turn towards the girl, who in a perfect agony of confusion exclaimed,—

“Oh! Mrs. Hartley, I have not the remotest idea where Nettie is. I am quite positive she had not another thought in her mind when she left me, but to go straight to Kingslough House.”

“The first remark you made when you heard she had not reached school was, that some accident must have happened to her.”

“Allow me to correct you, Mrs. Hartley,” said Miss Chesterfield. “Miss Moffat’s words were, ‘something must have happened,’ meaning, as I understood, that something must have happened to prevent her attending as usual to her duties; that was what you intended to imply, my dear,” added the lady, addressing her pupil, “is it not so?”

“Yes, that was what I intended to say,” the girl eagerly agreed.

“And when the man brought in her scarf, which he saw floating on the pond, you thought she must have met with an accident?”

“Please, Mrs. Hartley, do not ask me any more,” pleaded the witness. “We are making Miss Riley wretched. I cannot tell what to think. Very likely her scarf blew off as she crossed the plank. It was not in the least degree slippery this morning. I went that way myself. Besides the water there is not deep enough to drown any person.”

A long sentence for a young lady of that day to utter in public. The gift of tongues had not then been so freely vouchsafed to damsels under twenty, as it has in these later times. And after listening to Miss Grace’s little speech, Mrs. Hartley turned once more towards the window, and looked again over the sea.

With a different expression, however, to that her face had worn previously. She looked anxious and troubled. Nettie O’Hara’s beauty was too pleasant a remembrance for this middle-aged lady to be able to

contemplate without dismay, the possibility of harm having come to her. And that harm had come to her she began to fear, not in the way suggested by the Job's comforters who surrounded Miss Riley, but in a manner which might make the dripping corpse and long fair hair rendered unlovely by clinging sand, a welcome and happy memory by comparison.

No visitor who entered Miss Riley's house that day, had been so much inclined to pooh-pooh the alarm excited by the girl's disappearance as that remarkably sensible and matter-of-fact English lady, who now stood silently looking out over the sea; but as that sweet young face, innocent and guileless, and yet not quite happy, rose up before the eyes of her memory, she felt as though she should like to go forth and assist herself in the search foolish, kindly, incompetent, well-meaning friends and acquaintances were making for the girl.

While she stood there she heard vaguely as one hears the sound of running water, the stream of consolation and condolence flow on. They were good people all, those friends of the poor palsied lady, who with shaking head and trembling hands sat listening to their reiterated assurances that she need not be uneasy, there would be good news of Nettie soon; but not a competent counsellor could be reckoned amongst them. That at least was Mrs. Hartley's opinion when she turned and surveyed the group, and her opinion took the form of words in this wise:—

"If you hear nothing of Nettie before the post goes out to-night, Miss Riley, I should advise you to write and ask your nephew, the General, to come and see you without delay. I hope and trust, however, there may be no necessity for you to write. I shall send this evening to know if your anxiety is at an end."

And so saying, Mrs. Hartley took the old lady's hand, and held it for a moment sympathizingly; then with a general curtsey and good morning to an assemblage so large as to render a more friendly leave-taking well-nigh impossible, she passed from the room, her silk dress rustling as she went.

"That delightful Jane," as Mrs. Hartley called her, was in waiting to let the visitor out. She was a woman of thirty or thereabouts, ruddy complexioned, and of a comely countenance. She was arrayed in decent black. Some one or other of the Riley family was always dying, and her mistress liked to see Jane in black, though the mistress could not perhaps well have afforded to provide mourning for the maid.

Mourning was tidy and respectable, further it enabled Jane to wear out Miss Riley's tardily laid aside sable garments; but a better dressed servant could not have been found in Kingslough than Jane M'Bride, who now stood apron at her eye ready to open the door for Mrs. Hartley.

"My good Jane," said that lady, pausing, "what do you think of all this?"

"If anything has happened to Miss Nettie, it will break the mistress's heart altogether," answered the servant.

"But what can have happened?" asked Mrs. Hartley.

"Nothin' plaze God," replied Jane, with that ready invocation of the sacred name, which is an Hibernian peculiarity, and yet apparently with a secret misgiving, that her own views and those of Providence might on the special occasion in question have chanced to be at variance.

"Jane," said Mrs. Hartley, unmoved by the solemnity of the

adjuration—perhaps because she was too much accustomed to hear it used—“has it occurred to you that Miss Nettie might have gone off with a—lover?”

“No, ma’am; oh! presarve us all, no; Miss Nettie had no lover, nor thought of one.”

“You are quite certain of that? I speak to you as a friend of the family.”

“Certain sure; it is as sure as death, Miss Nettie had no lover.”

“Then as sure as death, if Miss Nettie had not a lover, she will be back here before the sun sets,” and adown the parade sailed Mrs. Hartley, all her silken flags and streamers flying in the light summer breeze.

Before, however, she reached Glendare Terrace, came a soft voice in her ear, and a light touch on her arm.

“May I walk with you, Mrs. Hartley?” said the voice.

“I want to confide in you,” said the touch.

“You here, Grace?” exclaimed Mrs. Hartley stopping and looking her young companion straight in the face. “Most decidedly you may walk with me, you know I am always glad of your company.”

And then they went on in silence. “Surely she will ask me some question,” thought Grace. “I will give my lady line enough,” decided the older woman—and the latter won.

“I have so wanted to speak to you, dear Mrs. Hartley,” said the girl, after they had paced along a few minutes in silence.

“I like to hear you speak, Grace,” was the calm reply.

“But about Nettie—”

“I understood you to say, my love, that you had told us all there was to tell.”

“And so I have—told all I had to tell, but surely, surely—you know—that is—I mean—dear Mrs. Hartley,” and the timid hand clasped the widow’s well-developed arm more tightly, “I may trust you implicitly, may I not?”

There was a second’s pause, then Mrs. Hartley said,—

“I hope you may trust me, Grace.”

“I have told all I know about Nettie,” went on the girl vehemently, “but not all I suspect. Oh! Mrs. Hartley, when I heard you advise Miss Riley to send for the General, I could have _blessed_ you. If ever Nettie comes back, you must never tell, never, what I am saying to you now. Nettie was miserable and discontented, and—and wicked. She used to wish she was dead. Oh! how she used to cry at the prospect of being a governess for life; and it _was_ hard, was it not, poor dear? I cannot bear to think about it. She seemed good and kind to Miss Riley, but she was not a bit grateful, really. Papa never liked Nettie. I did, and I like her still, but somehow, try her as one would, soft and sweet as she appeared, one always seemed to be getting one’s teeth on a stone. I am afraid you will think me dreadfully unkind, but I _must_ talk to somebody, and, may I, please, talk to you?”

“Certainly, Grace, if you will make yourself intelligible,” was the reply; “but I want to understand. Not fifteen minutes since you said you were certain that when Nettie parted company with you, she had, to use your own expression, which, if you were my child, I should beg of you never to use again, ‘not another thought in her mind but to go straight to Kingslough House.’”

“If I talked English, like you,” retorted Grace, “everybody in Ireland would laugh at me.”

“Do you talk Irish, then?” asked Mrs. Hartley.

“You know what I mean,” was the answer, and once again Mrs. Hartley felt the soft hand clasping her arm.

“My love, I do know what your Irish-English means, but not in the slightest degree do I comprehend your mystery. Do you believe Nettie has committed suicide?”

“Suicide!” with a shiver, “why should she?”

“Do you believe she is drowned?”

“No! oh, no!”

“Will she return to the Parade to-night?”

“I hope she may. How can I tell?”

At this juncture Mrs. Hartley freed her arm from Miss Moffat’s grasp.

“My dear child,” she said, “you had better go home to your father. He is a man of mature years, and may like to be fooled. I am a woman of mature years, and the bare suspicion of being fooled is intolerable to me—good-bye.”

Then Miss Moffat suddenly brought to book, exclaimed,—

“I have no mother, Mrs. Hartley, and my father never liked Nettie, and I liked her so—so much.”

“And therefore you know what has become of her—where she has gone?”—a sentence severely uttered as an interrogative.

“No! I wish I did—I wish I did.”

“What do you suspect? you may be quite frank, Grace, with me.”

“She had a locket she wore inside her dress, a ring she put on sometimes and said belonged to her grandfather; but it was quite a new ring, and the hair in the locket was black as jet. The locket fell out of her dress one day, and she invented in her confusion two or three stories about it. If she had only told me—if she had only said one word—Nettie, Nettie,” wailed the girl, extinguishing with that cry the last ray of hope Mrs. Hartley’s horizon had contained.

“Grace,” began that lady, after a long and painful pause, “you reminded me a little time since that you have no mother. May I talk to you like one?”

“Dear Mrs. Hartley, yes! what have I done wrong?” and Grace’s hand stole back to its accustomed place, and for once Mrs. Hartley thought her

companion’s accent more than pretty, something which might even have attracted admirers at “the West End.”

“Nothing, I hope; I trust you never will; but does your great interest in Nettie O’Hara arise from the fact that you and John Riley are likely to be much hereafter one to another?”

Instantly the hand was withdrawn, and a quick flush passed over the girl’s face.

“John and I are nothing to each other but very good friends. He does not care enough for me, and I do not care enough for him, for things to be different. I only wish Nettie and he could have liked each other, and made a match. Perhaps in time she would have grown good enough for him.”

“You think John Riley a very good man, then?”

“Yes, too good and rare—” began the girl, when her companion interrupted her with—

“You little simpleton, run home, and to-night when you say your prayers, entreat that if you ever marry, you may have just such a good and rare (though foolish and capable of improvement) husband as John Riley. In all human probability you never will be anything more to each other than you are now; but still keep him as a friend, and you shall have me too, Grace, if you care for an old woman’s liking.”

“Though I am not pretty like Nettie,” added the girl.

“You are pretty, though not like Nettie. Ah! child, when you are my age you will understand why we, for whom admiration, if we ever had the power to attract it, is a forgotten story, are so tender to girls. Oh! I wish I had that fair-haired Nettie beside me now. How shall I sleep if no tidings come of her to-night?”

“Surely there will,” said Grace softly.

“Surely there will not,” considered Mrs. Hartley; and so the pair parted, Miss Moffat with the hope that although Nettie might have “gone off” with somebody she would repent by the way and turn back, Mrs. Hartley wondering who in the world that “somebody” might be with whom the young lady had chosen to elope.

Could it be Mr. John Riley; that same John to whom Grace Moffat had, by popular consent, been long assigned? Grace was young, but young people grow older in a judicious course of years. John likewise had not yet that head on his shoulders which is popularly supposed to bestow wisdom on its possessor; but he was an honest, honourable, good-looking, sufficiently clever young man, and as both families approved of the suggested alliance (had done so indeed since Grace wore a coral and bells), Kingslough considered the marriage as well-nigh _un fait accompli_.

True, Grace had been known to declare “she never meant to leave her father, that she did not think much of love or lovers, of marrying or giving in marriage. Why could not girls let well alone, and when they were happy at home, stay there? She was happy; she would always remain at Bayview; she was well; she did wish people would leave her alone.” Thus Grace, whilst John, when gracefully rallied on the subject by acquaintances who never could be made to understand that if a man has lost his heart, he does not care to talk about the fact, was wont laughingly to quote the Scotch ballad, and say, “‘Gracie is ower young to marry yet,’ and when she is old enough it is not likely she would

throw herself away upon a poor fellow like me.”

For Grace had a large fortune in her own right, and expectations worthy of consideration, and she came of a good old family, and persons who were supposed to understand such matters declared that eventually Grace would be a very attractive woman.

But then that time was the paradise of girls; they held the place in masculine estimation now unhappily monopolized by more mature sirens, and if a girl failed in her early teens to develope beauty after the fashion of Nettie O’Hara, her chances in the matrimonial market were not considered promising.

Curls, book-muslin, blue eyes, sashes to match, blushes when spoken to, no original or commonplace observations to advance when invited out to the mild dissipation of tea, and a carpet-dance; such was the raw material from which men of that generation chose wives for themselves, mothers for their children.

It was the fashion of the day, and we are all aware that fashions are not immutable.

Such is not the fashion now; and yet who, looking around, shall dare to say that the old curl and crook and shepherdess business had not, spite of its folly, much to recommend it?

Men made mistakes then no doubt, but they were surely less costly mistakes than are made nowadays. If a husband take to wife the wrong woman—and this is an error which has not even the charm of novelty to recommend it—he had surely a better chance for happiness with natural hair, virgin white dresses made after simplicity’s own device, innocent blue eyes, and cheeks whose roses bloomed at a moment’s notice, than with the powders, paints, and frizettes of our own enchanting maidens.

We are concerned now, however, with the girl of _that_ period. According to the then standard of beauty, as by society established, Grace Moffat was not lovely. With Nettie O’Hara the case stood widely different.

Had her portrait ever been painted, it might now have been exhibited as the type of that in woman which took men’s hearts captive in those old world days; golden hair hanging in thick curls almost to her waist; large blue eyes, with iris that dilated till at times it made the pupil seem nearly black; long, tender lashes; a broad white forehead; a complexion pure pink, pure white; dimpled cheeks; soft tender throat; slight figure, undeveloped; brains undeveloped also; temper, perhaps, ditto.

A face without a line; eyes without even a passing cloud; an expression perfectly free from shadow; and yet Grace Moffat described her favourite companion accurately, when in vague language she likened her to some fair tempting fruit, inside whereof there lurked a hardness, which friend, relative, and acquaintance, tried in vain to overcome. It had been the custom at Kingslough to regard Nettie as a limpid brook, through the clean waters of which every pebble, every grain of sand was to be plainly discerned. Now as Mrs. Hartley sat and pondered over the girl’s mysterious disappearance, she marvelled whether Miss Nettie’s innocent transparency might not rather have been that of a mirror; in other words, whether, while showing nothing much of her own thoughts, the young lady merely reflected back those of others.

She had been unhappy, yet who save Grace was cognizant of the fact? The outside world always imagined she was interested and absorbed in those studies, which were to fit her to fill a responsible position—perhaps

eventually at a salary of eighty pounds a year; such things were amongst the chronicles of society—in that state of life in which strangely enough Providence had seen fit to place an O'Hara. And yet what was the truth? the position had been unendurable to her, and most probably the studies likewise.

"Oh!" sighed Mrs. Hartley, sinking into the depths of a comfortable easy-chair, "is truth to be found nowhere save at the bottom of a well? and has John Riley anything to do with Nettie's disappearance? If I find he has, I shall renounce humanity."

Nevertheless, how was she to retain her faith intact even in John Riley? Not for one moment did she now imagine that if Nettie were actually gone, and she believed this to be the case, she had gone alone. No relative, Mrs. Hartley well knew, would welcome this prodigal with tears of rejoicing—with outstretched arms of love. She had been slow to share in the alarm caused by Nettie's disappearance, by Nettie's saturated scarf; now she could not resist a gradually increasing conviction that the girl's conduct had belied her face, and brought discredit on her family; that she had stolen away with some one who, fancying the match would not be approved of by his own relatives, possessed power enough over her affections to induce her to consent to a secret marriage.

A deeper depth of misfortune than a runaway match Mrs. Hartley had indeed for a moment contemplated, as whilst the talk in Miss Riley's parlour ran on, her eyes looked over the sun-lit sea; but seated in her own pleasant drawing-room, her reason refused to let her fears venture again to the brink of so terrible an abyss. No; Nettie had always been surrounded by honest and honourable men and women; women, who though they might be at times malicious, fond of scandal, given to tattling concerning the offences of their neighbours, would yet have done their best to keep a girl from wrong, or the knowledge of wrong; men, who let their sins of omission and commission be in other respects what they would, had yet a high standard of morality, as morality concerned their wives, mothers, sisters, children, and female relatives generally.

Had Nettie been one of the royal family, fenced round by all sorts of forms and ceremonies, by state etiquette, and the traditions of a line of kings, she could not, in Mrs. Hartley's opinion, have breathed an atmosphere more free from taint of evil, than that in which she had hitherto lived and had her being.

It might be John Riley—incited thereto by love of her pretty face, and fear of opposition from his family—had persuaded the girl to run off with him. If this were so, the greater pity for both. He was poor and struggling; her worldly fortune consisted of those personal charms already duly chronicled, a very little learning, and a smattering of a few accomplishments.

She knew as much as other young ladies of her age of that period; but after all, "La Clochette," the "Battle of Prague," and other such triumphs of musical execution were not serviceable articles with which to set up house.

She had been in training for a governess, and why, oh! why, could not John Riley have left her in peace to follow that eminently respectable, if somewhat monotonous vocation?

"It must be John Riley;" that Mrs. Hartley decided with a sorrowful shake of her head. Thanks to the blindness, or folly, or design of Grace Moffat, the young man had been afforded ample opportunities of contemplating Nettie's pink cheeks, and blue eyes, and golden curls, in the old-fashioned garden at Bayview.

She had counted there as nobody, no doubt, the demure little chit. She had been still and proper, Mrs. Hartley could well understand. At a very early period of her young life, Nettie was taught in a bitter enough school the truth, that speech is silver, but silence gold.

Nevertheless, young men have eyes, and John Riley was at least as likely as Mrs. Hartley to realize the fact that Nettie was a very pretty girl.

“And it will be misery for both of them,” decided the lady; “but there, what can it signify to me, who have no reason to trouble myself about the matter, to whom they are neither kith nor kin? I shall never believe in an honest face again Mr. John Riley, nor in a blundering, stupid schoolboy manner. There, I wash my hands of the whole matter; I only wish they were both young enough to be whipped and put in the corner, couple of babies.”

And then as a fitting result of her sentence, Mrs. Hartley sent up this message to the Parade: “Mrs. Hartley’s kind love, and has Miss Riley heard any tidings of her niece?” as by a convenient fiction Miss O’Hara was called.

The answer which came back was, “Miss Riley’s best love to Mrs. Hartley. She is very poorly, and has sent for the General. No news of Miss Nettie.”

“What a shame,” thought Mrs. Hartley, “for them to keep the poor old lady in such a state of suspense!” and she went to bed, having previously corked up all the vials of her wrath, with the intention of opening them sooner or later for the benefit of John Riley.

Alas! however, for the best laid schemes of humanity. Next morning, when Dodson, Mrs. Hartley’s highly respectable and eminently disagreeable maid, called her mistress, she brought with her into the room the following announcement:—

“It is nine o’clock’ ’m, and if you please, ’m, Mr. Riley, ’m, is in the drawing-room, ’m, and Miss O’Hara—”

“What of her, woman?” demanded Mrs. Hartley, in a tone Mrs. Siddons might have envied, sitting bolt upright in bed and looking in her _toilette de nuit_ a very different person indeed from the stately widow whose dress was the envy and whose tongue was the dread of all the ladies in Kingslough, whether married or single. “Don’t stand there silent, as if you were an idiot.”

“Miss O’Hara have gone off with Mr. Daniel Brady, ’m, if you please, ’m,” and Dodson the imperturbable, having made this little speech, turned discreetly to leave the room.

“If she pleased, indeed!” Whether she pleased or not the deed was done and irrevocable.

For blue eyes, and pink cheeks, and golden hair there was in this world no hope, no pardon, no chance of social or family rehabiliment; not even when the eyes were bleared and glassy, not when the cheeks were pale and furrowed, not when the thick, bright hair was thin and grey, might Nettie ever imagine this sin of her youth would be forgiven and forgotten.

An hour had been enough for the sowing, years would scarcely suffice for the in-gathering.

All this Mrs. Hartley foresaw as she laid her head again on the pillow and turned her eyes away from the sight of the bright sunbeams dancing on the sea.

Meantime the door had closed behind her immaculate and most unpleasant maid.

CHAPTER III.
THE GLENDARES.

Twelve Irish miles from Kingslough, meaning fifteen or thereabouts English measurement, stood Rosemont, the ancestral residence of the Earls of Glendare.

That fifteen miles' journey took the traveller precisely the same distance from the sea; but it did not matter in the smallest degree to any of the Glendares where the family seat was situated, since they never lived on their own acres whilst a guinea remained to be spent in London or Paris.

Once upon a time, as the fairy-books say, the Glendare rent-roll had provided the head of the family with an income of one thousand pounds a day. There were larger rent-rolls in the United Kingdom no doubt, but still a thousand a day can scarcely be considered penury.

To the Glendares, however, it merely assumed the shape of pocket-money; as a natural consequence the ancestral revenues proved ultimately totally inadequate to supply the requirements of each successive earl.

They married heiresses, they married paupers, with a precisely similar result.

The heiresses' wealth was spent, the paupers learned to spend. Gamblers, men and women, they risked the happiness and well-being of their tenants on a throw of the dice. Rents, too high already, were raised on lands the holders had no capital to get more produce out of.

"Money! money!" was the Glendare refrain; and money scraped together by pence and shillings, money painfully earned in the sweat of men's brows, by the labour of women's hands, went out of the country to keep those wicked orgies going where my lord, and other lords like him, helped to make a poor land poorer, and milady, all paint, and pride, and sin, played not only diamonds and spades, but the heart's blood of patient men, and the tears and sobs of hopeless women.

In the quiet fields where the wheat grew and the barley ripened, where the potatoes put forth their blossoms, purple and yellow, white and yellow, where the meadows yielded crops that reached far above a man's knees, there was the Glendare rent sowed and planted, reaped, mown, garnered, gathered, pound by pound, all too slowly for the harpies who waited its advent.

The hens in the untidy farm-yards, the eggs they laid in convenient hedges, the chickens they hatched were all in due course sacrificed on the altar of rent. The cows' milk, the butter it produced, the calves they bore, might have been labelled "Rent." The yarn spun by an ancient grandmother, the cloth woven by a consumptive son had that trade-mark stamped upon thread and web. The bees in the garden hummed unconsciously the same tune, the pigs grunting on the dung-heap, wallowing in the

mire, exploring the tenants' earth-floored kitchens, repeated the same refrain.

Rent! the children might have been hushed to sleep with a song reciting its requirements, so familiar was the sound and meaning of the word to them. Rent! lovers could not forget the inevitable "gale days," even in their wooing.

What did it matter whether the tenants looked forth over land where the earth gave her increase, or upon barren swamps, where nothing grew luxuriantly save rushes and yellow flags? The rent had to be made up somehow just the same. Did the pig die, did the cow sicken, did the crops fail, did illness and death cross their thresholds, that rent, more inexorable even than death, had to be paid by men who in the best of times could scarcely gather together sufficient to pay it at all.

In the sweat of their brows was that income made up by the Glendare tenantry, and the Jews had the money. Fortunately in those days penny newspapers were not, and tidings from the great capital came rarely to remote homesteads, otherwise how should these men have borne their lot; borne labour greater than any working man of the present day would endure, and superadded to that labour all the anxieties of a merchant? The farmer then was a principal and yet he did his own labour. He had a principal's stake, a principal's responsibilities, and as a recompense—what? The privilege of being out in all weathers to look after his stock and his crops; the right to work early and late so long as he could make up his rent; the power to keep a sound roof over his head if he saw to the thatch or the slating himself. Add to these advantages a diet into which oaten meal entered largely and meat never; the luxury of a chaff-bed; the delight of being called Mister by the clergyman, the minister, the agent, and friends generally, and the reader will have a fair idea of the sort of existence led by tenants on the Glendare and other estates at that period of Ireland's history.

Landlords in those days had no responsibilities. Responsibility was at that time entirely a tenant question, which fact may perhaps account for some of the troubles that have since then perplexed the mind of the upper ten. By the grace of God and the king there was then a class established to spend money; by grace of the same powers there was a still larger class created to provide the money the former chose to squander.

That property had its duties as well as its rights was a maxim which would have been laughed to scorn by those whom the adage concerned.

Once again we may find in this, cause for the later effect, of the lower classes now utterly denying that property has its rights as well as its duties.

Revolutions come and revolutions go; there is a mighty one being wrought at the present moment, which has arisen out of circumstances such as those enumerated and others like them, and happy will this land be if for once the wealthy can persuade themselves to personal abnegation as the poor did in days gone by.

It is hard to do so with the eyes of body and understanding wide open, but in proportion to the difficulty so will be the reward.

The great must give much now for the years wherein their fathers gave nothing; and if they are willing to do so, the evil will right itself, and a bloodless battle-ground shall leave an open field whereon the next generation may ventilate the differences of centuries, and settle those grievances which have been handed down from generation to generation,

but investigated truthfully and thoroughly by none.

In the days of which I write, taking society round, the rich were all powerful, and the poor had none to help. It was a great and patient population that rose up early and worked hard all day, that ate the bread of carefulness and saved every groat which their poor lives could spare in order that milady and other ladies like her should fulfil no one single useful or grand purpose in life.

Were the sights of nature in her different moods sufficient reward for their uncomplaining labour? So perhaps the men and the women who never noticed nature at all, considered.

And yet there must have been some great compensation about the whole business, which perhaps we shall never quite understand here—unless it was to be found in the great contentment, the sweet patient adaptability of the people of that far away time.

The love of wife and children was wonderfully dear to those toilers on the land, and as a rule they had tender, helpful wives, and dutiful, hard working children. There was peace at home, let the agent be never so unquiet; there was no straining this way and struggling in that direction.

The oaten meal porridge was eaten in thankfulness, and no dissension curdled the milk with which the mess was diluted. They were too poor, and too dependent one upon another to quarrel, added to which the Almighty had bestowed upon them that power of knowing when to speak and when to refrain, which adds so mightily to the well-being of households.

“The world,” says the old adage, “grows wiser and weaker;” comparing the poor of these days with the poor of a long ago period, it is to be feared they do not grow better.

Concerning the rich, it is to be hoped they grow wiser than their progenitors.

Wickeder it might baffle some even of the men whose doings now astonish worthy magistrates and learned judges, to become.

No man of the present day at all events dare emulate the doings of those historical Glendares, and yet one redeeming point may be stated in their favour. They exhibited their vices where they spent their money. On the rare occasions when they honoured the family mansion with their presence, they left their immoralities behind them. They came like leeches to suck the life’s blood out of their tenants; to assert feudal superiority in the matter of votes; to get out of the way of importunate creditors; sometimes it might be to recruit health, enfeebled by London hours and London dissipation: but no tenant ever had cause to curse the day when his daughter’s pretty face was commented on by one of the Glendares, old or young; no farmer’s wife ever had reason to weep for a child worse than dead through them; no household held a vacant place in consequence of any ill wrought by my lord or one belonging to him.

Indeed that was just the sort of evil my lord would not have brooked on the part of one belonging to him.

He knew the people he had to deal with, and understood precisely the straw which should break the camel’s back of their endurance.

So to put it, he and his were on their good behaviour when they crossed the channel; and accordingly, though never worse landlords cursed a soil than these men who had come in with the second Charles, and not gone out

with any of the Georges, the Glendares were popular and well liked.

Perhaps for the same reason that the Stuarts were liked. They had winsome faces, gracious ways, familiar manners. The beggars in the streets had free liberty to bandy repartee with my lord, who always kept his pockets full of coppers for their benefit.

Coppers! the pence were much to them, but what were they to him? And yet the farmer, from whose leathern pouches those coppers originally came, and who gave out of their poverty a million times more than their landlord out of his abundance, liked to hear the mendicants' praise of my lord, who had a word and a joke for everybody, "God bless him."

And perhaps there was some praise due to a nobleman who, situated as my lord was, had a word and a joke for anybody.

It is not in the slightest degree likely that a single reader of these lines can know from experience the irritating effects which a persistent dun is capable of exciting on the serenest temper. Still less can the present race of debtors understand the horror that encompassed even a nobleman when he knew at any moment the hand of a bailiff might be laid on his shoulder.

Fancy capping jests under these circumstances with a bare-footed, imperfectly clothed Hibernian beggar who had never washed her body nor combed her hair for forty years or thereabouts. Could you have done it? No, you answer with a shudder; and yet that was the way in which gentry courted popularity, and "made their souls" in the good old days departed.

To the poorest man who touched his hat to him, my lord raised his; let the humblest Irish equivalent of John Oakes or Tom Styles ask audience, he was asked into the presence-chamber. On his agent, on his lawyers, my lord thrust the unpleasant portion of the land question, and every tenant on that wide estate was from his own personal experience firmly convinced that if his landlord could only be privately informed how wrong many things were, he would publicly redress them.

"Not but what the lawyers and the agent were very pleasant gentlemen, only it was not natural they should take the same interest in the soil as his lordship," and so forth. Whereas those unhappy gentlemen were always trying to moderate his lordship's demands, always striving to make that most worthy nobleman understand there was a limit to a farmer's purse, a point beyond which a man could not, physically or pecuniarily, be safely bled.

Besides Rosemont the Glendare owned other residences in Ireland: Glendare Castle, a black ruin, the foundations of which were washed by the wild Atlantic waves; Beechwood, a lovely property occupied by a certain Major Coombes, who kept the place in good order to the exceeding mortification of his landlord, who considered the well-kept lawns and trim flower-gardens and richly stocked conservatories a tacit reproach to himself; to say nothing of several dilapidated shooting-lodges that were either rented by poor gentlemen farmers, or else going to ruin as fast as damp and neglect could take them.

Had any one of the family set himself to the task of freeing the estates, he might have succeeded. Had any fresh earl when he returned to Rosemont, after laying the body of his predecessor in the old Abbey overlooking the sea, faced the question of his difficulties, and determined to rid his property of debt and the Jews, he might even at the eleventh hour have saved those broad acres for his posterity and won ease of mind and blessings from his inferiors for himself. Until the

very last, the disease though deep seated was not incurable; but not one of those careless earls ever had courage to endure the remedy.

After the funeral of each successive nobleman, the next heir hied him back to London, or Paris, or Baden, or some other favourite resort; and the Jews and the lawyers and the middle-men prospered and fattened on the Glendare pastures, whilst both landlord and tenants led wretched, anxious lives, the first driven almost mad by the harpies, whose cry from January to December was “More, more,” the latter toiling to fill a purse out of which the money poured faster than it could be thrown in.

Yes, they were doomed in those days of which I write—the Glendares gracious in manner, false at heart; lightly had their lands been won, lightly it seemed destined they should go. And yet there was one of the family towards whom the eyes of the tenantry turned with hope, though he was not heir-apparent, or presumptive, or anything of the sort.

He was resident, however, and that, in the estimation of the Glendare dependents, was a virtue and a promise in itself. Since his earliest youth Robert Somerford had lived amongst his uncle’s tenantry; not from any desire on his part to do so, the reader may be certain, but simply because Mrs. Somerford having no money to live anywhere else, had been glad enough when left a widow, to embrace Lord Glendare’s offer for her to take up her abode at Rosemont, and make her moderate income go as far as she could in one wing of that commodious family mansion.

The Hon. Mrs. Somerford never made even a pretence of being contented with this arrangement. She gave herself airs, she openly stated her dislike to the country and its inhabitants; she never visited the poor, or the rich either if she could help it, for that matter; she never assisted the sick and needy; the ready graceful charity of that generous peasantry she laughed to scorn; indeed, as Mrs. Hartley, herself a distant kinswoman of Lord Glendare’s relative declared, “Mrs. Somerford was a truly detestable person.”

But Lord Glendare had loved his younger brother, her husband, and for the sake of the dead gave shelter to the widow and her son, the latter of whom grew up amongst the Irish people as has been stated.

Had fate so willed it, he would gladly have left Ireland and the people behind him for ever. Aliens the Glendares were when to John Somerford, first Earl, King Charles granted those lands, privileges, and so forth, of which mention has already been made; and aliens they remained through the years that followed. They were not of the soil; better they loved the pavement of Bond Street than all the shamrocks of the sainted isle; but as already hinted, they were a plausible and an adaptable race, possessed of manners that might have pleased their first royal patron, not given to tramp unnecessarily on people’s corns and blessed with that ready courtesy, which if it mean in reality very little, conveys the idea of intending a great deal.

Certain were the tenants that some day Mr. Robert would put matters right for them with my lord.

“He is like one of ourselves, bless his handsome face,” said the women, enthusiastically. “He has sat down there,” and the speaker would point to a settle opposite, “many and many a time, and taken the children on his knee, and rested his gun in the corner, and eaten a potato and salt with as much relish as if it had been a slice off a joint.”

“And his tongue is like ours,” some man would continue. “Even my lord talks English, and so do his sons, fine young gentlemen though they be, but Master Robert is Irish to the backbone. He will go away to Dublin

and make a great name for himself one of these days, and then he won't forget the 'gossoons' he played with once, but 'insense' my lord into the wrongs that are put upon us in his name."

"There never was a Somerford a patch upon Mr. Robert," sometimes cried a female voice when the conversation turned upon Rosemont and its inhabitants. At which juncture a tenant more wise, more just, or more prudent than the woman-kind, was certain to interpose with a cautious remark—

"Hoot! ye shouldn't say that, the young lords are wonderful fine lads to be sure."

From all of which it will be perceived that another earl now received the Glendare rents from that lamented nobleman who ruled over his vassals at the time George the Fourth began his glorious reign.

He lay in Ballyknock Abbey securely cased in elm and soldered down in lead, and, for greater safety, boxed up a third time in oak; and Louis, the son he hoped might obtain an appointment in the Royal Household, and who did obtain it, reigned in his stead.

Thus a new race was springing up not one whit less extravagant, selfish, short sighted, and evilly inclined than the former generation. Strange tales about the Glendare _ménage_, and the Glendare doings, found their way across the channel to Dublin, and thence down to the better class of houses in the colder and darker north,—tales whereat sometimes society lifted up its hands and covered its face, tales at which it shook its decorous head, tales of shifts and subterfuges at which it was not in Irish nature to avoid laughing.

A volcano was threatening the land, but the Glendares danced unconscious on the edge of the crater. The skeleton ruin was creeping up to their gates, but they only threw those gates open the wider, and bade more guests enter. A cloud of debt, once no bigger than a man's hand, now covered almost the whole of their social future, and yet, each day, fresh debts were contracted.

The Countess was one of the queens whose voice was potent at Almack's.

She had been a great beauty in her youth. Artists had painted, sculptors moulded her, poets had written verses in her honour, philosophers had basked in her smiles, statesmen esteemed it an honour to receive a tap from her fan.

But the loveliness was gone, as the lands were going, and everybody knew it.

She had immediately before the period when this story opens, received an intimation from her husband that as an election was imminent, it would be necessary for them both to repair to Ireland; and when she looked in the glass, to trace precisely the change which the years come and gone since she had canvassed for votes before had wrought, she sighed at the alteration made not so much by time as by the harassing life led of her own choice and her own free will.

"Heigho!" she thought, "who would imagine I had once been the beautiful Lady Trevor?" and then she put on a little more rouge, and decided that after all the change was more apparent to her than it could be to any one else.

Happy in this delusion, my lady arrived at Rosemont on the morning of the day when all Kingslough was in consternation at high noon by reason

of Nettie O’Hara’s disappearance.

CHAPTER IV.
HOW THE NEWS ARRIVED.

It was a remarkable fact that although of the three ladies who kept the only circulating library Kingslough boasted one was deaf, a second nearly blind, and the third afflicted with lameness, nowhere in the town was such early and reliable information concerning important events to be obtained as in the small room lined with shelves, which were filled with ragged, soiled, generally imperfect, and sometimes wholly disabled books, which had passed through hundreds of hands, and done duty at various other circulating libraries before settling down for life amongst the inhabitants of that dull little seaport town.

In the pleasant days of old, few people in Ireland worked for their living. There was an idea abroad that to labour for daily bread could by no possibility be the right thing to do; and accordingly, as human beings found it impossible to live without bread, or at all events potatoes, as pennies were very scarce, even if the price of provisions was inconceivably low, a convenient series of fictions obtained amongst the Hibernians, that if any work was done it was performed entirely as a matter of pleasure or occupation.

Even the very labourers, most of whom had their few acres of rush or daisy-covered land, farmed by their wives and children, went to the estate on which they chanced to be employed, “Just to oblige the masther.”

The work was done fairly and the wages received regularly, but it pleased them to make the latter seem by a figure of speech rather an accident than a result.

And the same spirit pervaded all ranks. If a young man more clever and more fortunate than his fellows had a secretary’s place offered, he accepted it merely, so partial friends declared, because “Lord This or That was so good to him; treated dear George like his own son.” Did a boy enter the navy, “he could never, his relations declared, be happy on shore, so they were glad to humour his whim.” Did a brother scrape together all the family resources and purchase a commission in a cavalry regiment, the girls were delighted, because “Charley never was happy out of the saddle.” Did a man read hard and study hard and go in for the bar, mamma murmured in a delicious brogue, “Henery had always a turn for arguing and making speeches;” whilst if a keen young fellow were sufficiently lucky to own an attorney uncle, friendly enough and rich enough to find money to article the lad to himself, the matter was generally put in some such light as this:—

“Jack is going to Dublin to help his uncle. The dear old man’s business—almost entirely confined to the nobility—is increasing just as fast as his health is failing, and so he asked Jack if he would mind assisting him, and of course it will not be any extra expense to us, as he would not have Jack there and give him nothing.”

As regards the Church, I really think there was no need to put a false gloss on the motives of any man who entered it then, so far at least as money was concerned. The great prizes were not many. The pay of curates was ridiculously small; so small indeed that few save those possessed of adequate private means could have been found among their ranks; but

perhaps this was the only career concerning which a fair amount of candour prevailed.

To India, indeed, men did not scruple to say they were going, simply and purely to make their fortunes; but then India was a long way off, and the fortunes men had made there, the undying names they had left behind, the pages their deeds filled in history, read like the enchanted story of some eastern romance.

By a similar convenient fiction to that employed by men, if ladies worked, it was because they liked employment, not because they earned money.

Supposing “family circumstances” induced Miss Brennan to take up her abode in Sir Thomas O’Donnell’s family in the capacity of governess or companion, she stayed there, so sympathetic friends would have it, not because Sir Thomas paid her fifty pounds a year, but because Lady O’Donnell liked her so much she would not hear of her returning to her friends.

Supposing Mrs. Waller and her daughters, driven to their wits’ ends how to make the ends of their income meet! Visitors were expected to believe that all these screens Martha painted so beautifully; all these purses, glittering with beads and tassels and clasps and fancy rings, which Pauline knitted or netted with a grace and dexterity really pleasant to behold; all those pen-wipers and scent-bags and card-baskets and paper mats which the younger fry manufactured as industriously as though they had been inmates of a deaf and dumb school, were intended merely as free gifts to their richer relations.

That was the way Mrs. Waller put and her friends received it; with the light in which the richer relations viewed those works of art we have, happily, nothing to do. The delusion was kept up at one end; perhaps there was execration at the other. There are some persons who to this hour cannot behold an embroidered sofa-pillow, a set of dinner-mats adorned with robins seated on twigs; rural cottages surrounded with trees; foreign temples, and vague sea-views, all executed in Indian ink; a smoking-cap; a pair even of ornamented braces,—without groaning in spirit over memories of black mail, levied in the name of fancy work, that are recalled by the sight.

When however at a period, many years previous to the commencement of this story, Mrs. Larkins and her two maiden sisters, the Misses Healey, opened the circulating library to which reference has been made, Kingslough was fairly non-plussed what to do with, what to say about them. In its way it was as bad as though an Agnew had started a mill, or a Riley taken a shop and expressed his intention of serving behind a counter. The thing could not be concealed. There lay the awful communication,—

“_Have_ you heard,” wrote Mrs. Lefroy, “that the Healeys are going to lend out books?” and then of course it became that recipient’s duty to write to some one else. “My dear, _what_ do you think? The Healeys are having shelves put up all round their front parlour, and intend making it into a _public_ library,” and so forth, and so forth, till at last some spinster more courageous or more inquisitive than her neighbours, went boldly and asked Mrs. Larkins what she meant by it all.

Mrs. Larkins was equal to the occasion, she had not been left a widow twice for nothing.

“Yes; it is very sad,” she sighed, “but we cannot give up our charities.”

Now for many a long day the Healeys had, on the plea of giving to the poor, let their first floor to an old bachelor who, dying one morning minus a will, left them without a legacy or a lodger.

At once Kingslough accepted the Library, and its _raison d'être_. The idea had been suggested and the means found for carrying it into effect by a dreadfully vulgar man who made money somehow out of flax, in a distant part of the kingdom, and who having been brother to the deceased Larkins had given many a stray pound note to Larkins' widow, but all this was discreetly kept in the background.

"We cannot give up our charities," settled the business satisfactorily at Kingslough, and why should it not have done so when every hour, even at the present enlightened day, men and women have, as a matter of common politeness, to swallow doses of social humbug as large if not larger.

Not very long ago, the writer of this was expatiating to a friend on the bad taste of a wealthy and titled lady who not merely insisted on writing very poor verses but expected to be paid for them.

"Ah! it is for her charities!" was the reply. "What! with an income of—?" Not to be personal the amount shall remain blank. The reader, even if left to his internal consciousness, cannot fill it in at too high a figure.

"Yes, she is so good; she gives so much away."

In comparison to that what could Kingslough offer?—Kingslough, which has, I am credibly informed, gone on with the times, and now prints its own newspaper, and has its books from Mudie.

There was no Mudie when the Misses Healey converted the parlour of their "dear papa's" house into a room free to the public.

A second door was put up, to enable the hall door to stand hospitably open, and soon their friends began to consider the Library a pleasant sort of place in which to meet and while away half an hour. They visited the Misses Healey, in fact, and borrowed a book or so from them. And thus the ladies kept a roof over their heads, and retained their standing in society. If they did make charity an excuse, who amongst us, friends, has been so invariably straightforward that he shall dare to throw the first stone at them.

Let the man who has never played with that which is worse than lying—equivocation—stand up and condemn them. Charity begins at home, the worldly-wise tell us, and Mrs. Larkins and her sisters, who were in grievous need, bestowed it there. No beggar in the street was, after a fashion, poorer than they, and so they remembered their own need first.

But when all this was done they had still something left; a pot of jam for a sick child, a basin of soup for a weakly mother, tea-leaves with capabilities of tea still in them, for the old women, who loved their cup as their husbands loved their "glass;" clothes shabby and thin and patched, it is true, but still clothes for some half-clad beggar, and a few shillings even it might be in the course of the year given in cases where nothing but money could be of any use.

They gave what they could, and the beggars curtseyed to them, and even the young reprobates of the town—there were reprobates, alas! in Kingslough, dull as it was—sometimes lifted their hats, and always refrained from jeering remarks when the deaf sister and the blind paced

along the Parade arm-in-arm together.

Further to the credit of the town, be it stated, certain hours were by the _non-élite_ set apart for their own visits to the Library. These hours were either very early or very late. They did not wish to intrude when Miss Healey had visitors, and in return Miss Healey acted towards them the part of a mother, and only recommended them such books as she could warrant from previous perusal to be perfectly innocuous.

Mrs. Larkins and Miss Healey might indeed safely have been planted guard, not merely over the morals of Kingslough, but of the then coming generation.

Could the old darlings rise from their graves, what would they think of the literature of the present day?

If a girl, attracted by a particularly taking title, remarked, laying hands on the book, “I think I will have that, Miss Healey,” Miss Healey would turn upon her a wizened face, a pair of spectacles, and a brown front, and say,—

“My dear, you must not have that. It is a gentleman’s book.”

What awful iniquity lay concealed under that phrase perhaps the gentlemen of Kingslough could have explained. Certain am I no woman in the place excepting Mrs. Larkins and her sisters knew. Neither did the “lower orders.” Had Miss Healey belonged to the strictest sect of professing Christians, her spectacles could not more diligently have searched profitable and proper reading for the young men and the young women who, being able slowly and painfully to spell out a story, were willing to pay their hardly-earned pennies for the privilege of doing so.

No new novels found their way to Kingslough. The youngest Miss Healey’s shelves boasted must have been at least ten years of age, but they were fresh to the subscribers as the last work of fiction published. As a rule Miss Kate Healey, who was deaf, read aloud to her two sisters, but occasionally books would arrive, some scenes in which trenched so closely on their forbidden ground, that Miss Healey would decide against their public perusal, and undertake herself silently to grapple with the enemy.

As a woman twice married (“To think of it,” as Grace Moffat observed, “while so many women never are married even once”), on Mrs. Larkins this duty would naturally have devolved, but time and other causes had rendered her eye-sight so bad that reading was impossible.

Indeed she could not find any other means of employing the shining hours except knitting; and “How thankful I ought to be,” said the poor lady, “that I learned to knit while I could see!” And accordingly, morning, noon, and night, she plied her needles incessantly. Counterpanes, curtains, shawls, reticules, purses, grew under her bony fingers. Miss Kate read the tenderest love passages to the accompaniment of those clicking needles; and while Miss Healey, in the interests of public morality, was silently perusing some questionable scene, that everlasting knitting still made way.

Three busily idle women were those sisters; always at work, and yet always at leisure, always ready to hear news, equally ready to repeat news. They were to Kingslough as Reuter to the civilized world. The Library was the central telegraph office of the day to the little town. Had it ever occurred to the Misses Healey to issue a newspaper, they might have produced edition after edition containing the very latest

intelligence concerning the last piece of scandal.

To them, late on the evening of that summer's day when this story opens, entered, in great haste, a burly, red-faced, hearty-looking man, arrayed in a driving-coat, and having a large kerchief muffled about his neck.

"My compliments, ladies, your most obedient servant," he said, with a sort of rough gallantry which set upon him not amiss, uncovering at the same time, and holding his hat in his hand in a manner which might put a modern dandy to shame. "I want you to find me a book for my little wife. Plenty of love, and millinery, and grand society; you know her taste, Miss Healey. I am in a hurry, for I stopped longer at Braher fair than I intended, and my poor girl always thinks some accident has happened to me if I am late. Thank you. I knew you could lay hands on what I asked for in a minute," and he was about to depart, when Mrs. Larkins, full of the one subject of the day, interposed with—

"Oh! Mr. Mooney, and what do you think about this sad affair?"

"What sad affair?" he inquired.

"Dear! dear! haven't you heard?" exclaimed Miss Healey and Mrs. Larkins in amiable unison. "Miss O'Hara has been missing ever since ten o'clock this morning, and no one knows what has happened to her."

"Miss O'Hara?" he repeated. "Miss Riley's niece? a pretty young lady with a quantity of light hair?" and he made a gesture supposed to indicate curls flowing over the shoulder.

"Yes; and they have been dragging the river."

"And watching the tide," added Miss Healey.

"And poor dear Miss Riley is heartbroken."

"And she has sent for General Riley."

"I am very much mistaken if I did not see the young lady this morning," said Mr. Mooney, a serious expression overclouding his frank, jovial face.

"You? oh, Mr. Mooney! where?" cried the two ladies.

"Why, driving along the Kilcullagh Road with—"

"With whom?" in a shriek.

"With Mr. Dan Brady. I thought I had seen the young lady's face somewhere before, but his mare trotted past me so quick I could not identify it at the moment. Now, however, I am sure the lady was Miss O'Hara." There was a moment's silence.

"He must have abducted her, then," broke out the sisters, but Mr. Mooney shook his head.

"It is a bad job, I am afraid," he observed; "but she has good friends, that is one comfort. I do not think my little woman will want to read any novels to-night, Miss Healey, when I tell her this story. I am sorry, ay, that I am." And with another bow, for the Misses Healey were too high and mighty personages for him to offer his hand, Mr. Mooney, with the books in his capacious pockets, passed out into the street, mounted his gig, untied the reins he had knotted round the rail of the dash-board, said, "Now, Rory," to his horse, a great powerful roan, and

started off towards home at a good round pace, thinking the while how grieved his delicate wife would be to hear of this great trouble which had befallen respectable people.

“It is enough to make a man glad he has none of his own,” murmured Mr. Mooney to himself, in strict confidence, and this must be considered as going great lengths, since if Mr. Mooney had one bitter drop in his cup, it was the fact that no living child had ever been born to him; that he had neither son, nor daughter, nothing to love or to love him except the little “wife,” who beguiled the weary hours of her invalid existence with stories of lords and ladies, of fond men and foolish maidens, of brave attire and brilliant halls, of everything farthest removed from the actual experience of her own monotonous, though most beautiful and pathetic life.

Meanwhile Miss Healey having screamed the tidings brought by Mr. Mooney into Miss Kate’s least deaf ear, the three stood for a moment, so to say, at arms.

“Anne,” said Mrs. Larkins at length, “Miss Riley ought to know this,” but Anne shrank back appalled at the idea of being the bearer of such tidings.

“Some one ought to go after them now, this minute,” said Miss Kate.

“Poor, poor Miss Riley!” exclaimed Miss Healey. “Yes,” began Mrs. Larkins impatiently, “that is all very well, but something should be done.”

“I’ll tell you what,” exclaimed Miss Healey, fairly driven into a corner, which might excuse, though not perhaps justify her form of speech. “I’ll tell you what. I’ll put on my bonnet and shawl, and let Jane know what we have heard.”

“The very best thing you could do,” said Mrs. Larkins. So Miss Healey limped slowly off and told that “delightful Jane” the news.

CHAPTER V.
MR. RILEY’S PROSPECTS.

By the time Miss Healey, attended by her maid Sarah (although Mrs. Larkins and her sisters had astonished the proprieties of Kingslough by opening a library, they would never have dreamt of outraging them by roaming about the streets after dusk unprotected), arrived at Miss Riley’s abode, that lady was in bed and asleep, lulled thereto by the united effects of excitement and that modest tablespoonful of sherry which Jane always mixed with the gruel she had nightly, for some dozen years previously, prepared for her mistress.

After mature deliberation Jane decided to let her sleep on.

“It would be only breaking her night’s rest,” she said to Miss Healey, “and what could an ould lady like her do at this time of night?”

“What, indeed! or even in the morning,” answered Miss Healey, in a tone of the most profound despondency, whilst Sarah in the rear murmured sympathetically, “The crayture.”

“But I’ll just slip on my bonnet,” continued Jane, “and turn the key,

and put it in my pocket, and run down and tell the Colonel; some knowledgeable person ought to know about it," and suiting her actions to her words, Jane dived back into the kitchen, took up her bonnet and shawl, and returning to the front door, resumed her conversation with Miss Healey, while she tied her strings and threw her shawl about her. It was thus she made her toilette.

"You're not afraid of leaving your mistress?" suggested Miss Healey, delicately interrogative. Three as they were, such a thing had never happened to one of the sisters, as finding herself alone in the house after dark.

"Oh! I shan't be away five minutes, Miss," answered Jane confidently, as she closed the door and put the key in her pocket, and trotted off along the Parade, after bidding Miss Healey "Good night," leaving that lady all unconscious that it had been Jane's regular practice, when her mistress was settled, and Miss Riley settled very early indeed, to go out and have a gossip with her friends, not for five minutes only, but for many fives.

A willing servant, always good-tempered, always ready to wait upon that poor, feeble old lady, thankful for small wages, content with frugal fare,—a pattern domestic, but human nevertheless. And being human, the monotony of that monotonous existence would have been insupportable but for those stolen half-hours, of the theft of which Nettie O'Hara had been long aware.

And it was the knowledge of this fact which put a sting into Jane's words when speaking of the girl's elopement. She had trusted Nettie—perforce perhaps—but still she had trusted her with a confession of various visits, and interviews, and appointments, which she could not well confide to her mistress, and Nettie, having a secret herself, had heard all the servant found to say, and kept her own counsel the while.

Had she chosen any other man than Daniel Brady, and confided her love to Jane, Jane could have forgiven her; but she had chosen Daniel Brady and kept her confidence from Jane, therefore that model servant was very bitter indeed in her denunciation of Miss O'Hara's slyness.

"And to think that never a one of us should have guessed it," said Jane, in declamation to Colonel and Mrs. Perris. "Always with her books, as the mistress and me thought, taking them with her when she went to bathe, carrying them to the shore when she had a spare hour, and the tide was out, sitting in the parlour all by herself with her writing books and such like, I am sure I could have taken my Bible oath she had never so much as thought of a sweetheart. And that she should have taken up with the likes of him. It was lonesome for her," added the woman, with a vivid memory of the unutterable loneliness and dreariness of that silent house recurring as she spoke. "It was lonesome, but sure if she had only waited, many a gentleman would have been proud and happy to marry an O'Hara, even if she hadn't a halfpenny to her fortune."

"It is a bad business, if true," said Colonel Perris. "Let us hope it is not true."

"I am afeard it is true enough," Jane, who was beginning to be "wise afterwards," exclaimed; "and the poor mistress will never hold up her head again. Can nothing be done, sir?"

"Not by me," answered Colonel Perris decidedly. "Miss O'Hara is no relation of mine, and I cannot interfere;" and feeling that this speech naturally terminated the interview, Jane, after executing a curtsey, left the room, and, true to her determination of not leaving Miss Riley

alone for a longer period than she could avoid, hurried back to that dark, silent house, from out of which Nettie O'Hara had taken whatever of sunshine her youth and beauty could confer, for ever.

"I will write a line to the General," said Colonel Perris to his wife, after a few moments' silence, "and then wash my hands of the whole business. Shall I begin my communication as Jane did hers? 'One says Miss O'Hara has gone off;' what a convenient phrase, commits no person, and imparts an air of mystery to the whole proceeding! I will not commit myself to the names of informants at all events," and the Colonel wrote:—

"DEAR RILEY,—Rumour will have it that your pretty young cousin has eloped with, or been carried off by, Mr. Daniel Brady. I trust Rumour is in error, but at the same time think you ought to know what she says. Certain it is Miss Nettie disappeared mysteriously this morning, and has not since been heard of.

"Yours faithfully,
"FREDERICK PERRIS"

"That will bring him if Miss Riley's shaky complaint does not," remarked the writer, folding up the letter, which was written on a great sheet of paper such as one never sees nowadays, sealing it with red wax, and stamping that wax with a huge crest. "Tim shall ride over with it first thing to-morrow morning."

"And then," suggested Mrs. Perris.

"Then it will be for the family to decide what is best to be done," said the Colonel significantly. "I am very much mistaken in Mr. Brady if there be no need of family interference."

"Oh! Fred," exclaimed his wife.

"Well, my dear," he answered, then finding she made no further remark, he went on,—"Poor Nettie! She has done an evil day's work for herself, I am afraid. So far as I can judge of the affair now, whether she be married or whether she be not, I would rather have seen her taken out of the Black Stream dead, than heard the news that woman brought here to-night."

"What is this Mr. Brady, then?" inquired his wife.

"Simply the worst man between Kingslough and the Cove of Cork," was the reply. "If that description be not comprehensive enough, say the worst man between Kingslough and St. Petersburg."

"How could the girl have become acquainted with—with such a person?"

"Why, what sort of guardian was that doting, sightless, decrepit old woman, for a girl like Nettie? She might have had a hundred lovers and nobody been the wiser."

"But, my dear, how many other girls are similarly situated, and it never occurs to anyone to imagine that harm will happen to them?"

"How many other girls?" he repeated, "very few I should hope."

"Take Grace Moffat for instance—"

"Grace Moffat! How utterly you mistake the position. It was a leap, I admit, for him to speak to Nettie O'Hara, but he _dared_ not have said

even so much as good morning to Grace Moffat. You never will understand Irish ways or Irish ideas. Supposing a respectable man in trade had cast eyes on Miss Nettie, and offered himself to her family as her future husband, the Rileys and all who were interested in the girl might have lamented the necessity, but they would have accepted the man. But suppose a man in that rank offered himself to Grace Moffat? Why, there is not a labourer at Bayview who would not resent such an offer as a personal insult. Grace may marry whom she pleases. With Nettie it was a question of marrying whom she could. Of what use is beauty in a land where a poor man fears to admire? I put it to you, Lucy, is there a man in our station in Kingslough or twelve miles round, who could marry for love without money, unless he wished to make his wife and himself miserable."

"What a misfortune to be an heiress!" sighed his wife.

"That sigh is not fair, Lucy," he said, eagerly; "you know I should not have asked the richest woman living to marry me had I not loved her for herself, but wedding portionless wives with us Irish is just like looking into shop windows. The articles may be very beautiful, and we acknowledge they are so, but we cannot afford them; they are not suitable for poor men. Had this been otherwise, Nettie never would have been intended for a governess. India, _or_ a situation. If India be impossible, as it was in her case, then a situation. No man in her own rank dared have taken her to wife, and so she was fain to flee from the delights of being a pupil-teacher, even with Daniel Brady; whilst Grace Moffat, possessed of not one-half her beauty—one-tenth indeed—may pick and choose, can afford to keep on shilly-shallying with John Riley."

"My love, you make a mistake," said Mrs. Perris, rousing herself into a state of active opposition, "Grace Moffat will be a magnificent woman."

"Pooh! Lucy, what she may be hereafter signifies nothing, what she is now signifies everything. With Nettie O'Hara's beauty and her own position, she might have married Robert Somerford. As it is—"

"There, do not speak another word. Robert Somerford, indeed! That idle, good-for-nothing, verse-writing, harp-playing, would-be man of fashion; Robert Somerford, a man without a fortune, a profession, or a trade; no match, in my opinion, even for your pink-and-white beauty, certainly no match for my charming Grace."

"I see nothing charming about her," was the reply.

"That is because you are a man," said Mrs. Perris calmly. "Give her the chance, and ten years hence she will be the queen of society; but that is just what men cannot understand. They want a woman ready made. They cannot believe that the sort of beauty they admire in a girl in her teens will not last, cannot last. Now Grace's loveliness will ripen day by day."

"You are eloquent," interrupted her husband, laughing.

"So will other people be on the same subject hereafter," persisted the lady.

"Perhaps so," he replied, "but I cannot say I agree with you. I have no spirit of prophecy, and in my opinion Grace is as plain as Nettie is pretty."

"Pretty, yes; not that I ever did, or ever shall admire a girl whose only claims to beauty consist in a pink-and-white complexion, eyes as large as saucers and as blue as the heavens, and long golden curls. I

detest blue eyes and golden hair, and I abominate curls."

"Well, my dear, we need not quarrel about the matter. I suspect neither of us will see much more of the poor child's eyes and curls. I only hope Riley will give the fellow a good horsewhipping."

"That would not benefit her," said Mrs. Perris.

"I am not sure of that," answered her husband.

Riding into Kingslough the next morning, Mr. John Riley felt quite of the Colonel's opinion. There was nothing he desired so much as opportunity and provocation to thrash the man who had stolen away his cousin.

An insult had been offered through her to the whole of her relations. Longingly, when he heard the news, did General Riley's eyes turn towards his pistols; then remembering the degeneracy of the days he had lived to see, he muttered an ejaculation which had little beside brevity to recommend it, and asked his son, "What are we to do?"

"Follow them," was the quiet reply; but there was a significance in the way Mr. Riley wound the thong of his whip round his hand, that gave a second meaning to his words.

"I wish I could go with you," said the elder man, "but this confounded gout always lays me by the heels whenever there is any work to do."

"Never mind, sir; you may trust me," answered his son, laying an unmistakable emphasis on the last four words.

"You had better wait, and have some breakfast, Jack; the old lady never gives one anything except a cup of weak tea and a slice of brown bread and butter."

"No. I will hear what fresh news there may be, and then ask Mrs. Hartley to give me something to eat."

"I think you must be in love with that woman," said his father.

"I am afraid she is the only woman who is in love with me," was the reply, uttered lightly, yet with a certain bitterness, and, having so spoken, Mr. John Riley walked across the hall, mounted his horse, and, followed by Tim, went down the drive at a smart trot.

Grace Moffat was wont to say, a little contemptuously, that "any man could ride." Had her sight been a little more impartial, she would have acknowledged that few men, even in Ireland, could ride like John Riley. But Miss Grace had her own ideal of what a male human being should be, and the lover popular rumour assigned to her did not, in the least degree, fulfil that ideal. She liked black curly hair, dark dreamy eyes, a dark complexion, a slight figure; and John's hair was straight and brown, his eyes grey and keen, his frame strong and well knit. Her ideal had hands small and delicate, like those of a woman, feet which it was a wonder to behold, his voice was soft and pleading, whilst John—well, all that could be said in John's favour she summed up in three words,—"He was good;" and Grace was not the first woman who thought—any more than she will be the last to think—goodness an exceedingly negative sort of virtue.

But if Grace did not love John, he loved her. The affection was all one-sided—it generally is—and the young man comprehended the fact.

As he rode along the hard, firm road, his thoughts keeping time to the beat of his horse's feet, he took his resolution. Young though Grace was, he would ask her to be his wife, and if she refused, he meant to leave Ireland.

Considering his nation, considering his birth, considering his surroundings, considering the ideas of those with whom he was thrown in contact, this young man, with the straight brown hair and features far from faultless, was gifted with wonderful common sense.

Much, as he loved Grace Moffat, and how he loved her no one save himself could tell, he could not afford to let any woman spoil the whole of his future life. He could not drag on his present useless, purposeless existence, even for the pleasure of perpetually seeing Grace.

He was young: and the years stretched out indefinitely before him. How could he live through them if he had no goal to reach, no object to remember having achieved?

This matter of Nettie O'Hara's put his own affairs into a tangible shape before him. Suppose, after he had waited and waited, and trusted and hoped, Grace chose some other man than himself—not like Daniel Brady, of course, but equally undeserving—what should he do? How should he endure the days, the months, the years which must succeed?

No! he would end it. Pink-and-white demureness itself, personified, had made her choice without consulting anybody, and why should not Grace, who was older and wiser, and who _must_ know, and who did know, that everybody in Kingslough had assigned her to him.

Ay, there was the mischief. Young ladies do not like to be assigned. If Kingslough could only have kept silence; but then Kingslough never did keep silence. Well, he would try; he would take advantage of this terrible trouble which had befallen her friend, and avail himself of a time when he knew Grace must be full of sorrow, to speak to her about her own future and his.

Yes; whether together or apart, it meant hers and his. If she sent him adrift, he would try to make of that future something even she need not have been ashamed to share. If he wore the willow, it should be next his heart—other leaves he would wear where men could see them, where she might hear of them.

And this feeling governed his reply to Mrs. Hartley, when across the breakfast-table she said to him gravely,—

"John, you ought to marry Grace Moffat soon."

"I mean to do so if she consents," was his answer.

"She is very young," remarked Mrs. Hartley, who did not quite like his tone.

"She is old enough to know her own mind," he retorted quickly, then added, "I am sick of this uncertainty; she must end it one way or another."

"You expect her to say 'No'?"

"I expect her to say 'No,'" he agreed.

"But you will not take that as final?"

“I shall take it as final,” he said, after a pause, speaking slowly and deliberately, “Grace is no coquette. If she likes me she will tell me so; if she does not—”

“If she does not,” repeated Mrs. Hartley.

“I must find something—not a girl—that will like me and that I can like. Love is not everything, Mrs. Hartley, though it is a great deal. I cannot help thinking that the man who lets any woman wreck the whole of his life for him is very little better than a coward.”

“John Riley,” said the widow solemnly, “you may thank heaven I am an old woman, or I should marry you whether you liked it or not.”

“Dear Mrs. Hartley,” he answered, “if you were quarter of a century younger, or I quarter of a century older, I should propose for you at once. Wherever I am, wherever I go, I shall always esteem it a privilege to have known you.”

“Do not go anywhere,” she said. “Marry Grace and settle down.” But he only shook his head, helping himself to another slice of ham the while.

After all, he was a prosaic lover, Mrs. Hartley, spite of her partiality, could not help admitting. She was a woman, and so overlooked many facts she might otherwise have been expected to remember.

First, he had ridden eight Irish miles, fasting; and eight miles, on a bright summer morning, with the fresh wind blowing, was sufficient to give an appetite to a young fellow, in good health, who was innocent, moreover, of the then almost universal vice of hard drinking every night.

Second, this matter of Grace had been to him like a long toothache, which he could endure no longer. He must either have the tooth out, or know it could be cured. Grace must decide to have him for her lover, or do without him altogether. It might be very well for her to have him hanging about Bayview, accompanying her and her elderly maiden cousin to flower-shows, launches, picnics, regattas, and other mild dissipations, but his idle, purposeless life was ruining his worldly prospects.

Had he meant to stay on at Woodbrook till his father’s death left that already heavily mortgaged estate his property, the case might have been different, but John Riley intended to do nothing of the sort. He was fully determined to make money. He was weary of the shifts that cruel interest compelled his family to practise. He could not be blind to the fact that by reason of the pressure put upon him, his father was forced to put a pressure upon his tenants—bad for the land—injurious to them.

There was no money to do anything except pay the interest upon that debt which had not been incurred by them, which had been hung round the neck of that lovely estate by a former Riley as reckless as prodigal, as cruel to those who were to follow after as any Glendare lying in Ballyknock Abbey.

There was no money—not a shilling to spare; father and son, mother and daughters, all had to bow under the yoke of that tyrant mortgage. There was no money to drain; no money to improve the land, and so enable it to yield its increase. The landlord was poor, and the tenants as a natural consequence were poor likewise, and John Riley, proud and impulsive, chafed under the bitterness of his lot, and would have left the country long before to try and win Fortune’s smiles in other lands, but his love for Grace prevented him.

Once upon a time—no long time previously to that morning when he sate at breakfast with Mrs. Hartley, it had seemed to the young man a good thing to consider that when he married Grace Moffat, he would secure at once the girl he loved and sufficient money to lighten the mortgage at Woodbrook, but a casual remark let drop by Miss Nettie O'Hara, who understood her friend at least as well as her friend understood Nettie, opened his eyes to the fact that Grace Moffat attached quite as much importance to her "dot" as any one of her admirers.

"It is a thousand pities Grace's grandfather left her such a quantity of money," said demure but deep-seeing Miss O'Hara; "she would have been so much happier without a halfpenny. I am certain she will never marry any man who cannot in some shape or other lay down as much as she."

Now there was a significance in the way Nettie uttered this sentence which set Mr. John Riley thinking—what had he to lay down against Grace's fortune? Himself—ah! but then there was Grace's self—and her fortune still remained.

To the ordinary Irishman of that period—handsome, gallant, well bred, easy mannered—himself would have seemed a fair equivalent for the most beautiful woman and the finest fortune combined; but then, John Riley was not an ordinary Irishman, and Grace had in her foolish little head certain notions in advance of her time which did not tend to make her any happier.

For after all to be discreetly trustful is the best quality a woman can possess, and Grace did not quite trust John Riley any more than she loved him.

He did not possess the easy assurance—the confident self-assertion which usually marked his class. He was one of the exceptional men—one cast in the same mould as those who before and since have fought for their adopted mother, England, and saved her from defeat on many a hardly contested battle-field. So far as courage went he was made of the same stuff as those who fought the Affghans and stormed the Redan, and rode with the six hundred, and endured the lingering torments of Lucknow, and never talked of their courage or their patience afterwards; but he was ignorant of many things calculated, in those days especially, to win, by reason of their rarity, favour in a woman's eyes.

Even with his small stock, however, of drawing-room accomplishments, had he been more demonstrative, had he paraded his abilities, had he, to use a very homely phrase, made much of himself, perhaps Grace might have viewed him through more loving spectacles. As it was, she did not care for him at all in the way he cared for her. She saw the good kindly-natured John, possessed of encumbered acres and a somewhat plain face, and she was amiable enough to let him bask in the smiles of an heiress until such time as it suited the heiress to warn him off.

Without any _malice prepense_, be it clearly understood. If Grace had her ideal, that ideal certainly was not realized in the person of any man she ever expected to marry, or thought of marrying. She had not brought marrying home to herself in any way. She was romantic—given to solitary wanderings in the twilight and by moonlight along the terraced walk, bordered by myrtles, strewed with the leaves of the gum cistus flower, which blooms and fades in a day, fragrant with the scent of syringa,—that overlooked the bay. There she dreamt her dreams—there she recited to herself scraps of poetry—detached verses that had caught her fancy—there she murmured snatches of songs, all melancholy, all breathing the language of unchanging love and endless constancy.

"Opinion," remarks one of the wittiest of our living[1] satirists, "does

not follow language—but language opinion;" and if this be true as regards sentiment likewise, and doubtless it is, we cannot, judging from our songs, compliment the present generation either on its simplicity or its romance.

Footnote 1:

Dead, alas! since the above lines were written.

Foolish enough were the words young ladies warbled forty years since—but there was a tenderness and a grace and a fitness about the ditties of that long ago time which we seek in vain in modern verses. One merit at least was formerly possessed by the music and the story linked to music, that of intelligibility. Now when the story is intelligible, it is idiotic.

Not much of an ear could John Riley boast, yet he loved to listen to Grace's singing, and hearkened with something between a pang and a hope to the little thrills of melody into which she would break—just as a bird breaks into a vocal ecstasy—while they walked through the rose-laden gardens, or floated, oars uplifted, over the moonlit sea, the water diamonds dripping from them, making an accompaniment to the last soft notes of the duet sung by his sister and Grace.

And there were sights and sounds and scents that for years he could scarcely endure by reason of the memories they recalled—simple things—moonlight on the water—a sprig of myrtle starred with white flowers—a spray of jessamine, nestling in the folds of a white dress—the words of a familiar song. Well, few people marry their first love, and if they do, they generally repent that their love was compliant.

But John Riley had not yet fallen on those evil days in which memory was fraught with bitterness, although vaguely his sense foreshadowed them, when seated opposite to Mrs. Hartley he ate his breakfast with as much appetite as though, to quote that lady's mental observation, there were no such things in the world as love and disappointment, and marred lives and broken hearts!

CHAPTER VI.
ON THE TERRACE.

If, in the postchaise-and-four days, any record was kept of the number of runaway couples who were overtaken before the matrimonial knot could be tied, time has failed to preserve those statistics for us. From all which can be learned, however, it seems difficult to avoid the conclusion that in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred angry parents and disgusted guardians might as well have saved their money and spared their cattle.

Given a few hours' start, swift horses, and sound linch-pins, who could hope to overtake the fugitives? Most probably irate elders started in pursuit prompted by two motives,—one because it looked well to follow, even though the chase was useless,—the other because it gave them something to do. No reason, beyond these, presents itself sufficient to account for all the wild racing and chasing that was carried on at one period of the world's history.

To a more matter-of-fact generation, it seems unintelligible why old gentlemen, and still older ladies, should have risen at unwonted hours,

and started off in frantic and hopeless pursuit of a pair of fleeing lovers, when they might just as well have had out their “second sleep” in peace, and awaited intelligence beside the domestic hearth, instead of posting, at considerable inconvenience and expense, over bleak moorland roads, to obtain the same identical news.

Riding as fast as his horse could take him, to Kilcurragh, Mr. John Riley had, like other enemies of “Love’s young Dream,” only two ideas in his mind—to discover the fugitives, and to punish the male offender.

Riding back, extremely slowly, from that undesirable seaport, after verifying the fact of two persons answering to the description of Nettie and her companion having left Kilcurragh the previous evening by “that fastsailing steamship,” so the proprietors worded their bills, ‘Finn McCoul,’ he felt much like one who, having gone out fox-hunting, has seen no fox to hunt—who, having taken his gun to shoot, has started nothing whereat to fire.

Although no vessel followed the ‘Finn McCoul’ for three days, when the ‘Saint Patrick,’ then peacefully lying alongside a Scotch quay, would steam in the pleasant eventide down the Bay, on her way to that narrow channel which divides one people from another, it was quite practicable for Mr. Riley to have chartered some description of ship—say, even a collier—to take him, in swift pursuit, to the Land of Cakes. That is to say, it would have been practicable had Mr. Riley possessed enough of this world’s wealth to pay his expenses; but the young man had no money to speak of, and supposing the case different, it is improbable that he would have thrown away bank-notes so foolishly.

No; the evil was done. All the yachts in creation could not make a better of it now. She had run away with him; she, an O’Hara, connected with many and many a good family, with one of those wicked, dissolute, shameless Bradys, who had for years and years been casting off from them bit by bit, shred after shred, the mantle of family respectability in which they had once been proud to wrap themselves.

She had gone off, blue eyes, pink cheeks, golden hair, demure looks, with a man of notoriously bad character, with whom she had scarcely a chance of happiness; but that was her concern, and now hers only. They were gone where, at all events, matrimony was very easy. That, in itself, was a good feature in the case, since, if he did not intend to marry the girl, why should he take her to a land where unions, very hard to break, were very easily formed.

When he returned to the few ancestral acres the extravagance of his progenitors had left him, it would be time enough to require that a more binding marriage, according to Irish ideas, than a mere acknowledgment of Nettie being his wife should take place. On the whole, she having elected to elope, perhaps it was quite as well things were as they were. There had been no scene; his horsewhip was available for further service; society would be satisfied that, so far as a Brady could mean or do rightly, Daniel of that name had meant rightly by, and done rightly to, Nettie O’Hara. A grave scandal had been averted by Mr. Brady’s choice of a honeymoon route; nevertheless, Mr. Riley felt disappointed.

If a man go out to fight, it is intelligible that he should lament finding no enemy to encounter. To have ridden all those long miles, and found nothing to do at the end of the journey, was enough to try the patience of a more patient individual than John Riley. His common sense told him it was well; his Irish sense felt disgusted. He should have to return to his father, and, in answer to his expectant “Well?” reply,—

“They started for Scotland yesterday, and as I could not swim across the channel, here I am, no further forward than I was when I left.”

Still it _was_ better.

John could not help acknowledging this as he gave his horse to Colonel Perris’ man, and in answer to the Colonel’s inquiry whether he had any news of his cousin, answered,—

“Oh! it is all right. They left by the Scotch steamer last night. She might have written, though, I think, and saved me the ride.”

And the same to Mrs. Mynton and Mrs. Lefroy, whom he met on his way to the Parade, and to Miss Riley, who said she “never could have believed it of Nettie, never!” adding, “it is very hard on me at my age,” to which, with a shake of her poor old head and brown front—people had not then arrived at that pitch of modern civilisation, grey false hair—she appended,

“Ah! girls were very different when I was young—very.”

Considering the miles of time that stretched behind the period of her youth and of her age, John Riley might be excused if he muttered to himself that it was improbable she could have the smallest memory of what girls had been like at the remote epoch referred to.

Somehow the intense dreariness and patched poorness of that sad house had never impressed the young man with such a feeling of compassion for Nettie as he experienced when he found himself once more on the Parade, with the sea glittering and dancing at his feet. The faded carpets, the dingy paint, the darned table-covers, the spindle-legged tables, the dark, high-backed chairs, were fitting accessories to the picture which, years and years afterwards, remained in his memory of a feeble, palsied, half-doting old woman, who kept mumbling and maundering on, concerning the girls of her far away youth, and the ingratitude of Nettie, who had made, in her desperation, such a leap in the dark.

“It was a miserable home for any young thing,” said John compassionately to Mrs. Hartley, “and no future to look forward to except that of being a teacher. I never was very fond of Nettie, but upon my word I do not think I ever felt so sorry for anybody as I did for the little girl to-day—thinking of what a life hers must have been.”

“I was always fond of Nettie,” Mrs. Hartley remarked, “and have always been sorry for her—I am more sorry for her now, however. She has taken a step in haste, which I feel certain she will repent at her leisure, through every hour of her future life.”

This was at dinner—twice in that one day had John Riley to avail himself of the widow’s abundant hospitality. He knew he could not thus make sure of that of Mr. Moffat—who although an Englishman, a Liberal, and abundantly blessed with this world’s goods, liked friends to come after dinner, and to go away before supper, for which reason his daughter’s suitor usually paid his visits soon after breakfast, soon after luncheon—a very meagre meal indeed at Bayview, as in many of the houses across the Channel even to this day—or immediately after dinner, when he often had a cup of tea all alone with Grace in that pleasant drawing-room opening on the terrace-walk which commanded so wide and fair a view of the ever-changing sea.

He wished to have that cup of tea with Grace this evening—the Nettie who might have disturbed their _tête-à-tête_ would, he knew, never disturb another at Bayview. He intended to ask Grace one question, and then, why

then he meant to ride back through the night to his own home—a happy man or a disappointed according to the answer she made.

The consciousness of the throw he meant to make did not tend to render Mr. Riley an entertaining guest; and Mrs. Hartley, noticing his abstraction, said, as he rose from table, remarking it was quite time he was on the road again,—

“You are going to try your fortune this evening.”

“I am; how did you guess that?”

“Never mind, I did guess it.”

“Wish me success,” he said in a low tone, eagerly seizing her hands.

“I wish you success,” she answered slowly. “If you take care of yourself, you will develope into one of the worthiest men I ever knew.”

“I will try to be worthy of your good opinion, _however it may be_,” he said with a certain grateful softness in his tone, and then, suddenly loosing the lady’s hands, he stooped and kissed her.

“Have you gone crazy, John?” she asked, settling her cap, which the young man’s demonstrativeness had disarranged.

“A thousand pardons,” he entreated; “I could not help it—forgive me,” and he went—straight, strong, young, erect out into the evening, leaving her to think of the boy baby she had borne and lost thirty long years before—thirty long years.

Out into the evening—round to Colonel Perris’ stable, where his horse stood, nose deep in manger, hunting after any stray oats he might hitherto have failed to find.

“Take him aisy, Mister John, the first couple of mile,” advised the groom; “he has been aiting ever since you left him. It’s my belief them kinats[2] at Kilcurragh niver giv’ the dumb baste bite or sup barrin’ a wisp of hay and a mouthful of wather. Ride him aisy, giv’ him his time, or ye’ll break his win’; but, then, what can I tell ye about horse cattle ye don’t know already? And shure ye have the night, God bless it, before ye—and thank ye yer honour, and long life to yerself,” and he pocketed the coin Mr. Riley gave him, and held open the gate for the gentleman, never adding, as John noticed, a word of hope for Nettie.

Footnote 2:

Anglicè—misers, skinflints.

Courteous were those Kingslough people, courteous and partial to saying pleasant things high and low amongst them, but any thought or mention of the Bradys tried their complaisance.

There was no hope for Nettie. John Riley, taking his horse at a walk past Glendare Terrace, and so, making his way out of the long straggling town, felt popular opinion had already given up her case as hopeless.

She had chosen her lot; Kingslough felt the wisest course it could pursue, in the interest of itself and Nettie, was to ignore the probabilities of what that lot might be.

A great scandal had occurred—a scandal so great that, prone as Kingslough was to gossip, it felt disposed to maintain silence over the

affair.

In slight illnesses people love to talk over the symptoms and exaggerate the danger, but when the sickness becomes mortal, there ensues a disinclination to speak of it. Silence succeeds to speech, when once the solemn steps of the great conqueror are heard crossing the threshold. It is the same when a sore trouble menaces. In the presence of that enemy, even those whose happiness or misery is in no way concerned in his approach are fain to keep silence—and silence Kingslough maintained accordingly about the sad _faux pas_ Nettie O'Hara had made.

But as yet Grace Moffat scarcely grasped the length and the breadth and the depth of the pit her old companion had dug so carefully for her future.

"Have you found her, have you brought her back?" Grace asked eagerly as he entered.

"There is only one person who can bring her back now," he answered, "and that is her husband. They went to Scotland yesterday."

"Oh, Nettie! What could you have been thinking of?" exclaimed the girl.

"I suppose it is the old story, and that she was fond of him," Mr. Riley replied.

"You have seen Mrs. Hartley,—what does she say?"

"What can she say? what can anybody say? what is the use of saying anything? Nettie has done that which cannot be undone, and we must only hope the match may turn out better than we expect. She has chosen Mr. Brady and left her friends, and she will have to make the best of Mr. Brady, if there be any best about him, for the remainder of her life."

"I think you are extremely heartless," said Grace indignantly.

"I do not mean to be so," he replied. "If I could help Nettie out of this scrape, I would spare no pains in the matter. But there is no help, Grace. We cannot remake Brady, neither can we undo the fact of her having gone off with a man who has no one solitary quality to recommend him beyond his good looks."

At this point John Riley stopped suddenly and walked towards the window, while Grace busied herself with the tea-equipage.

The same thought had occurred to both of them. Other people besides Nettie O'Hara might be influenced by good looks, and, as has previously been remarked, Grace's lover did not realize her ideal of manly beauty.

"Where is your cousin, Grace?" asked Mr. Riley, after a moment's pause.

"Gone to spend the evening with Mrs. Mervyn." It was a matter of common occurrence for the worthy lady who presided over Mr. Moffat's establishment to spend the evening with some one or other of her numerous friends. She had a predilection also for paying morning visits and receiving morning visitors, so that Grace's time was more frequently at her own sole disposal than might have been considered quite desirable had Grace happened to be different to what she was.

But although the young lady's manners were much less demure than those of her former friend and companion, she was really a much wiser and more prudent girl than Nettie. She might have wandered alone along the world's wide road, and still come to no harm by the way.

Poor or rich, it would not have mattered to Grace. No man could ever have made a fool of her. She had her faults, but lack of pride and self-respect were not to be classed among them.

A girl to be greatly desired for a wife; a girl who would develope into a woman safely to be trusted with a man's happiness and a man's honour; a girl loyal, faithful, true. She was all this and more; and John Riley knew her worth, and would have served as long as Jacob did for Rachael, to gain her in the end.

"Grace," he began after a moment's pause, "will you finish your tea and come out into the garden? I want to speak to you."

"What do you want to say?"

"I have something particular to ask."

"What is it?"

"Come out and I will tell you."

"Tell me now."

"Cannot you guess?"

She looked at him steadily for an instant, then her eyes dropped, and her colour rose.

"Yes," she said quietly, "I can guess; but do not ask. Let us remain friends, as we have always been."

"That is impossible," he said, "we must either be more than friends, or—"

"Or," she repeated.

"Strangers," he finished, and there ensued a dead silence which he suddenly broke by exclaiming vehemently, "Grace, you cannot, you must not refuse me; I have loved you all my life. I never remember the time when I did not love you. I do not ask you to marry me yet, not until I have something to offer you besides myself, I only want you to say, 'John, I will be your wife some day, and I will care for nobody else till you come back to claim me.'"

She was as white now as she had been red before.

"Let us go out," she said, laying her hand on his arm and leading him through the French window on to the terrace-walk. There was no hope; he knew it, he felt it, felt it in the touch of her hand, saw it in the expression of her face. "Why did you thrust this pain upon yourself and me?" she asked reproachfully. "Did not you know I could never marry you? Have not you heard me say a hundred times over, that I should never marry anybody? We have always been good friends, why cannot we remain good friends still? I will forget what you said just now, and you must try to forget it too."

"Must I?" he answered, "well, the time will come when I shall forget even that, but not until I am dead, Grace. So long as life and memory remain, I shall never forget you," and he took the hand which lay on his arm, and held it tightly for a moment, then suddenly releasing it, he went on,—

“It was not always so; there was a time, and that not very long past, when you could not have stabbed me to the heart as you have done to-night. I do not say you ever loved me much, but you were young, and I believed you might learn to love me more; but there is no use in talking about that now, the new love has ousted out the old. You can never be more than a friend to me; that is the phrase, is it not? But somebody else may be nearer and dearer than the man who has cared for no one but you—no one else, Grace, all his life.”

“I do not understand you,” she began, but he interrupted her.

“You understand me perfectly. Until Mr. Somerford——”

“Mr. Somerford and I are nothing to each other,” she interposed eagerly.

“Are not, perhaps, but most probably will be hereafter,” he retorted. “I know he is the sort of fellow girls go wild about.”

“I have not gone wild about him,” said Grace indignantly. “Are you mad, John, or do you think I am, to imagine Lord Glendare’s nephew could ever possibly want to marry me?”

“I imagine your fortune would be extremely acceptable to a man who has not a sixpence, at all events,” was the almost brutal answer. Disappointed lovers are not usually over careful about what they say, and this one proved no honourable exception to the rule.

“The same remark might apply to other men who have not a sixpence either,” observed the young lady bitterly; “to Mr. John Riley, for instance.”

He was calm in a moment, hating himself for the words he had uttered, almost hating her for the retort those words induced.

“Say no more, Grace,” he answered; “you need not drive the knife any farther home—it has gone deep enough already,” and he turned, and would have left her, but Grace followed, crying out,—

“I did not mean it—I did not, really; only you provoked me.”

“You meant, however, that you would not marry, that you would not engage yourself to me,” he said, stopping, and looking mournfully and reproachfully at her in the gathering twilight.

“I am very sorry,” she was beginning, but he interrupted her.

“Never mind being sorry. I shall be sad and sorry enough for both. You did mean it then, Grace; you meant truly that you could never come to love me, never while the winds blow and the dews fall.”

“I do care for you,” she said softly.

“Ay, but not as I want to be cared for,” he replied. “Well, you cannot help it, I suppose, and I—but that does not matter.”

It was over; he was gone: she stood alone on the terrace. Strewed around were cistus leaves; through the silence she could hear the sobbing of the waves as they washed in upon the shore.

CHAPTER VII.

MR. SOMERFORD'S SUGGESTION.

Persons who knew anything about the Rosemont _ménage_—and the persons who did meant all resident within an area of twenty miles of that place, and a considerable number outside the area indicated—were aware that as a rule on those rare occasions when Lady Glendare honoured Ireland with her presence, the Hon. Mrs. Somerford "availed herself" of so favourable an opportunity for visiting her friends.

Lady Glendare and her hon. sister-in-law did not in all respects agree as sisters-in-law should. To state the case fairly, they hated each other. This undesirable frame of mind is not uncommon even in much lower circles, but perhaps civilized and decorous and socially polite hatred never attained a stronger growth than between the countess and her husband's brother's wife.

Lady Glendare was certainly right in stating that they were not sisters-in-law, since rigidly they could not be called such near relatives.

"She is the widow of my late brother-in-law," was the form of speech in which Lady Glendare liked to describe Mrs. Somerford's position; "and as she is fearfully poor, poorer even than the Somerfords' widows have usually been (and that is indeed indicating a deeper depth of poverty than most people can imagine), Lord Glendare allows her to live at Rosemont with that great boy of hers, who does nothing, literally nothing. How it will all end I cannot imagine. He has no fortune, no profession, he has no chance there of marrying. Better have apprenticed him to some trade," and at this juncture, her ladyship, who having come from a noble stock who boasted a longer pedigree and a more encumbered rent-roll than the Glendares, always made it a rule to speak pityingly and depreciatingly of her husband and his family, was wont to fold her white hands and look up to the ceiling with that pathetic and saintlike expression of countenance which a great painter having beheld, has perpetuated in a portrait, copies of which are to be seen in old-fashioned scrap-books and amateur portfolios to this day.

Lord Glendare had married late in life, middle age for him was over when he led to the hymeneal altar his beautiful, youthful, and accomplished bride. On the other hand, the Hon. Robert Somerford had married early, comparatively speaking, and the son he left was many years older than Lord Trevor, heir-apparent to the Glendare title and estates. Thus Mrs. Somerford was Lady Glendare's senior, and though a sensible woman and a hard, she had been younger, and she would have liked to remain so. As that was impossible, she could have wished all other wives and daughters a shade older than herself. As that likewise was impossible, Mrs. Somerford felt slightly dissatisfied with the arrangements of Providence, both as regarded the matter of age and other questions.

Further, Lady Glendare had been a celebrated beauty; the traditions of her beauty would endure, Mrs. Somerford knew, to the last days of her life. Even yet she was a very lovely woman, possessed of an exquisite figure, of a gracious and graceful manner, a woman who had but to come, to see, or rather to be seen, and to conquer. She took the citadels of men's hearts by storm; at sound of her voice, at sight of her smile, the battlements tottered, the walls fell. Virtue, as represented by Mrs. Somerford, was no doubt an estimable and discreet matron, but virtue felt its very existence ignored when Lady Glendare, concerning whose prudence doubts had been expressed, the straightlacedness of whose morals people more than suspected, sat in the same room with it.

All this, and the facts of her being my lady, of her first-born having

the prospect of inheriting an estate which, encumbered though it might be, was still an estate, attached to a sufficiently old and well-known title, proved gall and wormwood to Mrs. Somerford; but, on the other hand, there were bitter drops in Lady Glendare's cup poured into it by Mrs. Somerford.

In the first place, if Lady Glendare were beautiful, Mrs. Somerford was clever. Without her good looks the countess would have been a nonentity. Without any good looks to speak of, had Mrs. Somerford's lot been that of an earl's wife, society must have acknowledged her talents. Added to this, she was, as Lady Glendare put the matter, the widow of a younger brother, and it is to be questioned whether an angel could under such circumstances have given entire satisfaction to the women of her husband's family.

Mrs. Somerford not being an angel, gave none to the countess.

Again, Mrs. Somerford affected an austere sort of religion, and the countess had an uneasy feeling that consequently, despite her unpleasant manner, in this world, her sister-in-law might have a better chance than herself of happiness in the next.

Expressed heterodoxy even amongst men was rare in those days. People did not perhaps think so much about religion as they do now; but when they thought about it at all they believed—ay, even people like the Glendares—that there was something in it; something they would have to face certainly, and arrange if they could, once the evil days came, when doctor and lawyers and clergymen would be the only society they could possibly entertain.

To Lady Glendare the idea of that last sleep in Ballyknock Abbey was inexpressibly revolting. Hating Ireland as she did, the thought of a certain village church, black with age, in a vault beneath which dozens of her progenitors lay, seemed a desirable resting-place by comparison; but even that was a possibility my lady shivered to contemplate.

Then if it were true, as Mrs. Somerford asserted, that it mattered not to her where her mortal remains were laid, what an immeasurable advantage the widow possessed! A woman to whose lips the verse of a hymn or an appropriate text occurred whenever her eyes opened, could never feel afraid of awaking in the night. She might be disagreeable, but she could have no sins to repent of. Mrs. Somerford's manner always seemed to imply that, though she spoke of herself generally as a miserable sinner, she merely did so out of a feeling of delicacy towards others.

She was not as the Glendares, every action of her life seemed to assert; and she made Lady Glendare, who, if a sinner, was also a very weak woman, feel her moral and mental deficiencies at every turn.

For all these reasons, and for many more, which it would require much time to specify, Mrs. Somerford found it, as a rule, convenient to visit her friends when Lord and Lady Glendare visited Ireland.

Every rule has its exception, however, and at the particular time when the reader is first requested to visit Rosemont, it was intimated to Mrs. Somerford that if she and her son could make it convenient to remain at "home," so Lady Glendare civilly phrased it, she and the earl would consider it as a personal favour.

"They want me and Robert," decided the widow, with a proud smile. "They want _us_ to help them with the voters."

And the widow was right. Her brother-in-law was anxious on the subject

of the impending election, and his agent had ventured to hint that Mr. Somerford was very popular, and that his presence and request might possibly be the means of influencing many votes.

Nay, he went farther; he insinuated that eventually, perhaps, his lordship might find it expedient to put forward his nephew in the Liberal interest, and suggested that it would be therefore prudent to keep Mr. Somerford well before the constituents, and remind them how close were the ties that bound him at once to them and the noble house of Glendare.

To the earl the southern part of the county, for which a Glendare nominee had sat for seven successive Parliaments, and with few exceptions, for Parliaments almost countless before that, was the only thing in Ireland for which he cared.

Had any person except the Marquis of Ardmorne offered him a large sum, a liberal amount for Rosemont and the other residences he owned in Ireland, together with the Glendare lands, the Glendare tenantry, the Glendare rights of wood, moor, and game, and mineral, to say nothing of shore rights and manorial rights, and rights appertaining to fisheries, Lord Glendare would—had cutting off the entail been possible—have sold them all, Ballyknock Abbey and the remains of his ancestors included.

But he would not have sold his interest in the county. Every man has his toy, if we could only discover where he hides away the plaything; and it was not possible for one to be long in Lord Glendare's company without guessing that the family seat was to him the only one thing besides money and his children for which he really cared.

He was very fond of all his children excepting Lord Trevor, but it is problematical whether in the event having been necessary of a choice between his family seat and his parental feelings, he would not have sacrificed them to that Moloch in whose fires had been already consumed money, friendship, reputation, honour, happiness, self-respect.

A pack of hounds could have been kept for a portion of the money that seat had cost. Even the Jews might have uplifted their grasping hands in amazement had the sum the return of a Glendare nominee meant been presented to them in round figures.

Agents had groaned over, tenants had sunk under it, not an agent on the property for scores of years who did not curse each election as it took place with a vehemence of denunciation in comparison to which all the comminations hurled at the heads of Israelitish and Christian creditors faded into mere commonplace ejaculations of impiety.

One agent, indeed—the gentleman who had the direction of Lord Glendare's affairs, and management of his property at the period when Kingslough was introduced at high noon—had ventured, soon after the earl's accession, to remark that in his opinion the seat was more trouble than it was worth, whereupon his patron turned upon him like a demon and saluted his ears with such a storm of vehement invective and vile insinuations, that the agent left the house, vowing one day or other he would have his revenge on the passionate nobleman.

True, next day, Lord Glendare sent for and actually apologized to him, and a hollow truce was concluded; and employer and employed, to the outer world, seemed better friends than ever, but Mr. Dillwyn did not forget, neither did the earl quite forgive.

So far as a man of his temperament and habits could keep a watch on his agent, Lord Glendare kept one on Mr. Dillwyn, and Mr. Dillwyn, who had

his own very good reasons for imagining that Mrs. Somerford acted on emergency as spy for the absent earl—devoted his energies to outwitting that clever lady, and, all things considered, succeeded tolerably well in his endeavour.

A master-stroke of genius, however, was that letter to the earl containing the suggestion mentioned previously. It did not, perhaps, make the widow believe in him, but it caused her to reflect that perhaps her interests and his might not be so antagonistic as she at one time supposed. She had her hopes and her projects, and both centred in Robert. Besides, her vanity was flattered. Mr. Dillwyn had at last recognized her presence as a power.

And she was a power, if a disagreeable one. A woman competent to advise, direct, and assist a beautiful fool like her sister-in-law.

“I shall be somebody yet amongst the Glendares,” thought she, triumphantly, “and Robert very soon shall be a great somebody.” And all the time Mr. Dillwyn was weaving his webs, laying his plans, arranging his plots.

When the Glendare shipwreck came, as come he knew it would, he had no intention of finding himself on a barren rock, scarce of provisions.

He meant to stand by the vessel to the last. It is more easy, if people could only believe the fact, to do well for oneself pecuniarily by apparent loyalty than by open treason; but when the crash came, and the rotten timbers floated away over the ocean of men’s memories, he proposed to be found high and safe; high above the waters, safe from their fury.

It was an understood thing that when my lord and my lady took up their temporary residence in Ireland, the rules which governed their English life should be completely reversed; in other words, whatever they did in London, they left undone in Ireland; whatever they left undone in London, they were scrupulous to perform in the Blessed Isle.

For instance, in London, they rose in the afternoon and went to bed in the morning; and in Ireland they were called betimes, and retired to rest at hours which would, Lady Glendare vainly hoped, restore the once exquisite beauty of her complexion.

In England they never addressed an inferior save to issue a command, and in Ireland they entered into conversation with all sorts and conditions of men, the poorer and raggeder the better; in England they never walked, in Ireland the use of their limbs was restored to them as if by a miracle; in England they were always spending, in Ireland it was a fact that my lady often omitted to carry a purse, while my lord gave away pence and halfpence, but rarely had occasion to change a note.

In England my lord and my lady beheld each other rarely, in Ireland they saw a great deal more of each other than either considered essential to happiness. In England they associated with none save their equals; in Ireland the hearts of very middle-class people, indeed, were made glad by invitations to Rosemont, where they instituted mental comparisons between their own modest homes and an earl’s establishment, which caused them not to think the ways and modes of life “amongst gentlefolks poor or rich,” so different after all.

Only it troubled simple gentlefolks to understand where the money went, as well it might. Some put it down to English extravagance, wherein I think an injustice was put upon England. Even residents in Ireland have been known to run through incomes and estates with surprising rapidity;

but then, open house was kept by them, and half a county ate, drank, lodged at their expense. Certainly open house was not kept at Rosemont. Half the rooms were usually shut up, even when my lord and lady visited the ancestral seat.

As for Mrs. Somerford, she and her son contented themselves with a mere corner of the earl's great mansion. They dined in the library and sat in the music-room.

It would not have suited the widow's purse to maintain an establishment such as even one-half of Rosemont required to keep in order, so the shutters of the principal rooms were generally closed; the gilt chairs with their pale blue coverings were shrouded in brown holland. The mirrors and the chandeliers were enveloped in wraps, the tassels of the bellpulls were hid away in bags, as were also those of the curtain-holders. The statuettes were dressed in muslins. There were some good pictures on the walls, but no one cared to look at them. Some day, it might be, a new earl should come to his own, who would put life into all these sleeping apartments, people them—let in the sunlight—sweep off the dust; but so far, for generations past, the Glendares had cared nought for the place, which a former earl had when the title was still new built large enough to lodge a monarch and his suite, as was the fashion formerly in Ireland, where once every person who happened to be anybody, found himself over-housed and under-incomed.

When my lady visited Rosemont, she affected a certain west wing called the "garden side" by those employed about the place, and it was so far the garden side of the mansion, that the windows commanded a view of an old-fashioned parterre, and a glass door opened into a piece of pleasure-ground which might have delighted the heart of Mr. Disraeli's Lady Corisande herself.

There were to be found those old-fashioned flowers one longs for nowadays and never finds. There were the plants a false civilization, a perfect subjugation of individual taste to the dictum of interested tradesmen, have banished beyond our ken. That garden was the only thing connected with Rosemont my lady loved. There was somewhat of romance about the place—something which reminded her—so my lady said, to her London listeners—of the sweet peace of a convent garden, in that bit of pleasure-ground at Rosemont, enclosed as it was with thick low hedges of privet, amongst which grew roses and passionflowers, and sweet briar and honeysuckle.

Assuredly it was a lovely little nook, where, in the earliest spring, crocuses and snowdrops sprang to life, and following fast in their wake came "pale primroses" and hepaticas, pink and blue, and the many-faced polyanthus and daffodil, a flower whose praises Herrick has not disdained to sing.

But it was later on in the golden summer time, that the garden side of Rosemont decked itself in the most gorgeous apparel, not merely in scarlet, and yellow, and blue, as is now the fashion, fleeting we may hope, but in every rich and tender colour the Creator of all things beautiful has made to render our earth lovely.

There shone—humbly self-asserting—the gentianella in her dark blue robe of velvet. There were beds where fairy lilies of the valley made melody amongst their luxuriant foliage; there grew soft harebells, pale blue, transparent white; there were flaunting tulips, and showy anemones and ranunculus, the colours of which dazzled the sight; there were sweet auriculas and climbing honeysuckle, and a perfect wealth of roses—roses that have had their day and disappeared before the great, scentless, coarse, overgrown monstrosities that demand care and admiration from

their lovers in the present generation.

Against the walls of the house were trained myrtles, lemon verbenas, alpine roses, and the mysterious passion-flower both white and purple. That garden side of Rosemont was certainly, as my lady said, “beautiful exceedingly.”

Not that the fact of its being beautiful exceedingly would have recommended it to any one of the Glendares except in an abstract and conversational manner. They had none of that passionate love of scenery, that almost savage fondness for hill and dale, for the wide sea and the foaming rivulet, for snow-crowned mountains and rock-bound coasts, which has served to stipple in a background full of romance and sorrow and pathos to the figure of many a reckless, extravagant, wickedly improvident Irishman.

But the Glendares were not Irish. They owned the soil, but they were not of it, they had not even that indefinite sort of attachment for the land which property usually developes.

They were aliens, every one, not excepting Mr. Robert Somerford, who, though he had managed to secure for himself so much good-will, cared really no more for any blade of grass in the emerald isle than he would have done for roses of Sharon.

He was as adaptable as other members of his family had proved themselves under various vicissitudes of fortune, but he was also as false.

Unknown to himself, perhaps, but still, certainly his whole life was a lie—an assumption of qualities he did not possess—of abilities with which nature had not endowed him, of affections forgotten at his birth. It was what they believed him to be, and not what he was, that the lower classes loved. And as regards Grace Moffat? Well, perhaps she too, like her friend Nettie, had admired a handsome face too easily; perhaps the accomplishments, unusual at that period, Mr. Somerford had cultivated, caught her fancy; perhaps—and this is of the three the more likely solution of the enigma—his close relationship to an earl affected the imagination of a girl born in a land the inhabitants of which believe in a lord as implicitly as any Republican who ever breathed.

He was as near the roses as any man could well be who chanced not actually to be among them. He had been born in the purple, though he happened not to be clad in it. He had lived much in Dublin and amongst the gentry of the South of Ireland, and his accent was softer than that which was obtained in the North—softer, tenderer. It conveyed much whilst saying little.

On the whole, perhaps, Mr. Robert Somerford was not a safe companion for a young lady whom her friends might desire to keep heart-whole; but as regards Grace Moffat, the evil had been wrought. For her earth held no hero like Lord Glendare’s nephew, for her nature presented no desirable type of man, save one, and that one assumed the shape of Mr. Robert Somerford, who, seated in the room which commanded a view of the garden previously mentioned, was trying, not without success, to win golden opinions from his uncle’s wife.

To Mr. Robert Somerford, Lady Glendare could afford to be gracious, amiable, kindly-mannered,—in a word, herself. There were many points in his favour, the chief perhaps being that there was not the slightest chance of his ever succeeding to the title and rent-roll of the Glendares. Between him and the earldom stood the young lords, and an elder brother of his father, the Honourable Cecil Somerford, who lived abroad, and was known by the family generally to have formed some

undesirable attachment which rendered a residence in England impossible.

Mr. Robert had thus been preserved from waiting for dead men's shoes. Eventually he hoped Lord or Lady Glendare, or the Honourable Cecil, or some other friend or member of the noble family to which he belonged, would get him an appointment; meanwhile, it was clearly his interest to make himself as agreeable and useful to his uncle and his uncle's wife, and accordingly he entered heart and soul into the business of canvassing and bribing voters which had brought the earl to Ireland just at the time when, as Lady Glendare pathetically put it, "that dear London was pleasanter even than usual."

But every one knew the opposition was likely to be bitter as usual, and more formidable than on previous occasions.

Lord Ardmorne had, of recent years, been purchasing land largely. Farms and estates Lord Glendare would have bought, had he only possessed enough money, passed into the hands of his wealthier neighbour. To the north of Glenwellan lay properties and town-lands, hitherto owned by a non-resident Englishman, sinfully indifferent to Whigs and Tories alike, and to how his tenants voted; but he having departed to that very far country where we may humbly hope politics are forgotten, his heirs decided to sell his Irish estates, and Lord Ardmorne became their possessor. This threw a weight into the Tory scale which the Glendare party could not fail to regard with anxiety, and further there was no question but that of late years, Kingslough, their own especial stronghold, had been developing proclivities as unpleasant as they were unsuspected. It was doubtful on how many votes the Whigs could certainly reckon even at Kingslough. Already the Glendare star was waning. My lord had been absent while his rival was present.

Lord Ardmorne was bringing capital into the county, Lord Glendare was draining it away; Lord Ardmorne spent part of every year in Ireland, sometimes for years together Ireland never beheld the face of Glendare.

In a word, any one could see the course was not going to be walked over, and Mrs. Somerford had not hesitated to express her opinion to this effect, with a certain triumphant bitterness which increased Lady Glendare's dislike for her. Not that Mrs. Somerford had ever done anything to strengthen the family influence, on the contrary; but then she had, so she modestly put it, no position.

In Lady Glendare's shoes she could have marched triumphantly to success; this her tone and manner implied, to the intense disgust of the countess.

Hours, so it seemed to her ladyship, had passed since breakfast, as she sat in a low chair near one of the windows, eating strawberries, an operation which displayed to advantage her beautiful hands. Mr. Robert Somerford admired his aunt intensely. She might be _passée_, but no one could deny she was still a very lovely woman, and to a man of his dreamy sensuous nature, there was something marvellously attractive in the easy, almost indolent grace of her slightest movement, in the way in which she made even the eating of strawberries a sight pleasant to behold.

At a short distance from Lady Glendare, Mrs. Somerford had taken up her position, severely industrious. She was one of those dreadful people who never seem happy unless engaged upon some elaborate piece of work. Making imitation lace chanced to be Mrs. Somerford's speciality, and as those were the days of veils, long, wide, and white, she was engaged in fabricating one.

To Lady Glendare, who could scarcely have specified the difference between the point and the eye of a needle, this industry appeared singularly wearisome and aggravating, but her husband felt secretly envious of his sister-in-law's resources.

It is not given to every one to do nothing with an exquisite grace; and clad in the snuff-coloured trousers and dark blue frock-coat which it always, for some inscrutable reason, pleased him to don when he came to Rosemont, his lordship drumming an irritable tattoo on the table, was perhaps conscious that he did not form by any means so pleasing a feature in the tableau as his wife.

"Ardmorne has given three picnics and two balls," Mr. Somerford was remarking.

"What a pity we could not have gone to them," said her ladyship, whilst Lord Glendare muttered audibly a commination service over his neighbour, consisting of two monosyllables.

"Hu—sh!" Mrs. Somerford entreated, holding up her finger.

"It is all very well to say 'hush,'" retorted her brother-in-law, "but when a fellow like that, wallowing in money as if it were dirt, shows fight on our very doorstep, as I may say, it is enough to make any man swear."

"I don't see how swearing can mend the matter," observed Mrs. Somerford.

Lady Glendare tranquilly conveyed another strawberry to her lips; the tattoo grew ominously loud; Mrs. Somerford thought it expedient to devote her attention to a particular stitch she was executing; Robert Somerford began once more,—

"The question is, with what weapons we can fight him."

"That is practical, Robert," said his aunt. "That is precisely the observation I have been hoping some one would make. Here am I, exiled to this picturesque but barbarous land, willing to do anything if I am only told what is required of me. I have canvassed before, I am ready to canvass again. I will beg, buy, borrow, or steal votes. I can give balls, I can arrange picnics, though they are a form of entertainment I detest."

"If you could only tell one where to get some money," interrupted the earl.

"Ah! now you ask me something quite beyond my power," was the calm reply. "Had I ever possessed any inventive genius of that kind, it would have been exhausted years since."

"There is one way in which you might propitiate the Kingslough worthies, however, that would not involve any pecuniary outlay," said Mr. Somerford, hastily cutting across the retort his uncle was about to make.

"Indeed!" exclaimed Lady Glendare, raising her eyes and looking at the speaker with a certain languid interest. "How can such a desirable object be compassed in so desirable a manner?"

"If you would honour Kingslough by bathing there, I think we might safely set Ardmorne at defiance," answered Mr. Somerford, with the lightest touch of mock deference in his voice.

“Do you mean bathe in the sea?” asked her ladyship, still toying with the rich, ripe fruit. “I am afraid it would be impossible for me to ‘honour’ Kingslough to that extent. How should you propose my setting about it? I do not see how I could run across the shingle after the fashion which prevails in this charming country, with no clothing except a bathing-dress, cloak, and a pair of slippers, and after a few plunges return in like manner. No doubt the spectacle might prove amusing to the bystanders, but it certainly would be anything but agreeable to the performer.”

“My dear aunt, do you think I should for one moment have asked you, even in jest, to attempt anything of that kind? No I have been considering the matter seriously, and mean precisely what I say, namely, that if you would honour Kingslough so far as to try the effect of sea-bathing on your health, we might calculate on carrying the town and neighbourhood by storm. Any of the inhabitants whose houses are close on the shore, I mean who have back entrances to the sea, would be only too happy to place them at your service, or, what would be a still better plan, make use of Miss Moffat’s bathing-box. It is like a little castle built out on the Lonely Rock. There is always deep water at that point, and the place is fitted up perfectly, my mother says.”

“Yes, Mr. Moffat has spared no expense,” Mrs. Somerford agreed.

“And who is this Miss Moffat?” asked Lady Glendare.

“She is the only daughter of a gentleman who, although he has the misfortune to care very little about politics, still has the good fortune, so far as he does care about politics, to be of our way of thinking.”

“Dillwyn said he was breaking a horse for her,” observed the earl at this juncture.

“Dillwyn only told you that to account for his having so valuable an animal in his possession,” answered Mr. Somerford with sudden heat.

“Do you mean to imply he said that which was perfectly untrue?” asked his uncle.

“Certainly.”

“Now, Robert,” entreated Mrs. Somerford.

“There can be no doubt Mr. Dillwyn would like extremely to get hold of Miss Moffat’s fortune, but—”

“I must listen to this,” exclaimed Lady Glendare. “The conversation is becoming quite interesting. Pray proceed, Robert. Do not be influenced by Mrs. Somerford’s signs of wisdom. Mr. Dillwyn is a dishonest steward. According to popular belief there has never been an honest one on the property, so that is nothing new; but it is new to have an agent in love. Do tell me all about it.”

“I was speaking of Miss Moffat’s fortune,” said Mr. Somerford with an impatient emphasis on the last word.

“Is it large, and is she nice? Why not marry her yourself?” asked her ladyship.

“I trust my son will never marry for money,” said Mrs. Somerford, in accents of dignified rebuke.

“Your son will be a much greater simpleton than I fancy, if he ever marry without it,” remarked Lord Glendare.

“Pray let Robert finish his romance,” entreated her ladyship. “Mr. Dillwyn wishes to marry an heiress, and as I understand your tone, the heiress deserves a better fate, and is conscious of her deserts. Now tell me about her. It she young?”

“Miss Moffat is young,” said Mrs. Somerford, answering for her son. “Concerning her appearance opinions are divided. She has a considerable fortune for a person in her rank of life, and I, for one, think it would give rise to jealousy and dissatisfaction if Lady Glendare were to single out for special attention the daughter of a gentleman who is not particularly popular, and who has herself, as is well known, been engaged almost from childhood to Mr. John Riley, whose father is an active supporter of Lord Ardmorne.”

The countess rose, put the plate containing her remaining strawberries on a table close at hand, and said,—

“Robert, life becomes serious when your mother touches it. I am going into the park, you can come with me if you like.”

Next moment they were in the old-fashioned garden. A few moments later they were sauntering slowly along a shaded path which led to the more pretentious grounds beyond.

“For pity’s sake,” began Lady Glendare, “do not disparage Mr. Dillwyn to the earl. He may have all the sins in the decalogue, but he has one virtue,—he refrains from troubling me about the condition of this interesting peasantry. You want to have the agency and marry Miss Moffat; Mrs. Somerford wants you to have the agency and not to marry Miss Moffat. My advice is, marry Miss Moffat, and neither hunger nor thirst after the agency. You could never give satisfaction, never; whereas, with this heiress, you might get returned at the next election, and then almost choose your career. _We_ can do nothing for you, I am sorry to say. My sons will require all the influence we can bring to bear to get even a bare living. Who is this unwelcome individual, the fact of whose existence your mother so triumphantly announced? If you are wise, do not let him carry off Miss Moffat.”

There is an advantage one has in dealing with selfish people who are not specially clever. They show what they want almost at the first move of the game. It may not be in the power of any man to hinder their getting their way, winning their game, but at all events he is not taken unawares. Mr. Somerford, who was, perhaps, not one whit cleverer than her ladyship, though he chanced to be more plausible, understood clearly what she meant.

She disliked poor relations—she would be glad if he married well—then, when he had helped himself, she and the earl might, perhaps, lift a finger to help him on a little farther.

It was not what he had wished—it was not what he had hoped, but he accepted the position, and answered with an amount of self-depreciation which, coming from Robert Somerford, would have been really touching, could any one have believed it in the slightest degree true.

“I should not have the slightest chance of success. Report says the young lady has already refused Mr. Riley, heir to one of the loveliest properties in this part of the country, and where he failed it would be useless for me to try. He had every advantage on his side, whilst I have nothing in the world to recommend me except the fact of being related to

Lady Glendare."

"And that fact you wish me to bring to Miss Moffat's remembrance?"

"No. What I proposed was solely in the interests of our party."

"And could your own not be served at the same time?" was the shrewd inquiry.

"No; for once my mother and I are of one mind. I should not care to owe everything to a wife, however amiable, and I am not quite certain that Miss Moffat's nature is all sweetness."

"Gather me that rose, if you please," said the countess; and whilst the young man performed her bidding, she looked at him with a keen, worldly scrutiny.

That evening she remarked to Lord Glendare, "Robert does not yet know the precise sum an earl's nephew is worth in the matrimonial market."

"I should have thought that a point upon which your ladyship could afford him important information," was the bitter reply.

"Young people never believe the words of experience, and for that reason I maintain a judicious silence," answered the countess calmly. "My opinion, however, is, he will only find out how little there is in a name, even when combined with a brogue and good looks, when he has outlived the latter."

Mr. Robert Somerford was certainly not of one mind with her ladyship in this matter. Months before, he had given the Moffat question his most serious consideration, and decided that he ought to be able to do better.

Combined with his romantic and musical tendencies, the young man had a perfect knowledge of the value of riches. He was, perhaps, as fond of Grace Moffat as he could be of anything besides himself, but he had no thought of marrying her—yet.

It might be, it might not be. It was all uncertain as the mystic "He loves me, he loves me not;" but on the whole Robert Somerford felt satisfied fate had a higher destiny in store for him than that.

CHAPTER VIII.
INTRODUCES THE NAME OF AMOS SCOTT.

Great was the consternation at Woodbrook when John Riley announced his intention of leaving Ireland; greater, if possible, the lamentations which ensued when he informed his relations that Grace had refused him.

Had it been possible to conceal the fact of his rejection, he would have done so, but he knew this was impossible, and knowing, made a virtue of necessity.

The family heart had been so long set upon the match, Grace's fortune seemed the solution of so many financial enigmas—the end of such wearing anxiety—that the news fell upon father and mother and sisters like the tidings of a bank failure, or the hearing of a will read, from which their names had been cruelly omitted.

For years the matter had been considered settled. Mr. Moffat had never troubled himself about his daughter's future. He considered her as good as married. Mrs. Riley had treated Grace just as though she were a child of her own. She was free of the house, came and went without invitation, or thought of one, as if it belonged to her own father. She and the Misses Riley lent each other bead and other patterns, made paper mats of the same design, sang the same songs, exchanged books, played duets together, and walked about hand linked in hand, or arm twined round waist. They went to the same little parties, they rode together, they boated together, they had all been close companions, they had been like sisters until about a year previously, when Grace took it into her head to conceive a violent affection for Nettie O'Hara, towards whom she had never hitherto evinced any extraordinary amount of attachment. Whenever Nettie had an hour to spare it was spent at Bayview. She could not, it is true, go out to parties, and ride and drive and boat, and otherwise comport herself like the Misses Riley, but she could and did occupy a great deal more of Miss Moffat's time and attention than those young ladies approved. And yet what could they say? how was it possible for them to express their annoyance?

Nettie was their relative—her life not a cheerful one—her future presented nothing which could tend to make the future brighter. She had few friends, and those who stood in that position were most of them a few generations older than herself. Grace was very good to Nettie, gave her presents, and kind words, and kisses, which were exchanged as freely and effusively amongst school-girls at that period of the world's history as they are now. Every person said how kind it was of the heiress to take so much notice of a portionless orphan. Some people hoped it would not make Miss O'Hara discontented with her lot in life, others doubted whether Miss Moffat was prudent in giving Mr. Riley so many opportunities of meeting such an extremely pretty girl—Miss Moffat, as has been stated, not ranking as a beauty amongst the Kingslough authorities—whilst a very small minority, who had sense enough to keep their opinions to themselves, adopted the theory that Grace was beginning to weary of the Rileys, that she was getting old enough to realize what such extraordinarily close intimacy meant, and what it must end in some day; that she had taken Nettie into favour as a sort of counteracting influence, and that if Mr. John Riley, without an available shilling, should choose to fall in love with Miss Nettie O'Hara, who had not a penny available or otherwise, Grace Moffat would not prove inconsolable.

In all of which ideas the majority was partly right and partly wrong. Grace had no definite scheme of transferring Nettie to Mr. Riley, but she found her presence at Bayview an intense relief. She liked John Riley, but she did not want to marry him; she was tired of every one taking for granted that she would eventually marry him; it was a pleasure to have a willing listener like Nettie, who believed, or who, at all events, seemed to believe her, when she said she would never marry anybody,—never. It was perhaps a still greater pleasure to find that Nettie's beau ideal of a hero and hers were identical, so far as words could make them so.

Till the locket and the ring discoveries excited Grace's suspicions, she had not the remotest notion that Nettie owned a lover; but Nettie knew perfectly well that her friend was in love in a simple, innocent, romantic, foolish, inconsequent manner with Mr. Robert Somerford; knew when and where, and how Grace had first seen him, and was intimately acquainted with the dress Miss Moffat happened to be wearing on that eventful day.

Miss Moffat had never communicated those particulars in any intelligible

and consecutive manner, but Nettie spelt and put together one thing and another till she was mistress of the position, then she surreptitiously conveyed to Bayview an album, some fifty years old or thereabouts, which contained a vile watercolour daub of a simpering and sentimental-looking young man, which nevertheless bore an absurd likeness to Mr. Somerford.

It was a picture of nobody in particular, but the eyes were dark and dreamy, and the hair soft and waving, and the nose well formed, and the mouth full and undetermined—altogether, a face likely to please girlish fancies in an age when ladies were always represented with button-hole mouths, opened just sufficiently to display two pearly teeth and a morsel of tongue.

Grace asked Nettie if she might copy this work of art, to which Nettie, who considered nobody would ever be the wiser, replied by cutting out the page and presenting it to her friend.

Some days later, after they had refreshed their memories with another look at the inane handsome face, Nettie asked Grace if she did not think it bore a slight resemblance to “that nephew of Lord Glendare?”

“Now you mention it, I think it does, dear,” Grace answered hypocritically.

“I fancy so,” Nettie proceeded, “though I never saw him close but once, and that was the day of Miss Agnew’s wedding; but it is not nearly as handsome as he.”

“I thought it was,” Grace faintly objected.

“Oh, no—not nearly! Why, Gracie, where can your eyes be?” persisted Miss O’Hara; and Miss Moffat was brought, by slow degrees, to see how infinitely better looking her living hero was to this portrait of one dead and gone years and years before; and thus Nettie fooled the girl to the top of her bent; and thus, surely and certainly, the thought of John grew distasteful to the heiress, and unconsciously, almost, a fancy for Robert Somerford took possession of her.

But she never thought of marrying him. No; sometime, perhaps, she might die—of consumption she hoped, and he would hear of it, and be sorry when he remembered the girl whose singing had, he said, almost made him weep. He would marry some great and titled lady, whose loveliness would be wonderful, as that of the beauties depicted in Heath’s ‘Book of Beauty,’ or in the engravings that adorned ‘La Belle Assemblée.’

At that period of her life Grace read poetry largely. The number of “Farewells” she copied into a certain manuscript book, knowledge of the existence of which was kept secret even from Nettie O’Hara, might have astonished even a modern editor. The sadder and the more hopeless the tone, the better the verses pleased Miss Moffat.

She did not often see Mr. Somerford, but what then? The pleasure was all the greater when she did see him; and ill-natured people would have added, she had the less opportunity of finding out that her idol had feet of clay.

There is a time of life when it is a positive luxury to be unhappy. Grace was unhappy, and rejoiced in her sufferings. It seemed to her that she was experiencing the common doom, that she was in her own person enacting a scene out of a life tragedy.

No; she would never marry any one; she could not marry John Riley, “dear John, so good and kind—and ugly!” she always mentally added.

“A bad, ungrateful girl,” said poor Mrs. Riley, whose heart had often been kept from utter despair by the bare thought of Grace’s thousands, and who might naturally be forgiven some extravagance of expression under the circumstances.

“Deceitful monkey!” ejaculated Miss Riley.

“I did not think she would have served us so, I must say,” remarked the general.

“I will never speak to her again,” declared the youngest daughter.

“Then you may make up your mind never to speak to me,” exclaimed Mr. John, happy at last to find some one on whom he could pour out the vials of his wrath, his regrets, his disappointment, and his disgust at the utterly prosaic view his family took of the affair.

He was most genuinely in love with Grace; he had, as he truly said, cared for no one else all his life; and he hated to hear lamentation made concerning the loss of her fortune, whilst he had not a thought to spare—love being selfish—save for the loss of her dear self.

“I may as well tell you at once,” he went on, “that the person who says anything against Grace says it against me; that her enemies are mine, that her friends shall be mine;” he made a moment’s pause after this, feeling he had not spoken quite truly in that last clause. “The girl has a right to choose and to reject. If I did not please her, it was my misfortune, not my fault; and as for her fortune, concerning which you all talk as though it were her sole possession worth having, I wish she had not a penny, that I might prove it is for herself alone I love her.”

Then, with a catch in his voice, which sounded suspiciously like a sob, John Riley ended his sentence, and left the room.

“I will have a talk with her father,” observed the general.

“I can never forgive her—never,” said Mrs. Riley, solemnly, as though she were uttering an anathema.

“She will be content, I suppose, when she finds she has driven John out of the country,” added Miss Riley.

“I wonder,” began a young lady who had not hitherto spoken, “whether, after all, there is nothing to be said in Grace’s favour. I wonder if any of us except John really liked her—whether it was not her money we were all so fond of.”

“Lucy, you are wicked to talk on solemn subjects in that sort of manner,” said Mrs. Riley.

“There is something in Lucy’s notion, though,” broke out the general. “This confounded money question seems to shadow every act in one’s life like an upas tree. The girl is free from anxiety now; she would not have been free here.”

“Will she be free if she marries Robert Somerford? tell me that,” interrupted Mrs. Riley, almost tempestuous in her vehemence. “And that is the English of all this, if you must take her part against your own children. The arts and devices of some people are almost beyond belief. There is that Lady Glendare driving over almost every day to Bayview—coachman—footman—lady’s-maid—lapdog, and who can say what beside?”

“Carriage and horses most probably,” suggested her husband.

“Don’t be absurd,” retorted the lady. “You know what I mean. She walks with Miss Grace to the Lonely Rock—she bathes; and the facts are reported in Kingslough, as if there were a court newsman retained for the purpose. Mr. Moffat, who scarcely ever asked us to have a glass of wine and a biscuit in his house, entertains her ladyship at luncheon. Sometimes my lady breakfasts at Bayview! Miss Moffat accompanied her ladyship back to Rosemont on Saturday, and returned to Bayview on Monday! Oh! it makes me ill to think of it, and we cherished that viper as if she had been a child of our own.”

“Grace may be a fool. Very likely she is, but I do not believe her to be a viper,” said Miss Lucy stoutly. “It is a fortnight since she refused John. He told us so himself, and Lady Glendare could not then even have seen her.”

“But she had seen Mr. Somerford.”

“Well, girls, and which of you but might like to have a chance of setting her cap at an earl’s nephew,” observed the General. “In my opinion the earl is a very unprincipled man, and the nephew but a sorry sort of fellow. Nevertheless, we must not be too hard upon Grace, though I think” (speaking very slowly and distinctly) “she has broken my heart.”

And having so spoken—he, like his son, rose and left the room.

And all this time, though Kingslough was well aware that Miss Moffat had given Mr. John Riley his _congé_—though Kingslough and Glenwellan and Kilcurragh and many another place in addition were speculating concerning Mr. Somerford’s chances of winning the heiress—concerning Miss Moffat’s chances of wedding an extremely good-looking sprig of nobility—all this time, I say, Mr. Moffat remained in ignorance of his daughter’s assertion of independence.

As has before been said, he was not hospitable. He disliked the customs of a country where every man had the run of his friends’ tables. He did not visit anywhere unless solemnly and ceremoniously invited, and very seldom then, and he wanted no chance guests in a house the domestic routine of which might have been wound up and set going by clockwork.

Nevertheless he had been accustomed to see John Riley about the place—to meet him in the avenue, or on the terrace, or strolling through the grounds with Grace and Nettie, and after a time it occurred to him that, spite of Lady Glendare’s frequent presence, there was something or some one absent who had filled up a gap in his experience.

He thought the matter over with that curious thoroughness which is the attribute of slow and abstracted natures, and then said, “Grace, what has become of John? Is he from home? I have not seen him for more than a fortnight past.”

For a moment Grace paused—then she said, very evenly, “I do not think you will see John Riley here again at present. He asked me to marry him, and I refused; that is the reason he has not visited Bayview for a fortnight past.”

“But, my dear Grace—your mother—”

“My dear papa,” interrupted Grace, “I deny the right of any mother, how much more the right of a mother who is dead, and who can know nothing of

the feelings of the living, to select a husband for her child. It was all a mistake; and if mamma were alive, she would, I am sure, be the first to acknowledge it to be so."

"At your age, Grace," began Mr. Moffat.

"At my age, papa," once again interrupted Miss Grace, "it is of great importance to know one's own mind, and I have long known I would never marry John Riley."

"But remembering for how long a time it has been considered a settled matter that you and he were to become man and wife eventually, I think you ought at all events to have consulted me before rejecting him."

"I had not any time to consult you, papa," answered Miss Grace demurely, "it was just 'Yes' or 'No,' and I said 'No.' I never thought you really liked the Rileys," went on the girl, "and I do not see why I should marry John merely because my grandfather had a friendship for the general. I have always declared I do not intend to leave you or Bayview," and she rubbed her cheek caressingly against his sleeve.

"Ah, Gracie, that is all very well _now_," said Mr. Moffat.

"It is very well for ever, papa," she replied. "How should I learn to care for any other home than this? How should I endure such a life as that the girls lead at Woodbrook. If I am fastidious, papa, remember who has made me so. It is your own fault if I am as people say I am, proud and reserved; I, who have not, to quote some of the plain-spoken Kingslough people, a desirable thing about me except my money."

"What does Mrs. Riley say to all this, Grace?" asked Mr. Moffat, totally ignoring his daughter's last sentence.

"I can only imagine," the girl replied. "Mrs. Riley and I have not seen each other since; I do not suppose we ever shall see each other again."

"Do you mean that because you have refused John, all intimacy between the families is to cease?" asked her father somewhat anxiously.

"I mean that as he has not been here for more than a fortnight, nor his sisters, nor his mother, nor his father, it is very likely they all intend to cut me—but I can bear it," finished Miss Grace with a toss of her pretty head.

"I had regarded this marriage as a settled thing," said Mr. Moffat thoughtfully.

"So did a great many other people, I believe," answered his daughter.

"When a girl has a large fortune," went on Mr. Moffat, "it becomes an anxious question whom she shall marry."

"I should have thought that an anxious question whether a girl have a fortune or not," Grace remarked.

"I am speaking seriously about a serious matter," replied her father in a tone of rebuke. "A portionless girl is at all events certain not to fall into the hands of a fortune-hunter. There is nothing I should have such a horror of as seeing a child of mine married to a mere adventurer. Till now I have never felt a moment's uneasiness about your future. The match proposed by your grandfather seemed in every respect suitable, and now, without even mentioning the subject to me, you have unsettled the plans of years. So independent a young lady as you aspire to be," he

added bitterly, “will no doubt choose a husband with as much facility as you have discarded a suitor, and some day you will come to me and say, I have accepted Mr. So-and-so, with as much coolness as that with which you now tell me you have rejected John Riley.”

“You are unkind, you are not fair to me,” said Grace, who was by this time in tears. “I never thought you much liked the Rileys; you did not ask them to the house.”

“No,” interrupted Mr. Moffat, “I certainly did not encourage promiscuous visiting, because I like to feel my house and my time my own, and detest the practice of living any where except at home, which prevails so much in this country. I am not a man who delights in general society, and I do not pretend to say the Rileys are congenial to my taste, but—”

“You think they ought to be to mine,” said Grace, laughing even while she cried.

“I think they are a family with whom you might have got on extremely well,” answered Mr. Moffat. “I think John Riley is a young man in whose hands any girl might safely put her happiness. There is no drawback I can see to him except the fact of his father’s property being so heavily encumbered, and your money would have paid that mortgage off, and the estate might in my opinion then have been doubled in value. I have often thought how it might be managed.”

“So have the Rileys I am quite sure,” added Grace.

“I believe John’s affection for you to be perfectly disinterested,” said her father.

“Perhaps it may,” she replied, “but the worst of being an heiress is, one never thinks anybody is disinterested.”

“Do not talk in that manner, my dear, or you will make me wish Mr. Lane had never left you a shilling.”

“I have often wished he had left it to those poor slaves he made it out of,” answered Grace. “Papa, I am sick of money: I should like to feel, if it were only for an hour, that somebody cared for me for myself alone.”

“I think many somebodies care for you alone,” he remarked; “myself, for instance.”

“You—yes of course; but then, you are nobody,” she said, squeezing his hand.

“Thank you, my dear, for that compliment. What say you then to Lady Glendare?”

“I do not know what to say, except that I am afraid I am getting horribly tired of her. I shall be so glad when this detestable election is over and her ladyship’s bathing at an end. How she does hate the very sight of the water!” added Grace, laughing at the recollection of Lady Glendare’s terror. “I asked her one day if she did not enjoy it, and she repeated the word ‘Enjoy!’ with a shudder more expressive than any form of speech could have been.”

“Then you have no ambition to live amongst the nobility?” asked Mr. Moffat.

“No, I should dislike it as much as Lady Glendare does sea-bathing. She

cannot feel more out of her element on the Lone Rock than I did at Rosemont."

"I am glad to hear it, Grace," said her father; "I do not think much good comes out of girls associating with those in a higher rank than themselves."

Conscious that this remark was capable of a more particular application than the speaker suspected, Grace hung down her head and made no answer. When next she spoke it was to say,—

"Papa, you are not angry—not really angry, I mean, because I could not care for John?"

"I am not angry," he answered, "but I am sorry. Any person may want to steal you away now."

"But if I am not to be stolen?" she asked.

Mr. Moffat smiled gravely and said,—

"Ah! Grace, you do not know much about these matters yet—I wish you could have liked John. But there," he added speaking more cheerfully, "perhaps you may change your mind, and marry him in spite of all this."

"No," she answered. "And if I wanted to marry him ever so much he would never ask me again—never."

"You think that, Grace?"

"I am certain of it—certain—positive. I did not refuse him nicely, papa, not at all as young ladies do in books; I was rude and said what I ought not to have said. He vexed me and I vexed him."

"I trust you did not express any idea of his being influenced by mercenary considerations," said Mr. Moffat sharply.

"Yes I did," confessed the girl penitently.

"Then, Grace, I am angry with you; I shall make a point of going over to Woodbrook, and apologizing to him for your rudeness. I would not for any consideration, this had happened. I wonder how you could so far forget your own dignity as to insult a man who had done you the great honour of asking you to be his wife, for, whatever you may think, a man can confer no higher compliment on a woman than that."

The girl made no reply; she only withdrew her hand from her father's arm, and walked slowly away towards the house. That day Lady Glendare found Miss Moffat in an unusually lively mood. Never before had her ladyship heard Miss Moffat talk so much or so well.

"She really has something in her," decided the countess, "and Robert might do worse; besides Mrs. Somerford does not like her." For all of which reasons Lady Glendare determined to promote the match.

Meanwhile another and not an adverse influence was at work.

When Mr. Moffat arrived at Woodbrook, great were the expectations raised in the bosoms of Mrs. Riley and her daughters by his unlooked-for visit.

He had asked for Mr. John Riley, but the servant ushered him into the general sitting-room, where Mrs. Riley, surrounded by the Misses Riley, was engaged in works of industry.

“This is an unlooked-for pleasure,” said that careworn matron, giving Mr. Moffat both her hands to shake, as though one would not have been more than enough to satisfy him. “We did not hope to see you here: I think it very kind of you to call, and to show us we are still to be friends, although it seems we are not to be relatives.”

Mrs. Riley was not a favourite of Mr. Moffat’s. He liked everything soft, and quiet, and graceful about a woman—voice, manner, mind, dress, movement. Mrs. Riley had a pronounced accent, and was neither quiet nor graceful; a good woman, no doubt, but one who would have made Lady Glendare shudder. She caused Mr. Moffat to draw back a little farther into his shell, as he answered,—

“No one can regret Grace’s decision more than I,” (then she has not changed her mind, thought Mrs. Riley). “It is usually an anxious thing for a widower to be left with a daughter, more especially if that daughter have a large fortune, but I never felt anxious about Grace until now. I was so certain your son would make her a good husband.”

Yes, it was Mrs. Riley’s opinion there were not many young men like John in the world, and she expressed it.

“But one cannot control a young girl’s fancies,” said Mr. Moffat, who felt vaguely that the virtues of his daughter seemed to be forgotten in Mrs. Riley’s praises of her son.

“I am very sorry to hear you say so,” said that lady, pursing up her lips, “very sorry for Grace’s sake.”

“Do you think I can _make_ Grace like your son?” asked Mr. Moffat, a little hotly, misinterpreting her meaning, and considering Mr. Riley would at least gain as much advantage from the match as his daughter.

“Certainly not, Mr. Moffat, but it might be just possible to keep her from liking other people.”

“If your remark contain any hidden meaning, I am stupid enough not to perceive it,” said Mr. Moffat, answering her tone rather than her words.

“There is no hidden meaning so far as I am aware,” replied the lady. “We know the reason why John—”

“Mamma,” interposed Lucy entreatingly.

“Nonsense, child, don’t dictate to me,” said her mother angrily, while Mr. Moffat added,—

“Pardon me, Miss Lucy, but I think your mother is right. If she is aware of any reason for Grace’s decision beyond those with which I am acquainted, I certainly ought not to be kept in ignorance of them.”

“But it is only mamma’s idea, and I do not believe there is anything in it; I do not, indeed,” persisted Lucy.

“And pray how does it happen you are so much wiser than your elders?” asked Mrs. Riley snappishly. “The fact is this, Mr. Moffat; Grace refused John because she likes some one else better.”

“And who is the some one?” asked the perplexed father.

“Mr. Robert Somerford,” said Mrs. Riley, with slow triumph.

“Mr. Robert Somerford! you must be”—crazy, Mr. Moffat had nearly added, but he substituted “mistaken” for it. “Grace has not seen him half-a-dozen times in her life.”

“That makes no difference,” was the calm reply.

“I think it makes every difference,” said Mr. Moffat. “Believe me, Mrs. Riley, you are quite mistaken about this matter.”

“Perhaps so, but if you ask your daughter, I think you will find I am not mistaken.”

“I should indeed be sorry to mention the subject to my daughter, and I hope no one else will,” said Mr. Moffat rising. “I have not the least desire to put such a ridiculous idea into her mind. There is nothing I should have such a horror of, for her, as an unequal marriage. There is scarcely a man I know I should less desire to see her husband than Mr. Somerford. As you say John is at the stables, I will, if you will allow me, go to him. I entreat of you,” he added earnestly, “not to harbour this delusion. I am certain Grace is not a girl to give her affections where they have not been asked, where they are not wanted.”

“Oh! we shall say nothing,” hastily replied Mrs. Riley, who had already imparted her views on the Somerford question under the seal of secrecy to at least half-a-dozen friends; “we have our own affairs to attend to, and find that sufficient, without meddling in the affairs of other people. I only wish the General was of my mind. What he can be thinking of to turn knight-errant at his time of life, I cannot imagine.”

“Papa wants to see Nettie’s ‘marriage lines,’ Mr. Moffat,” said Lucy, noticing their visitor’s perplexed expression, “that is all mamma means. John and he are going over to-day to Maryville to ask for a private view.”

“You ought not to speak about such subjects at all, Lucy,” said her mother; “certainly not in so flippant a manner.”

“Girls are a great plague,” sighed Mr. Moffat. Whether his remark had any reference to Miss Lucy’s flippancy it is difficult to say.

“Mine are not,” said materfamilias, proudly.

“The present company is always excepted,” answered Mr. Moffat, mentally adding, as he left the room, “not that I should except you from being one of the most ill-bred women I ever met. Perhaps, after all, Gracie has done wisely. I doubt whether she and Mrs. Riley could ever have gone on smoothly together.”

In the stable-yard he met John, whose face brightened at sight of Grace’s father, and then became once again overcast when he found Mr. Moffat had only called to apologize for his daughter’s rudeness.

“Thank you,” the young man said, simply. “Grace did not mean to hurt me, I am certain, but there was just enough truth in her words to sting and to rankle. You know, sir,” he went on, “we are poor, and a man who is poor cannot help thinking about money; but it is not for her money’s sake I love Grace. Some day she will know that, perhaps. When I am gone quite away, I wish you would tell her she could not be any dearer to me if she had millions, nor less dear if she had not a penny.”

“Are you going away, then?”

“Yes, whenever the election is over, I shall leave Ireland. If Grace had

said, ‘yes,’ I should have left it all the same, only with a lighter heart. I did not want her to marry a pauper. I meant to do something. I meant somehow to make a name and money; but why should I trouble you with all this?” and he broke off abruptly. The past had been fair, but it was dead and cold. The mental refrain of every sentence was, “Never more.” For ever he should love her, never she would love him; that was the burden of that weary song he had kept repeating to himself ever since the night when he left her standing on the terrace, listening to the moan of the sea.

They walked on together in silence down the back avenue to a pair of rusty gates, outside of which Mr. Moffat had left his dog-cart.

“John,” asked that gentleman abruptly, at length, “what is it your mother means about Mr. Somerford?”

“What about him?” said John moodily.

“She seems to think Grace is fond of him.”

“So she is,” was the reply.

“I am certain you are wrong.”

“I am certain I am right; listen to me, sir. I do not say Grace is in love with the fellow, heaven forbid; but still, I do say he has, to use a common expression, ‘put her out of conceit’ with every one else. I am glad you have mentioned the matter, because I can now explain how Grace happened to be so spiteful to me. I expected to be refused, and yet I grew half-crazy with rage and jealousy when I was refused. So like a fool, I told her the new love had ousted out the old, and then, when she said I was mad to think Lord Glendare’s nephew would ever want to marry her, I retorted that he might like to marry her money. The fault was mine, you see,” finished the young man hurriedly. “Grace was not to blame, and I should have been the one to apologize, not you.”

“What makes you suppose there is anything between Mr. Somerford and Grace?” that was the one question of absorbing interest to Mr. Moffat.

“I do not suppose there is anything,” answered the young man. “All I mean is, that with his singing and playing, his handsome face and his soft, false manners, he has taken her fancy.”

“That will all pass away,” said Mr. Moffat, but John shook his head.

“If she could know him as he really is,” answered the young man, “know him for a cold, shallow, selfish, unprincipled vagabond, there might be some hope; but Grace has made a hero of him. She thinks he is without reproach, that he is pre-destined to retrieve the Glendare fortunes, that he is the one good fruit of a rotten tree. There, I would rather say no more about him. Perhaps I am unjust. For her sake I hope I am. I will come over to bid you and her good-bye before I go. Though we parted in anger, I think she would like to remember we parted once again as friends.”

“Yes, you may be positive about that,” Mr. Moffat assured him, and then they shook hands and separated, John to proceed to Maryville, and Grace’s father to return to Bayview, a much more perplexed and harassed man than he had left it.

Was Mr. Somerford the origin of Lady Glendare’s sudden intimacy with and professed affection for his daughter? He had said, and said truly, to Mrs. Riley, that he had a horror of unequal marriages, and that Robert

Somerford was not a man to whom he should like to give his daughter; and yet, when he came to consider the matter calmly, when he found his objections to the young man were based greatly on prejudice, he began to see the match was not in reality so unequal as he had at first thought.

Grace was a gentlewoman, possessed of a large fortune, Mr. Somerford was the nephew of an earl, and had not a sixpence; so far the beam stood tolerably even. No one had ever spoken of Mr. Somerford as a rake, or a gambler, or a drunkard. His sins were those of omission. So far as Mr. Moffat was aware, no sins of commission had ever been charged against him. The poorer classes idolized him, and Mr. Moffat did not know enough of the lower classes to be able to judge accurately the value of that idolatry.

Living entirely amongst his books, mixing little with society, as much a stranger to the feelings and habits of the country as the day he settled at Bayview, Irish only by connexion and marriage, Northumbrian by birth, English by feeling, wealthy by a sequence of unlooked-for events, indolent, refined, reserved, how should he, who had never been able to win for himself popularity, understand the utter worthlessness of the beads, and feathers, and gew-gaws of manner, and word, and presence, by which popularity is to be bought.

The Glendares were a weak, dissolute, extravagant, heartless race; but then, Mrs. Somerford, Robert's mother, was a very dragon of piety, respectability, pride, and austerity; and after all, if Grace's fortune were settled strictly on herself and her children, she might do worse.

Hitherto, he had always looked upon Grace as virtually married to John Riley, and it was therefore a shock and a wrench to imagine her married to any one else; but if Grace did not like John, and did like Lord Glendare's nephew, why then Mr. Moffat decided he would try to accustom himself to the change.

After all, Lady Glendare and Mrs. Somerford would be more desirable relatives than poor, bustling, well-meaning, loud-voiced, many-daughtered Mrs. Riley.

Further, Grace must marry, and that soon. Those were days as has been already stated, when girls sooner outgrew their first youth than women do now, and Mr. Moffat disliked beyond all description the idea of having, as he mentally expressed it, "a score of lovers hanging about Bayview."

The charge of a young maiden, the trouble of keeping undesirable admirers at bay, love complications, secret engagements, scenes, tears, loss of appetite, and threatened consumption, all these things were as much beyond Mr. Moffat's province as they were outside his taste.

He loved ease and the classics, he detested company, he hated having the even tenour of his life ruffled even for a moment by the intrusion of an outside current.

He had been vexed with Grace, and sorry for John Riley, but now he believed John would get over it, and perhaps it was quite as well Mrs. Riley should not become his daughter's mother-in-law.

Mrs. Riley's voice had that day sounded especially disagreeable. The bitterness, disappointment, and resentment she feared to express had not added to its sweetness, and had added to the brusqueness of her manner.

After the sweetness of Lady Glendare, the acid of Mrs. Riley had not appeared good to Mr. Moffat. How handsome her ladyship still remained,

how exquisitely she dressed! The fashions of those days seem astonishing to us, but they were the mode then, and people admired them accordingly. How gracefully she moved! As Robert Somerford said, “there was poetry in her walk.” On the other hand, what a dowdy Mrs. Riley looked, with her crushed cap and faded strings, her ill-made dress, and yellow bony hands.

A long course of mortgage had not tended to improve Mrs. Riley’s personal appearance. She looked like a house in chancery. Every time he beheld her, Mr. Moffat beheld likewise fresh dilapidations and—

“Jerry,” said Mr. Moffat at this juncture, suddenly roused from ideal musings to a sense of the real; “see what is the matter with Finn’s front off foot. He is easing it.”

Mr. Moffat was driving tandem, and his leader’s foot was slightly beyond his range of accurate vision.

“Cast a shoe, your honour,” explained Jerry, lifting the foot indicated.

“That is bad, what can we do?”

“I’ll walk him home,” volunteered the groom.

“No, I cannot endure driving alone. Cannot we put him up somewhere?”

“Amos Scott would take good care of him. His place is at the top of the next loanin.”[3]

Footnote 3:

Lane.

“You mean Miss Grace’s friend, the man who has a lame boy, and who wears a blue coat with brass buttons?”

“Yes, your honour.”

“Open the gates then, and I will drive up.”

“There are half-a-dozen gates.”

“Walk on then and open them all. What a cursed country!” thought Mr. Moffat as his wheels went down on one side and up on the other, and his horses gingerly picked their way over huge stones, and gravel, and pieces of rock. “Jerry, does Scott draw his farm-produce down this charming piece of road?”

“Every ton of it, sir.”

“And his manure back?”

“Ah, it’s little manure he draws. He has his own heap always rotting at the door, ready to his hand, and it’s good land he has, God bless it.”

“Who is supposed to keep this road in repair?” asked Mr. Moffat, unheeding this testimony to Mr. Scott’s admirable management, and the superior quality of his soil.

“Nobody, sir.”

“Who does it belong to?”

“Nobody, sir; it is a divisional, and nobody can stop it, and nobody cares to mend it. In the winter there is a fine stream running sometimes; I’ve seen it in flood times up to the horse’s girths.”

“Who is the landlord?”

“The Earl, sir.”

There was only one earl known at Kingslough, his rival being the marquis.

“If he knew the state this road was in, he would have something done to it, I should think,” said Mr. Moffat.

“Likely, sir, but it was always so,” remarked the man.

“Always so, always so,” repeated Mr. Moffat to himself, “ay, and everything always will be so while Ireland is Ireland, and the Irish remain Irish,” forgetting that he, an Englishman, had fallen into Irish ways; that the grass on his lawns was suffered to grow long like that in a meadow, that his hedges and borders were unclipped, that his walks were unrolled, and his grounds, though beautiful exceedingly, were left in a state which would have driven an English gardener crazy to behold.

Yes, he was Irish in his ways, without the Irishman’s excuse, for he had plenty of money, plenty and to spare. He might have given employment to many and many a labourer, had he transplanted the trim civilization of his native land across the channel.

If a man have wealth and do not spend it, he may as well be an absentee as a resident. Some idea of this truth had already dawned upon Grace Moffat. All the evils Ireland groaned under she heard ascribed to non-resident landlords, to the rent the land yielded being spent out of the country; but the girl, thanks perhaps to the comparatively lonely life she led, and to her intense love for and sympathy with the people, was beginning to understand that non-residence was only a part of the evil.

For example, she and her father lived at Bayview; but for all the money they spent, or good they did in Ireland, they might as well have lived at Jericho. The Rileys again, who was the better for their presence? They lived off the soil; they killed their own sheep, they ate their own poultry, they grew their own vegetables, they wore the same clothes, so it seemed to Grace, month after month, and year after year. All this certainly might be their misfortune, indeed Miss Moffat knew no choice was left to them in the matter; but the man who held the mortgage on their property, and for whose sake the Woodbrook tenants groaned under a yoke scarcely less severe than that laid upon the necks of the farmers who rented land from the Glendares, lived at Kilcurragh alone, with an aged servant, in a large dilapidated house, giving nothing away, living upon as little as he could.

If he expended a hundred a year, it was the extent of his outgoings.

Then Grace thought about Mrs. Hartley. She, though English, resided in a land where the exigencies of society did not require a large expenditure of money, and accordingly Mrs. Hartley did not live up to her income; did not, in fact, use a fourth of it.

The poor, Miss Moffat could not fail to see, were the real benefactors of their country. They gave their labour, and out of their poverty they were liberal; they gave the ready handful of meal, the bannock of griddle bread, the sieve-full of potatoes, the drink of milk, the

abundance of their sympathy, the cheerful courtesy of their manners, the smiling promptitude of their charity; and Grace, who was a little shy, whom neither the lower nor the higher classes exactly understood, seeing everything, laid it to heart, and made a trembling vow that when she came to her own, when she attained the advanced age of one-and-twenty, she would try to use her wealth aright, and see whether even a woman might not do something to regenerate the country she loved so dearly.

If Mr. Moffat had ever entertained any romantic ideas of the same description, they were dead and buried years before this story opens.

Taking the world round, no matter how many persons a man begins with being attached to, he generally ends in liking himself better than any of them.

To this rule Mr. Moffat proved no exception. Grace and himself now formed the only prominent figures in his life's design, and at that time Grace stood a little behind himself.

Not a bad man, not a dishonourable, but yet he buried his talent in the ground, and returned no interest for all wherewith his Lord had trusted him.

The people, by which phrase I mean those whose rank was socially lower than his own, liked him very well indeed.

He was a "foreigner," and consequently could not be supposed to understand their ways; but they found him always civil. He was a "gentleman," if a very quiet one. He rarely addressed them, but when he did, "he was civil and well-spoken."

"He never made free." On the whole, Mr. Moffat was popular, allowances being readily made for his love of books and solitude.

Specially he was liked amongst the Glendare tenantry. Once or twice he had spoken to the "Aggent," as Mr. Dillwyn was generally styled, and effected good by his mild interference.

With beaming face, Mrs. Scott, a middle-aged woman, whose face was framed in the universal white frilled cap, and who wore a blue-checked apron, came out to meet him.

"Is your husband at home, Mrs. Scott?" asked her visitor.

"No, sir; he has gone to Rosemont, to see th' Airl. We'll get our lease promised now, plaize God."

"My leader has cast a shoe," explained Mr. Moffat. "May I leave him here for an hour or two?"

"An' welcome, sir; shall I unloose him?"

"You, Mrs. Scott! certainly not; Jerry can attend to him. There, easy man, easy. Mind how you pull off that bridle."

Afterwards it occurred to Mr. Moffat, with a feeling as near remorse as he was capable of experiencing, that if he had not been quite so wrapped up that summer's day in himself and his leader, he might have uttered a word of warning to the farmer's hard-working wife.

They were as innocent as children of the world's ways, those men and those women, and happy as children in their innocence, till they had to pay the penalty of such ignorance.

CHAPTER IX.
AT THE CASTLE FARM.

Amongst his friends and acquaintances Amos Scott's homestead was considered a marvel of convenience and luxury, whilst by gentle and simple alike Mr. Scott himself was regarded as a very fortunate man—one with whom the world had prospered exceedingly. As his neighbours expressed his lot, "He was born on a sunny morning," and the sunshine had through forty years scarcely ever been obscured by a cloud.

He farmed the land his fathers had farmed before him. He married the woman of his choice, and that woman chanced to have a stocking full of money to her dowry; his children—all save one Reuben—were strong, straight, healthy; he was respected and well liked by his equals, his superiors, and his inferiors. He paid for his two sittings at the Presbyterian Meeting-house, and the minister drank tea with him and his wife thrice a year at all events. The murrain had left his cattle untouched; all his children, old enough to have sounded such depths of knowledge, could read and write. Reuben, indeed, thanks to Grace Moffat, boasted a much wider range of learning. He was the "scholard" of the family, and the family entertained an openly-expressed expectation that some day—thanks again to Miss Gracie—he would be a schoolmaster, and a secret hope that, thanks to his own abilities and the still not to be despised contents of the typical stocking, he might enter the ministry.

It was entirely as a social question, as a matter of rising in the world, that Amos Scott desired this result. To him the ministry merely represented a body of men who taught the same creed as that he believed, and who, not labouring with their hands, filled a better position than any mere farmer might hope to occupy. He, Amos Scott, was too staunch a Presbyterian to regard the clergy from any superstitious or popish point of view. He always considered himself and men like him as true descendants of the seven thousand who refused to bow their knee to Baal—who, being certainly of the elect, nevertheless threw good works in to swell the credit of the account their faith had previously balanced—and he and the thousands of his fellows who at that time doggedly, and bigotedly, and unchristianly, as it may seem, entered their daily protest against Popery, as surely—from a political point of view—stood between their country and destruction as the Derry Apprentices saved Ireland to England.

Whether Ireland was grateful, or England is grateful, history alone can decide. When that history which has still to be written is published, the staunch and sturdy Presbyterians of the Black North may possibly receive their due meed of praise; but staunch and sturdy people, who hold strong opinions, and like exhibiting them to the world, are apt sometimes to be voted bores, both by those who differ from them, and those who are indifferent to everything, and it is very possibly for this reason, and no better one, that statesmen and peacemakers, and those who consider the Roman Catholic religion "picturesque," and suited to the "Celtic nature," and adapted to afford comfort and happiness to "poor, warmhearted, enthusiastic persons," have all considered and do all consider the stiff-necked Protestantism of the Irish minority—powerful, though a minority—one of the chief causes of the "Irish difficulty."

Certainly, in the North, at the time of which I write, the Roman Catholics had but a poor life.

What with the favourite form of drunken expletive which consigned the Pope to regions hot and gloomy; what with party tunes, Orange processions, and that which is hardest perhaps of all to bear, the visiting the sins of a system on individuals, and assuming them capable of any crime merely because they belonged to a special Church, it was not easy for “Papists,” as the rival sects loved to style Roman Catholics, to order their course aright.

They were the few amongst the many in the North. In the South the tables were turned, and Protestants did not find it easy to please the warmhearted peasantry, who had then, as now, a fancy for cold lead and firing from behind hedges.

But it is with the North we are concerned, with Ulster when the Church as by law established stood much in the position of Saul. She counted her thousands, but Calvin his tens of thousands. Nineteen-twentieths of the people went to “Meeting.” I should like to see the man who to this day dare call a “Meeting-house” “Chapel” in Ulster. They were a hard, stubborn, honest people, who kept the Lord’s Day with an almost New England strictness, who prayed to the Lord standing, and who sang His praises sitting, and who were, it should please almost any person to imagine, a race the Lord Himself, Who knows all hearts, might have loved, so keen was their sense of duty, their feeling of responsibility, their love of justice, their respect for appointed powers.

To men accustomed to more artificial society, their manners might seem a trifle brusque, their words too plain to be always pleasant; but underneath a rough exterior, hearts beat leal and noble.

Here and there, not at long intervals, but within any one human being’s ken, might have been picked out men and women capable of as noble deeds, of as grand sacrifices, as any which are deemed worthy of being chronicled in romance, and one of those men was Amos Scott, and one of those women was his wife.

At any hour of the day or night had Grace Moffat tapped at their door, and said,—

“We are in sore trouble, we want all the help you can give,” without a second thought, though they were a close-fisted pair, sparing on themselves, devoted to bargains, given to haggling about halfpence—the contents of the magical stocking would have been poured into her lap, and had need occurred Amos would have threshed out his corn, and sold his cows, and parted with his pigs, and handed the proceeds to the young lady, with as little thought of having acted with marvellous generosity as a child, in as fine a spirit of chivalry as moved those poor, weatherbeaten fishermen who, some seventy years ago, rowed a gallant gentleman—gallant, if mistaken—out of sight of land, and then, resting on their oars, pulled forth the paper offering one thousand pounds reward for their passenger, and asked him if he “knew any body answering to that description.” He had thought his disguise perfect, fancied himself safe in it, and behold his whole safety lay and had lain in the honour of those men who were carrying him to the sloop destined to bear one most unfortunate to France and liberty.

And yet to look at Amos Scott and his wife was to destroy the idea of all romance in connexion with them. Hearty and healthy were they both: strong, bony, large-framed, hard-featured. He had been a ruddy-complexioned, bashful fair-haired gossoon when he first beheld his future wife, the buxom, strapping daughter of a village innkeeper. Dark brown was her hair in those days, thick and long enough to twine in ropes round the back of her head; dark brown, also, were her eyes, and

she had a large, frank mouth, and large white even teeth, and a complexion delicate, and clear, and beautiful, like most other girls of her nation; but the years had come and gone since then, and the "gossoon" was a middle-aged man, and his wife's hair was tucked away under one of those caps which cease to be picturesque when once the starch is out of them, and she had wrinkles after the manner of her class—everywhere—and she had lost some of her teeth, and her voice was—well—I love the accent, the honest, friendly accent of the lower classes in that romantic, and picturesque, and sorrowful land; but Mr. Moffat, being an Englishman, though partially acclimatized, did not admire it any more than he admired the dung-heap—graced with a sow and a dozen young ones—that rose to the left hand of the "causeway," or the sodden, rotting straw, wherein were scratching and pecking some thirty fowls that lay to the right of the said causeway, marking the spot whence a previous midden had been removed.

"Won't you come in, sir, and sit down off your feet?" asked Mrs. Scott hospitably, anxious to show a gentleman, whose nature she did not in the least understand, all the hospitality in her power; but Mr. Moffat, with a gesture almost of dread, declined the proffered civility.

Once had he been seduced into that abode, once by Grace, and he always thought afterwards, with horror, of the sufferings endured within the walls of Mr. Scott's mansion.

Cheese had been produced for their delectation,—Cheese, a species of food Mr. Moffat, being a man of weak digestion and given to considering his ailments, loathed. Further, it was new cheese, such as the Irish eat at births and funerals (washing it down with whisky), new cheese, dotted with caraway seeds, and with this Mrs. Scott set out oaten bread, and butter fresh and good, but butter made with Mrs. Scott's own hands, which did not look inviting, and butter-milk and sweet-milk: and he was expected to eat.

If Mr. Moffat were not genial, and I am not aware his worst enemy ever laid that virtue in the form of a vice to his charge, at all events he was courteous. The feast was spread so humbly and so willingly, with such a simple hospitality and belief that because it chanced to be the best the house held it would be received kindly, that Mr. Moffat could not choose but break a piece off the oat cake and eat it.

"Do you know poor papa can scarcely ever touch butter and _never_ eats cheese," said Grace to Mrs. Scott, gaily helping herself to a great piece of cake and an enormous slice of butter, "and you know I do not like caraways—you always make my cheese without them," which speech contained an allusion to the fact of its being Mrs. Scott's annual custom to present Miss Moffat with a cheese of her own manufacture.

Great were the ceremonies attendant on that presentation, which was always performed by Mrs. Scott in person, and the cheese invariably proved remarkably good. Perhaps, had Grace beheld the _modus operandi_ of its manufacture, she might not have regarded the article as a delicacy, for all Mrs. Scott's progeny assisted at the tub, and little hands, not so clean as might have been desired, dabbled in the whey.

What the eye does not see, the heart, however, does not grieve over, and Ireland is not the only country in which mothers, impressed by a fatal delusion that their offspring can touch nothing without improving it, permit children to meddle with and dabble in affairs more important than the separation of curd from whey.

As for those youngsters at the Tower Farm, Grace loved them every one. All the later babies she had nursed and cooed over. One of them was

called after her, Grace Moffat Scott, and had it been possible for such a suggestion to be made to the Presbyterian mind, she would gladly have stood godmother to the new arrival.

As it was, Amos Scott's convictions saved her from assuming any such responsibility, and Miss Moffat, thus debarred from any public evidence of affection, had to content herself with fondling the infant so long as it was little, and tossing it up to the ceiling the while it cooed and shrieked an ecstatic accompaniment, and letting it, as age advanced, come like the rest to see what she had in her pockets, what "comforts and lozengers," were there lying _perdu_ for subsequent delectation.

Often on Saturdays Nettie O'Hara and she had made up a picnic party all by themselves, and taking their luncheon with them, so as to alleviate the pangs of hunger, held high festival among the ruins of the tower which gave a name to Amos Scott's farm.

Dear to Grace was every inch of that farm, one of the delights of her childhood had been to accompany her nurse thither. There were not so many importunate urchins then to claim Mrs. Scott's attention, and every moment of her time could therefore be devoted to her little lady guest.

For her—the motherless, black-frocked, grave, old-fashioned orphan—were saved the reddest and sunniest apples in the orchard; for her was baked the first "bannock" that could be manufactured out of new potatoes; for her always was kept a comb of honey; for her the "strippings" from the best cow, which Grace, who was warned at home that new milk "would make her yellow," regarded in the light of a forbidden indulgence, and drank rapturously out of the lid of a tin can; for her, surreptitious rides on Pat, the donkey, and Rob, the venerable black pony, over whose decease she subsequently wept bitter tears; for her a hundred thousand welcomes; for her the best that house held, while she was still so little as to be unable to guess how much out of their small means these people were giving her, how royally in their own poor way they were entertaining a child who it seemed scarcely likely would ever directly or indirectly benefit them in any way.

Not out of interested motives, however, did they welcome the little maiden; not because of any return they looked for did they welcome her to the farm, and make her free of house and byre, of stable, garden, orchard, and paddock. In those early days they wanted nothing from any one: in the latter days, when we make their acquaintance, they still wanted nothing from any one save a renewal of their still unexpired lease from Lord Glendare, and for that they were willing and able to pay. The rent had never yet been more than a temporary trouble to Amos Scott. The land was exceptionally good. The amount he paid for it exceptionally low. Stiff premiums had indeed twice been paid by Amos and his father, but they were able to afford them.

There is a great deal in "starting square." They had done so, and by dint of prudence, economy, and hard labour, were enabled to keep themselves that ten pounds before the world which means affluence, instead of that ten pounds behind which means perpetual pauperism.

And for these reasons and many more, had Grace been thrice the heiress she was, and of age, and holding her whole fortune in her own hand, it would have made no difference (pecuniarily) to the Scotts. They did not want gifts or loans, they could earn as much as they needed and desired, indeed, would have accepted nothing more. They could pay for their children's schooling, and spared them to go to school except in the very height of hay-making, reaping, or potato-digging. Had Miss Moffat or her father offered to be at the sole expense of educating one of the children, they would have resented the idea almost as an insult, but

when Grace, in her own quiet way, proposed to do a still greater thing, namely, teach the feeble one of the flock all that she knew herself, the parents caught at the notion; and the girl herself, still almost a child, gave her lessons with a sweet patience, with a determined perseverance, with a thoroughness and kindly encouragement Nettie O'Hara might have envied.

But she did nothing of the kind; she only laughed at Grace's fancy for playing at schoolmistress.

"You can't think, dear, how much I learn myself in teaching him," said Grace, not in the least disturbed by her friend's ridicule.

Once again Nettie laughed.

"If I had your fortune, I should not care how little I knew."

"You would like to know how to spend it though," said Grace, with a pretty sense of responsibility.

"Oh! somebody else will do that for you."

"Never," answered Grace, "never; Nettie, how often am I to tell you no one shall ever persuade me to leave Bayview and papa?"

"But your papa will spend it for you," said Nettie, hastily drawing back her foot from the conversational hole into which she had unwittingly thrust it.

Now came Grace's turn to laugh.

"Dear papa does not know how to spend his own," she exclaimed; "and perhaps when I have money, I shall know as little what to do with it as he. But oh! Nettie, I hope I shall learn; I am trying so hard to understand what is wanted most in this world."

"Money for everybody, I think," Nettie retorted, a little bitterly. After all, the difference was great between the embryo heiress and the embryo governess. Perhaps Grace felt it to be so, for she embraced her friend tenderly, and Nettie certainly saw the distinction clearly, and attributed to it results that did not always accrue from the premises she imagined.

For instance she always fancied the welcome to Castle Farm was more cordial to Grace than to herself, because Grace had money and she none; whereas the Scotts would have greeted Grace the same had she not owned a stiver, and liked Nettie even less than was the case, had some benevolent person left her ten thousand a year.

Wonderfully quick are the wisest of the lower orders all the world over at reading character; shrewd even beyond their class are the Irish, and more especially the northern Irish, in detecting the faintest token of a false ring in the human coin. And, spite of her beauty, which had won such golden opinions from the gentlemen and ladies of Kingslough—both being for once unanimous in the matter—the Scotts thought it was a pity "Miss Grace was so wrapt up in that Miss Nettie."

Nevertheless, in their own way, both husband and wife were unaffectedly grieved when they heard of the trouble Nettie had wrought for herself, and it was with subdued voice and grave face that Mrs. Scott said to her chance visitor, while Jerry took that "contrary divil Finn," as he styled him, into the stable,—

“Miss Grace’ll have heard, sir, that Miss Nettie—Mrs. Brady, begging her pardon, has come home.”

“I do not think she has,” answered Mr. Moffat, with a sudden repression of manner which did not escape Mrs. Scott’s notice. “When did she come? where is she?”

“Where should she be, sir, but in her husband’s house?—bad luck to him—that’s where she is; and as for when she come home, I was over at my cousin’s two days ago—she’s in great trouble, having just buried her husband, the Lord help her, and nine children to fill and to find—and as I was coming home through the gloaming I met them on the car, Mr. Dan driving. He nodded to me and gave me the time of day. They were walking the horse down the Abbey brae, but she had her face covered with a veil and looked neither one way nor another. I thought to myself, ‘that’s a coming home for an O’Hara.’ She has made a rough bed for herself to lie on, and a purty creature, too.”

“Mrs. Scott,” said Mr. Moffat, “I wish you would answer me one question straightforwardly and in confidence, entirely in confidence you understand. What is this man Brady? what has he done, what has he left undone, to have such a mark placed against his name? As you are aware, I do not put myself in the way of hearing idle gossip; I disapprove of people who are never happy except when meddling in their neighbours’ business, but you know how it was with my little girl and Miss O’Hara—and—”

“God bless Miss Grace, she’ll want to be running off after Miss Nettie the minute she hears of her home-coming; but don’t let her, sir, don’t. Miss Nettie has made her bed, and neither man nor woman can help her to unmake it now, and don’t let Miss Grace try to meddle or to make. Don’t put it in anybody’s power to say Dan Brady ever spoke a word to her, or she to him.”

“Yes—yes, my good woman,” interposed Mr. Moffat testily, “I know all that, I know everybody is in the same story about Mr. Daniel Brady, but what I want to hear is, what has he done? Why do the well-educated and highly-civilized population of Kingslough denounce this really decidedly good-looking and rather well-mannered young man, as though he were a sinner past redemption? What has the man done?”

“Is it about Brady, sir, ye’re asking that question,” joined in a male voice at this juncture; and, looking round, Mr. Moffat beheld Amos Scott, who had just returned home. “If so be it is, I’ll make free to answer it myself? What has he done? what hasn’t he done, except what it was his right to do? that is more to the point. They say he forged his grandfather’s will; he broke his mother’s heart; he had a grudge against a man, and swore that about him which sent him beyond the seas; he has always the best of a bargain; ay, and there’s not a father in the county whose heart hadn’t need to be sore if he saw one of his girls even say, ‘Good mornin’, to Daniel Brady.”

“That’s it, is it?” commented Mr. Moffat, briefly. He knew enough of the people he lived among to understand the full significance of the latter part of Mr. Scott’s sentence. Parents had as a rule sufficient faith in their daughters to leave them to take care of themselves, and as a rule their daughters justified the trust reposed in them. Nevertheless girls were sometimes deceived, and the man who made it his occupation to lure them to “misfortune,” so the tender phrase went, was not likely to receive much toleration at the hands of the masses.

In a country like Ireland, where women have an exceptional liberty of action, speech, and manner—a liberty unknown even in England—it is

natural that fathers, brothers, and husbands should resist the smallest encroachment on such freedom; should cast a libertine out from familiar intercourse with their families as though he were a leper.

If a man was bad let him consort with bad company, and refrain from bringing social and moral destruction into decent houses.

Mr. Daniel was bad and had consorted with bad company, and no respectable man cared to have much intimate acquaintance with him; and to his other sins he had now added the offence of having run off with a very lonely and pretty girl.

For that offence, however, Mr. Moffat felt no desire to quarrel with him. On the whole, he was perhaps rather pleased than otherwise that Nettie had chosen for her husband one whose position and character rendered further acquaintance between her and his daughter impossible.

Nettie had been as great a pest to him as it was possible for a young girl to prove to an elderly gentleman who spent much of his time in his library. It would be absurd to say that he grudged the preserves, and biscuits, and milk, the tea, and the bread and butter, wherewith Grace was wont to entertain her friend, but he did dislike Nettie's perpetual presence. Golden curls, blue eyes, pink-and-white cheeks, did not make up his ideal of feminine perfection, and had he admired and liked Nettie ever so much, and he neither particularly liked nor admired her, it would still have been a burden and a weariness to him to see her so perpetually about the house.

To him she appeared as obnoxious and strange a visitor to have constantly hovering round the premises as a strange cat prowling over his flower-beds seems to a careful gardener.

He had never hoped to get completely rid of her, and yet, lo! in a moment, Mr. Brady had procured his deliverance. On the whole, therefore, Mr. Moffat was not disposed to judge Mr. Brady severely. Perhaps, on the whole, he felt pleased to think his code of morals was objectionable; possibly he did not fret because Mr. Brady had placed himself, and, as a matter of course, his wife, out of the pale of decent society.

Miss Nettie had chosen, and for the future Bayview would be free of that young lady at all events.

Such were the thoughts that passed through Mr. Moffat's mind while Amos Scott continued a rambling tirade against Mr. Brady and his sins of omission and commission.

"You must have been away betimes this morning," he remarked at length, feeling it would be only civil before he went to refer to some matter personal to his host.

"No, sir, I met th' Airl a couple of miles on the other side of Kingslough, and would you please to tell Miss Grace it is all right? he has promised me the new lease."

"You will have to pay for it, though, I suppose," answered Mr. Moffat.

"Yes, sir; but thank God we have a pound or two to the fore, and we would rather pinch a bit, if need was, than leave th' ould place."

"That is natural," remarked Mr. Moffat; and then, his leader having been comfortably disposed of by Jerry, he bade good-day to Mr. and Mrs. Scott, and slowly retraced his way to the main road, muttering maledictions against the "divisional" as he went.

CHAPTER X.
MR. DANIEL BRADY RECEIVES.

At one time, a pernicious habit obtained across the channel, a habit which unfortunately appears to have latterly been imported into England, of bestowing Christian names on country-seats. A son, fond of his mother, bought a property possessed of some old Irish cognomen, and forthwith the place became Kittymount, or Hannah Ville, or Jinny Brook, or St. Margaret's. Sometimes men also came in for their share of this delicate attention, and Robertsford, and Williamsford, and Mount George, or Knock Denis, perpetuated the name of some favoured member of the race.

To this custom Maryville, the seat of Mr. Daniel Brady, owed its nomenclature.

A certain heiress, in the days when the Bradys owned a considerable amount of property, married a younger son of that family.

With her money a small estate, on which stood an unpretending cottage residence, was purchased, a large house erected, a park fenced in, gardens laid out, lodge and lodge-entrance provided, and then Mr. and Mrs. Theophilus Brady took up their abode at Maryville.

Acre after acre the principal estate changed hands; one by one the older branches of the family died out. My Lord Ardmorne owned all the broad lands that had once belonged to the old Bradys, but Maryville still remained to the descendants of Theophilus. The porter's lodge was in ruins, the gates hanging on one hinge stood wide, the park was a wilderness, in the gardens weeds grew knee-deep, and the currant and gooseberry trees were smothered with bind-weed and convolvulus.

As for the house, a few of the rooms were habitable, and these Mr. Daniel Brady occupied. He lived there all alone, in company with an elderly housekeeper, whose age and looks were sufficient guarantee for her propriety; lived there, a man at war with society, a man who was at feud with the world, a man who said he was determined some day to get the better of society, and make those who had once snubbed him glad of his company.

"It is all a question of money," he said openly. "If they thought I was rich, they would be glad enough to ask me to their houses, hang them."

However great a cad a man may be, it is extremely unlikely he should acknowledge the fact, even to himself. Indeed, he is always the only person who remains entirely unconscious of the circumstance, and therefore, although Mr. Brady was aware that for a considerable period those of his race who had preceded him had found themselves neglected by the upper ten of Kingslough and its neighbourhood, that for generations his people had dropped out of the rank of gentry, and that his own existence was virtually tabooed by persons who made the slightest pretension to respectability; still he persisted this social ostracism originated in circumstances entirely independent of character; that the Bradys had gone down, not because they were, in their humbler way, as bad, and wild, and reckless, and selfish, and self-willed as the Glendares, but because his great-grandfather had married a shopkeeper's daughter, and his aunt had elected to go off with the particularly handsome son of a small farmer, who was no higher in rank than a

labourer, while his mother, sick, doubtless of the Bradys and people like them, chose for her second husband an Englishman who made her comfortable, though he did drop his h's, and whose connexion with himself Mr. Daniel utterly repudiated.

After her marriage, the youth, then in his very early teens, was taken by his maternal grandfather, who, spite of wars and rumours of wars, spite of various threats expressive of an intention to kick his grandson out of his house, spite of the contempt he felt for "that cur," as he habitually designated Daniel, left to that young man everything of which he died possessed, and passing by his daughter, devised and bequeathed his small corn-mill, his farm, held at an almost nominal rent for a long term, his furniture, his horses, and his blessing to the youthful reprobate.

No one ever believed Mr. Farrell signed that will knowing its contents. Most people went so far as to believe he never signed it at all, and amongst the latter number was included the heir's mother. This idea and a stormy interview with her first-born were the proximate causes of her death. She had three children by her second marriage, and counted no doubt on inheriting the greater portion of her father's property, which in turn she would be able to bequeath to them. From the day of Mr. Farrell's funeral, she never held up her head. Gradually she drooped, and pined, and died of a broken heart, that disease which doctors try to diagnose in vain.

Clear of all relations, possessed of a sum of money which, if really small, seemed comparatively large to a man whose family had for so long a time been drifting in a rotten boat along the river of incapable expenditure to the river of ruin, Mr. Daniel Brady removed his grandfather's furniture to Maryville, which had long stood empty, gave the man who had rented the land during his minority notice to quit, let his corn-mill to a Scotch Irishman, whose soul was not above grinding and meal, as was the soul of the heir, and began to lead that life for which he had long panted—a life of cheap debauchery, of economical villany, of consistent moneymaking.

Looking at the moss-covered drive, at the rusty gates, at the desolate park, at the weed-covered gardens, a stranger might have said, rashly, "The owner of this place must be a beggar."

But Mr. Brady knew what he was about. A well-kept avenue, gates that opened noiselessly, grass closely mown, gardens filled with fruit and flowers, all these things would have cost much whilst they returned nothing. They could return nothing to a man who wanted no help such as the appearance of wealth occasionally enables people to obtain. What he seemed would not, he was shrewd enough to understand, have the smallest weight with a community who mentally counted every sixpence of his inheritance the moment he laid claim to it. What he had would, he knew, be regarded ultimately with respect. Perhaps the Irish may not like moneyed men, but certainly they reverence them.

The almighty dollar will exercise its influence as well amongst persons who swear against it as amongst those who swear by it. Mr. Daniel Brady was no fool in worldly matters, and he had early recognized the truth of that maxim which states, "Money is power."

What would the end find him? A pretentious snob, or a grubbing miser? The soil on which both grow is the same. The earth of which he was made could be moulded as readily into one as the other. He had youth in his favour, and youth is pliable. If a selfish, self-indulgent, insolent, meanly extravagant braggart be preferable in the reader's opinion to a wretched old miser, there is a chance for Mr. Daniel Brady exhibiting

himself in the former character. At the time this story opens, however, he was in training for a miser. He was that most wonderful thing in creation, a young man niggardly even over his pleasures, calculating even concerning the things his soul most longed for, who was never led away by the voice of praise, or turned by that of censure, who had no impulses of generosity, kindliness, remorse; a wonderful thing, but not an uncommon. The world has a great many Daniel Bradys travelling through it, though we may reck not of their existence.

If the characters of men could be revealed when they give up their railway-tickets at the end of their morning journeys, it might surprise a good many unsuspecting people to discover the number of unmitigated scoundrels who have lent them the _Times_, or discoursed to them about the state of the weather and the funds.

Mr. Brady was an unmitigated scoundrel. The higher orders tabooed his existence; the middle regretted he had come to Maryville; the lower hated him.

Now the love of the lower orders is often open to be viewed with suspicion. Meretricious qualities may win it, adventitious circumstances secure it. About their hate there is no such mistake. They hate a man because of such and such qualities, which he possesses or does not possess, and there is an end of the matter. Had Mr. Brady announced to the beggars of Kingslough and its neighbourhood that on a given day he would distribute fifty pounds in charity, they would have known he had an ulterior object in view.

As it was, he never gave them a halfpenny, and that seemed a vice to the majority in those remote days, ere the Marquis of Townshend had begun his crusade against mendicants.

Then most people gave according as he or she could, gave to beggars who asked, and gave to the decent and reticent poor who would not ask, but whom they sought out and assisted.

Not a practicable thing to do, perhaps, at this time of the world, when the workhouse doors stand hospitably open to receive those who like to enter in and relinquish hope. Certainly not a practicable thing to do now, when the labouring classes say they are the dictators; that they will have pence, and sixpences, and sovereigns out of the pockets of capitalists, whether capitalists lose or gain; but then—then—ah! heaven,—what was not a gift thrown to a half-naked beggar? It meant a day’s food. What good did not the present stealthily bestowed on a family too proud too ask, too lonely to have friends, effect? It enabled struggling people to turn many an ugly corner, to keep a home, poor though it was, together, and avoid that last vague necessity of “going out on the world,” a phrase which expresses in such few words a fearful calamity.

But neither openly nor by stealth did Mr. Brady perform any of those small acts of charity so universal and so needful at that time in his country, and his sins of omission were as duly set down to the debit of his account by an observant and exacting population as those of commission.

The very beggars hated him. The idiots, who then wandered loose about every town and village in Ireland, never with grotesque gesture and jabbering tone entreated a halfpenny of him. Instinctively the blind, knowing the sound of his horse’s hoofs slunk on to the side path, or close up beside a wall or a hedge, on his approach; the ragged, shoeless, homeless children never ran after that rider, praying him to throw them a “farden;” the deaf and dumb, who, according to popular

belief, had “knowledge,” and whom it was not well to anger, looked at him menacingly and raised clenched fists when he had passed; whilst “Trust in the Lord,” so named because he was the religious begging impostor of Kingslough, maddened the young man by piously folding his hands when Mr. Brady crossed his path, and uttering ejaculatory and audible prayers for all sinners, more especially “for this sinner, who may be called the chief of them all.”

As for Katty Clancy, who had begged her bread, and worn the same scanty petticoat, and covered her shoulders with the same washed out, ragged, picturesque, patchwork counterpane for forty long years, “a dissolute orphan,” as she styled herself, till the absurdity of the lament was pointed out by Mrs. Hartley; as for Katty, Mr. Daniel Brady hated that woman with a completeness of detestation to which no words could do justice.

Others of her profession refrained from asking him for alms, but she took a delight in doing so, and in flinging some bitter taunt or jibe back in his face when he refused, generally with an oath, to give her one copper.

Their conversations were usually carried on somewhat as follows:—

“Good mornin’, Mr. Brady, isn’t that the beautiful day, God bliss it? Yer astir airly. An’ where is it yer honour’s goin’ to in sich a hurry?”

“To ——,” Mr. Brady replied, mentioning what Lord Stowell, in one of his judgments, styled a “favourite place of consignment.”

“Ach, well yer honour, it’s a long journey, and I wish ye safe there,” said Katty, with persistent courtesy, and then Mr. Brady, muttering an oath, walked off, while Katty solemnly shook her head, and said _sotto voce_, “There’s many a true word spoken in jest, and it’s my belief, Dan Brady, ye are thravellin’ that road as fast as time will let ye.”

Before Nettie O’Hara, however, Mr. Brady had contrived to appear the incarnation of every manly virtue. He told the girl how much he loved her, spoke of his own lonely life at Maryville, of his solitary home, of the unjust stories his enemies had circulated to his prejudice, of the manner in which he was excluded from society for no reason in the world except that some of his family had made mésalliances, and that he himself was poor.

“But I mean to be rich one of these days, Nettie,” he finished, “if you will only help me—if you will only try to grow fond of me.”

Nettie, unhappily, had no occasion to try to grow fond of him. She loved his handsome face, and the notion of sharing his lonely home had no terrors for her.

She knew and he knew, it would be idle to ask her friends’ consent. Indeed, he did not want it. He wanted her and he had got her. Flight was sudden at the last, but Nettie had long understood she meant to go off with him some day.

And that day, and many, many other days had come and gone, and Nettie was home at Maryville, walking about the weed-covered garden, when her relatives the Rileys, father and son, paid their first visit to the house.

Amongst the other rarities and attractions Maryville had once boasted were a fish-pond and a sundial. The first was green with slime and choked with the leaves of water-plants, whilst round the rotting pillar

of the dial climbed briony and convolvulus.

Beside the pond, with one hand resting on the slate time-teller, Nettie stood motionless. She did not hear the footsteps of her relatives as they fell silently on moss-covered walks and grass-grown paths. She was dressed in white, she had a blue ribbon round her waist, and another of the same colour kept back her hair—her long, bright, beautiful hair. Never afterwards did General Riley forget that picture, never could he quite efface from his memory the sight of that girl, almost a child, standing amongst that wilderness of rank vegetation, looking across the pond at a belt of dark firs which separated this portion of the gardens from the open park beyond.

“Nettie,” John said softly; then with a start she turned and saw them, a colour rising in her face, and smiles dimpling her cheeks the while.

“Oh, General! Oh, John! this is kind of you,” she said eagerly; “I did not think—that is, I did not hope—” and then she stopped and looked at them both, and General Riley looked at his son, and John at his father, perplexed as to what they were to do next.

“Are you quite well, Nettie?” asked the young man, after a moment’s pause, looking a little doubtfully in her face, which, now the flush caused by their sudden appearance had died away, looked paler and thinner than ever he remembered to have seen it.

“Yes, very well, thank you,” with an unnecessary emphasis on the very. “I am a little tired; we only came home the evening before last, and you know I am not much accustomed to travelling.”

“Did you like Scotland?”

“Greatly, but I think I like Ireland best.” There was a wistful anxious look in the blue eyes that neither man could help noticing, and Nettie perceiving that they did so, went on to ask, quickly, “How is Grace?”

“Well, I believe,” John answered.

“You believe?” she repeated.

“Yes,” he said quietly. “I have not seen Grace for some weeks. The fact is, she has refused me, and I am going away. You have not been in the neighbourhood, or you would have heard all about that long ago.”

Nettie did not reply, she stood looking at the fir-trees with great serious eyes. She seemed prettier then than John had ever before thought her—poor little girl.

“We were told we should find Mr. Brady here,” broke in General Riley at this juncture. “I suppose the servant made some mistake.”

“_Then you did not come to see me!_” she exclaimed, taking her eyes from the firs and fastening them on their faces.

“Of course we came to see you,” said John falsely, but kindly. He could not endure the dumb anguish of her expression.

“You did not,” she said vehemently. “Don’t tell untruths to me, John Riley; you have come to talk to my husband about me, and to meddle in my concerns, but you did not come to see me as relations should come to see one another. You think I have disgraced myself by marrying out of your rank—yours, what is it?—and you do not want to visit me yourselves or to let your sisters do so. When my husband has a large property like yours,

and money to keep it up, which he will have, and you never will, then I shall be able to pick and choose my friends, but till then I must be content to live without any."

Then, with a catching sob, she stopped, her eyes flashing, her cheeks aflame, while John Riley, preventing his father answering, and passing over the sting her words held, said,—

"No one will be better pleased than we to hear you and your husband are happy and prosperous, Nettie. It would be useless to deny that we did, and do, regret the step you have taken, but that step has been taken, and it behoves us, as your nearest male friends, to see that its consequences prove as little disastrous to you as may be."

"You are very kind," said Nettie sarcastically.

"Our intentions are so, at all events," answered John, with a temper and a humility which touched even Nettie.

"I believe," she said, "you are the best person in the world, and I am sure your intentions are always good and kind, but you have made a mistake this time. It is not well to meddle between man and wife."

"When were you made man and wife?" asked the General, charging like an old soldier direct to the point he wanted to reach.

"What business is that of yours, General Riley?" she retorted. "It was not you Mr. Brady married."

"Be reasonable, Nettie," interposed John. "On my word we do not want to make or to meddle; we only desire to protect. If we fail in our duty now, the day may come when you will say to us, 'I was but a girl, ignorant of the world, and you left me to bear the consequences of my rashness; you never advised, you never helped me.' All we want to know is that you have been so securely married no doubt can be thrown upon the matter, and afterwards——" he stopped.

"What about afterwards?" she asked.

"We must leave afterwards to take care of itself, having done all it seemed possible in the present."

"Do you think I am not married, then?" she asked; "that I would come back to Kingslough if—if——"

"There is no necessity for you to get into a passion with us, Nettie," interrupted her cousin. "We think no evil of you, but you are only a young and inexperienced girl, and to put the argument in a nutshell, we have taken this matter up, and mean to have it put in proper form."

"You had better see my husband, then," she exclaimed. "I do not suppose he will give you much of a welcome, but if you choose to insult a man in his own house, you have only yourselves to thank if you meet with scant courtesy," and with her head up in the air, and her blue ribbons floating, and her golden curls glinting in the sunlight, Nettie led them out of the garden, and by a side door, into a small sitting-apartment, which had, in the days when Maryville was in its glory, been an inner drawing-room or boudoir—my lady's closet, perhaps, where she conducted her correspondence, or worked at her embroidery.

A second door led to the drawing-room, which was bare of all furniture, unless a huge chandelier, a cracked girandole, and a rickety sofa could be so considered; but the door was closed, and the Rileys could not see

the nakedness of the land.

Instead, they beheld an apartment furnished with a few chairs and a couple of tables, the floor covered with a somewhat faded Kidderminster carpet; but, taking one thing with another, the place did not look poverty stricken or uncomfortable.

“It is not much of a home I am able to welcome you to,” said Nettie, turning defiantly upon her relations, “but at least it is clear of debt.”

“Nettie,” replied John Riley, “you cannot hurt us, so say what you please; at the same time I would ask if you think it worth while to try and insult those who have no object in being here beyond that I have stated.”

“Some day, child,” added the General, “you may understand it is better to be honestly indebted than dishonestly clear of debt.”

“I never could understand paradoxes,” said Nettie, and she sat down beside the window, her white hands linked together in her lap, and her pretty head averted from her visitors till Mr. Brady, for whom she had sent, entered.

Ere long Mr. Brady appeared. He came in with a slight swagger, looking a little nervous, but handsome and defiant as ever.

“This is a pleasure I did not hope for so soon,” he began. “Glad to see you, General. How do you do, Squire?” and he extended his hand to the visitors, but General Riley crossed his behind his back, and John thrust his in his pockets.

It was not a pleasant position for any one of the four, most unpleasant of all, perhaps, for Nettie, and yet she alone was equal to the occasion.

“Do you mean, John Riley,” she said, turning upon him like a fury, “that you refuse, having voluntarily come into this house, to shake hands with its master, my husband?”

“No man will be more ready than I, Nettie, to give my hand to Mr. Brady when he has proved himself worthy to take it,” John answered steadily.

“I understand you,” answered Mr. Brady, “this is a business visit?”

“Strictly so,” was the reply.

“You had better leave us to discuss business, Annette,” said Mr. Brady slowly. “Pray be seated, gentlemen;” then after the sound of Nettie’s footsteps had died away he went on, “Now what do you want? what is it?”

“We want to know if you are married to my cousin?” said John.

“You had better have put that question to her.”

“We have.”

“And what answer did she give you?”

“She evidently considers she is legally your wife.”

“Then, what more do you want?”

“Proof that her idea is correct.”

“Supposing I refuse to give it?”

“We will make you give it, sir,” interposed the General.

“Two to one is scarcely fair,” remarked Mr. Brady, “still curiosity makes me inquire how you propose to make me open my mouth if I choose to keep it shut?”

“I do not know—” the General was beginning, when his son interrupted him with—

“One moment, father. I hope you misunderstood Mr. Brady’s reply. This is not a matter, I should think, about which he would wish to keep us in the dark. It is absolutely essential,” he went on, speaking to Mr. Brady, “that we should understand my cousin’s position.”

“Why?”

“Because if she be not your wife already, you must immediately make her so.”

“Again I ask, why?”

“Do you suppose we should allow her to remain with you an hour longer excepting as your wife?”

“I really do not see how you are to help yourselves.”

“Mr. Brady,” began John, “I cannot believe you are speaking seriously. I think you must be trying to annoy us by persisting in what is at best but a very sorry sort of jest. We have not come here to reproach you for the scandal you have caused a respectable family, for the advantage you have taken of an ignorant and unprotected girl. We merely desire to know if you have made her the only reparation in your power. Is she legally your wife?”

“That is a question I decline to answer.”

“Is she not your wife?”

“That, likewise, is a question I decline to answer.”

“You villain!” exclaimed the General, “we will find means to make you answer,” and he was advancing with raised hand and threatening gesture towards Mr. Brady, when his son stepped between them.

“We shall not do any good by using violence, father,” he said, putting a curb on his own temper, and clenching his fingers, which were itching to grasp his riding-whip, and lay it about the shoulders of the self-possessed scoundrel who stood before him, smiling contemptuously.

“There is only one course left open for us to pursue now; we must take Nettie away, and get legal advice as to what we ought to do next.”

“I apprehend your legal adviser will say that even loving relatives like you cannot separate husband and wife,” replied Mr. Brady.

“It will be for you then to prove that you are her husband.”

“And what if Annette refuses to go?”

“She will not remain here when I tell her how she has been deceived,” was the answer, and John Riley took up his hat and whip, and was following his father to the door, when Mr. Brady stopped them.

“A moment,” he said; “do not be in such a hurry, gentlemen. If you, General, will kindly restrain your temper, and you, Mr. Riley, will kindly hold your tongue, perhaps some arrangement may be come to. I have declined,” he went on, after a pause, “to tell you whether the young lady in whose affairs you have interfered so officiously is my wife or not, for the extremely simple reason that I am not at all clear on the point myself. I think she is my wife if I like to claim her; I think she is not my wife if I choose to repudiate her. It is an awkward position for her, certainly, and I do not imagine it can be a pleasant one for her relatives.”

“Well, sir?” said General Riley, to whom this speech was specially addressed.

“To make the thing secure for her we certainly ought to go through some sort of ceremony, otherwise I do not see how she is either to prove that she is married or unmarried. It is an awkward affair for me, too. I am a poor man. I had enough burdens before, without hampering myself with a wife. I cannot say I have much taste for domestic felicity; and after the specimen of good breeding you have given me to-day, I can imagine many things more desirable than a connexion with the Riley family.”

“In heaven’s name what are you driving at?” asked the General. “We do not want a dissertation on your tastes and prejudices, we want to know, in a word, whether you will marry Nettie, or whether you will leave us to seek our remedy elsewhere.”

“Meaning at law?”

“Meaning at law, and also that I will give you a thrashing you shall remember to your dying day,” said John Riley.

“I requested you to hold your tongue, did I not?” retorted Mr. Brady coolly. “As I was saying,” he continued, addressing the General, “the holy state of matrimony is not one into which I have the least desire to enter, more especially with such a remarkably useless young lady as your relative; still I am willing to meet your views. I am not desirous of raising any scandal, and if you like to make it worth my while I will take her for better for worse.”

“Make it worth your while?” repeated the General.

“Yes, you do not expect me to do something for nothing, do you? I shall have to board and clothe a young woman for the remainder of her days, and resign my liberty in addition. I do not want, however, to drive a hard bargain, or take advantage of your difficulty. The girl has, I believe, a hundred pounds or so of her own. Make it up five hundred, and I will send for the minister here, or marry her in church, whichever you like.”

“I’ll see you——”

To what lot or in what place General Riley intended to say he would see the speaker may be imagined, but can never now be exactly known, for while he was uttering these words the door between the outer and the inner drawing-room opened, and Nettie herself appeared.

“Take me away, John,” she said, “take me anywhere out of this house, away from him.”

“You have been listening,” observed Mr. Brady, disconcerted for the first time.

“Yes, it was my affair and I had a right to hear. Take me away, John, from that bad, false man. Do you understand what I say? Oh! and I was so fond of him, and I believed him. I did,” and she burst into a fit of hysterical weeping, and her face, her shamed, grief-stained face, covered with her hands, hurried from the room.

“Go after her, John,” said the General, “and keep her in the garden till I have settled this matter one way or other.”

“And hark ye, mister,” called out Mr. Brady, “she does not leave this place without my consent; ay, and, for all her crying, she does not want to leave it.”

Which last clause was hard to believe in the face of Nettie’s passionate entreaties for John to take her away, away at once.

“And to think of how I trusted him,” she moaned. “If the whole world had spoken ill of him it could not have changed me. I thought I knew him better than anybody, and this is the end of it all, this is the end.”

And so she moaned on for some fifteen minutes, whilst John stood leaning against a tree.

In truth he did not know what to say. His heart was full of compassion for her, but he could not think of a word of comfort good to speak. She had done so evil a thing for herself that he did not see how any one could make a better of it, and so, whilst she, seated amongst the long rank grass, made her bitter lamentations, sobbed her tears, and bewailed her lot, John Riley did, perhaps, the kindest and wisest thing possible under the circumstances, he held his peace, he let her alone.

CHAPTER XI.
NETTIE AT BAY.

At last General Riley appeared.

“It is all right, I am thankful to say,” he announced to his son, in a low tone. “He will marry her.”

“But I will not marry him!” exclaimed the person most interested in the matter. “I would rather work, beg, starve, die, than be thrust in this way on any man.”

“You ought to have thought of all this before you went away with him,” said the General bluntly. “We have made the best of a very bad business for you, and I must beg of you not to undo our work by any temper, or airs, or romantic nonsense. There is nothing left for you but to marry him, and a good thing it is that he is willing to take you for his wife.”

Swiftly Nettie rose from the ground and stood slight and erect before him. With one hand she swept back her hair, with the other she wiped the tears from her cheeks. Pretty she did not look, with her swollen eyelids and her face disfigured by grief and weeping; but there was something in the helplessness of her defiance, in the hopelessness of her struggle,

in the prospective misery of her fate, in the utter ruin she had wrought for herself, so young, that made both men feel heart-sick at thought of their own inability to put this terrible wrong right.

“Are you going to turn against me?” she said, speaking to John. “Are you going to say there is nothing left for me to do but marry a man who does not want me, whose wife I thought I was, or you would never have seen me back here? Will you not help me, John? will you not take me away?”

“God knows, Nettie, I would help you if I only knew how. I would take you away if I knew where to take you, if I thought it would not make a worse scandal than there has been, and put everything more wrong than it is already.”

“I would go anywhere you told me,” she went on pitifully. “I would go where nobody knew me, and I would be a good girl and work hard.”

“You could not go anywhere that people would not know all about it after a little time,” answered her cousin. “There is only one thing for a girl who has made a mistake like yours, dear, to do, and that is, marry. What my father says is very true, you may be glad enough that Mr. Brady is willing to marry you.”

“Willing to marry me?” Nettie repeated drearily. “_Willing_ to marry _me_? There go, both of you,” she added, turning upon them in a very access of passion. “I never want to see you again. I never wish to hear the voice of one belonging to me. If you had been in trouble, such trouble, I would have helped you; but there is nobody who cares for my trouble, nobody, no, not one.”

“Crying again, Annette,” exclaimed Mr. Brady, who, having only waited behind General Riley in order to refresh himself with a glass of whisky after their stormy interview, at this point joined the trio. “What is the matter now?” and he put his hand on her shoulder and would have drawn her towards him, but she shrank away, and looking at him through her tears, with hot angry eyes, began,—

“They say _you_ are willing to marry _me_, and expect me to be thankful. They never asked me if _I_ was willing to marry _you_.”

“There is no compulsion,” said Mr. Brady coolly; “you need not if you do not like.”

“Like? and you say that to me who have given up everything for you?”

“I am ready to marry you within the hour,” said Mr. Brady, with a shrug. “Can I say fairer than that, gentlemen? If Miss Annette like teaching better than marrying, far be it from me to balk her taste; if she like me better than teaching, I am ready to stand to what I have said, and make her Mrs. Brady.”

“And you do not care,” said Nettie, speaking with dry, parched lips and cheeks fever-flushed, “you do not care, and you call yourselves men?”

“We do care, Nettie,” answered John Riley, “and it is because we are men that we have tried to do all that lay in our power for you. It seems hard to you, and it is hard. You are angry with Mr. Brady and with us, but by-and-by you will thank us for advising you to marry him.”

“I never was an advocate for coaxing dogs to eat mutton,” remarked Mr. Brady, with a sneer. “I have offered to marry this independent young lady, and as she does not like to have me, why she had better leave me, that is if she has a clear idea as to where she means to go afterwards.”

“I will go to Bayview, to Grace Moffat.”

“I would, and let us know how Mr. Moffat receives you,” he laughed.

“My aunt, my poor old aunt that I deceived, she would not turn me from her door,” sobbed Nettie.

“Perhaps not, you might see.”

“Then, if all else fail,” she flashed out, “I will trust to Mrs. Hartley’s charity. I will ask her to take me in and find me work. I am neither kith nor kin to her, and she would think it no disgrace to shelter a girl who had been deceived like me. She would get me a situation in some place, and I will put the sea between myself and all of you, and none of you will ever hear of me again.”

Mr. Brady looked at the General and his son. He beheld consternation written on their faces.

At last Nettie was mistress of the position. She had mentioned the name of the only friend she knew who would be willing and able to save her, and the idea of the scandal which might ensue if she carried out her threat of appealing to Mrs. Hartley was as little agreeable to her relations as to the man who had flung a shadow over her life.

The girl was desperate, her pride had been humbled, her vanity hurt, her temper aroused, her love wounded, slighted. She meant to leave him, she did _not_ want to be forced on any man. Mr. Brady suddenly awoke to a consciousness of both facts, and to a knowledge, also, that it would not suit him to lose her.

Never again would he, could he, hold such another card in his hands as Nettie O’Hara. If he played so as to let her and her wrongs slip away from his control, if once he permitted her to make a party against him, and backed by Mrs. Hartley he knew she could, he vaguely comprehended he would have raised a devil whom he might find it difficult to lay.

Besides, he was not yet tired of Nettie; her thoughts had not been his thoughts, her sole companionship had proved slightly monotonous; she had put, unwitting, a sort of restraint upon him; but still, if Daniel Brady had ever an affection for a woman into which a higher kind of love entered, he felt it for Nettie O’Hara.

Had Nettie only been possessed of the world’s wisdom in those days when surreptitiously she met him on the sea-shore, amongst the ruins of Ballyknock Abbey, and in the glens where, in her lonely childhood, she gathered wild strawberries, and made for herself swords and parasols and butterfly cages of rushes; had she, I say, then understood the ways of the world and the minds of men, she would never have gone off with Daniel Brady, trusting to his love to keep her safe, trusting to his gratitude to repay her for her faith.

After all, affairs of the heart are best to be put on a “commercial basis.”

When one man is, to use a vulgar expression, “chiselled” by another, the first dose of comfort administered by his friends is, “But why had you no agreement?”

If the unhappy wretch suggests that he thought he had to do with a man of honour, or an honest man, or a sincere Christian, he is at once informed, “It is well in money-matters to treat every man as if he were

a rogue."

And in love? you ask. Well, in love it may be as well to advise young persons about to form engagements for life to look upon all charming suitors as possible villains. It is not an amiable trait in the character of man or woman that which leads him (or her) to make himself (or herself) beyond all things safe, but it is necessary, nevertheless.

Suppose a man loses his money, or a woman her character, who shall recoup him, or her?

The colonies or the workhouse for the one; the streets or that exhilarating place of abode, a Refuge, for the other.

And yet, perhaps, neither might be a greater fool nor a greater sinner than Amos Scott on the one hand, or Annette, commonly called Nettie O'Hara, on the other.

Each had trusted to a promise. It is a foolish way some people have, as though there were something in the nature of a promise that made it as secure as a deed. Each found reason to repent that trust. Nettie's repentance had begun already. Dimly she understood there had been a time when her terms would have ruled the day, when her beauty and her birth might have asked what they liked from this far-seeing lover, and received a charmed yea for answer.

But that time was gone and past. She could never dictate (legitimately) terms to any man again. She had lost caste, friends, and what was, perhaps, worse than either, her "future." For even if she appealed to Mrs. Hartley and tried by that lady's help to begin her life over again, she never could wipe out the blot on her former life; not all the waters of Lethe could wash out from her past that morning's work, when, trusting to one untrustworthy, she went off to seek her ruin.

All this the girl dimly comprehended, grasped in a feeble passionate despair. No longer meek and demure, no longer smiling and self-contained, she stood there at bay, and for the moment, as has been said, she was mistress of the position.

True she could help herself little, but she could injure Mr. Brady much, and inflict, besides, considerable annoyance on her relatives. The bright hair might remain bright as ever, the blue eyes might look soft and sweet as before, but something had been aroused in Nettie O'Hara that might never slumber again.

"I want to leave Kingslough," she went on, pursuing her advantage, "and I will leave it. I wish never to see one of you more, and I never will if I can help it."

"But, Nettie, dear, only consider," began her cousin, while the General muttered, "Never heard such nonsense in all my life," but Mr. Brady, cutting across both their sentences, said,—

"Will you kindly walk to the other end of the garden? I should like to say a word or two to Mrs. Brady alone."

She looked up at him quickly, and answered, as they complied, "I am not Mrs. Brady, and never will be."

"You are," he persisted, "and you can't help yourself. You are my wife if I choose to claim you, and I do. You are mine, and I mean to keep you. Little as you may think it, I am too fond of you to let you go."

“Fond!” she repeated contemptuously.

“Yes,” he said, “fond. If I hadn’t been, do you think I would have made the fool of myself I have? What did I want with a wife? Why should I have burdened myself with you if it was not for fondness’ sake? If you had not listened, you would have known nothing of this. Listeners, you know, never hear any good of themselves. You are married to me safe enough, but I wanted to bring down the confounded pride of your people a peg or two, and I wanted, also, to get some money out of them for you and myself if I could manage it. That is the whole truth of the business, so you need not fret any more.”

“I do not believe a word of it,” was Nettie’s candid reply, “but I do not intend to fret, and I will go to Mrs. Hartley, and neither you nor all the Rileys in creation shall hinder me.”

“I thought you loved me,” he said, with an impatience he tried to control, but could not.

“Thought I loved you?” she echoed, “thought! I never loved anything before except a kitten, and I never mean to love anything again.”

“And yet you want to go and make a talk and a scandal over the place, and curse my life and your own.”

“Make a talk and a scandal? No. I only want to leave a man who could treat a girl as you have treated me. Did not I ask you if we were safely and truly married? and did you not swear to me on the Bible that not all the bishops in England could make us more man and wife than we were?”

“Nor could they,” commented Mr. Brady.

“And,” went on Nettie, “when I asked you to give me some writing that I could show to Grace and my aunt, and John, if he wanted to see it, you told me you would satisfy them all; that no writing would be of so much use as your simple acknowledgment that I was your wife; and this is how you acknowledge me. Well, I deserved it, I suppose, but I did not deserve it from you.”

She ought not to have “stood upon the order of going,” but have gone, if she meant to leave him. Her words were bitter, and her anger keen, but neither was bitter nor keen enough to win the day when once she began to argue with a man to whom her heart still clung, whom she loved as she had “never loved anything before.”

“You did not deserve it,” he answered, more quietly, for he saw she was wavering in her determination, and knew that now compliance was a mere question of time, “and I am sorry that for the sake of gratifying myself and annoying your upstart relations I placed you even for a moment in a false position. A man cannot say more than that he is sorry, can he? Give me your hand, and say you forgive and forget.”

But she twitched her fingers out of his, and sobbed, “It was cruel, it was cruel.”

“It was,” he agreed, “but remember, I never intended you to know anything about the matter. You would not have heard had you not listened. Put yourself in my place. Had a couple of women treated you as those two men treated me, should you not have tried to serve them out if you could?”

“And did not I stand up for you?” she exclaimed. “Oh! I would have been faithful to you till death, but you—”

“Annette, as true as death you are my wife. You are so much my wife, that if you went away from me now you could not marry any one else, and neither could I.”

“It does not matter,” she said. “I do not want to marry any one else, I only want to go away.”

“Well, then, go,” he exclaimed. “I will never beg and pray a woman to stay with me against her will. You are married to me safe enough, but I am ready, for all that, to satisfy you and your people by going through the ceremony again if you like. If you do not like, go to your friend Mrs. Hartley, and see what she will do for you. Only remember one thing, if you elect to leave me now, never ask me to take you back again. I would not do it if you came covered with diamonds.”

She was but a young thing, for all her defiance; for all her anger she was but as a reed in his hands, and so, when he gave her free leave to go, bade her spread her wings and return to that waste of waters from which she had flown to him, as to an ark of refuge, Nettie covered her face and wept aloud.

“There is nothing to cry about,” he remarked. “It is a matter for your own choice. Come now, be reasonable. What more could I do than I have done? What more could I offer than I have offered?”

Still no answer.

“Annette, do not keep on fretting,” he entreated; “try to put out of your mind every thing you heard me say to-day. I did not mean a word of it; I did not, upon my honour. I was angry and offended, and spoke without thought, but you should not bear malice. You will forgive and forget, won’t you?”

“I will for—give,” she said, after a pause, with a sob between each word.

“And forget,” he added, but Nettie shook her head doubtfully.

“I am not good at forgetting,” she answered. Poor Mrs. Hartley, could she only have heard that reply, it would have made her hair stand on end!

“I’ll chance that,” said Mr. Brady generously, and he walked off to the spot where the General and his son stood, surveying a wilderness wilder than any their own neglected estate could show.

“We have made up that little difference,” he said, with a smile and an easy familiarity which caused John Riley to wince, “and now I am ready to go through the rest of the business when and where you please. It is quite unnecessary, I may remark. At any rate we had better agree that it is, but that to satisfy your scruples I have agreed to ceremony number two. We may as well be married by the minister here, or at Woodbrook, which you please. It will make less talk than going to church, and you can have as many witnesses as you like. In for a penny in for a pound. Of course Mrs. Brady remains here. If she is to remain in my house I do not intend her to leave it except in my company. Scandal about your relation could not hurt me, but scandal about my wife I won’t have; besides, you have no place to take her to;” and Mr. Daniel Brady laughed triumphantly.

“Come, gentlemen,” he went on, “it is of no use making the worst of a bad business. You have checkmated me, I confess; and yet, still, I bear

no malice. Bad blood is an evil thing, especially amongst relations. Can I offer you any refreshment—no? Then, Mr. Riley, I depend on your seeing the minister and arranging everything to your own satisfaction. You will shake hands with me now, I suppose," and he stretched out his hand; but neither the General nor his son availed himself of the opportunity afforded.

A dark look crossed Mr. Brady's face, as he said, in a tone of defiant mockery,—

"At least, you can never say it was not offered to you twice in one day."

"I believe you to be a consummate blackguard," remarked John Riley bluntly; "but still, for Nettie's sake, I am willing to shake hands and let bygones be bygones."

"And you, General?" asked Mr. Brady. Without a word the General stretched out his hand. "You won't repent it," remarked Mr. Brady consolingly.

"I shall be back as soon as I can bring a minister," said John. Those were the days when marriage in Ireland was almost as easy as in Scotland.

"The sooner the better," observed Mr. Brady; and he stood watching the pair as they trotted slowly down the moss-covered avenue, muttering to himself, "Now they are reckoning me up;" but he was mistaken, for the iron had entered too deeply into their souls to be lightly spoken of.

One thing, however, was significant. A mile from Maryville a stream, bright and sparkling, crossed the road.

"Hold my horse for a minute, John," said the General; and dismounting, he put the hand Daniel Brady had grasped into the rivulet, and let the water flow over it.

"That is a good example, father," he remarked laughing; "and I think I will follow it;" then, as he remounted, he said, in a changed tone, "God help Nettie," to which the General responded, "Amen."

Next day, one of the Woodbrook servants having driven into town to execute various commissions, called on his way back at "The Library," for a book for Miss Lucy, who was the only reading sister of the Riley family.

After replying to such anxious inquiries concerning the health of Mrs. Riley and the General, and the young ladies, and Mr. John, and an antiquated gardener, and still more antiquated nurse, who had lived with the family for a few generations, nominally as servants, but in reality as masters, Patrick, who all the time had been panting to open his budget, began,—

"Ye'll likely have heard the news, ladies?"

"That Miss Nettie, I mean Mrs. Brady, has come home, Patrick. Oh, yes! we knew that long ago," said Miss Healey, with dignity.

"It was not that same I meant, Miss; they have been married again."

"Married again!" exclaimed the two sisters who could hear, in chorus; "bless us, wasn't one marriage enough?"

“The Gineral would have it, miss—ma’am: says he to Brady, says he, ‘I don’t like hole-and-corner weddings,’ says he, ‘and as you are an Irishman and have chosen an Irish wife, why, to make all sure, you had better marry her again, fair and above-board;’ and so he did.”

“When were they married? who married them? who was present?” the sisters were literally breathless with excitement, and shrieked out their questions, unheeding Miss Kate, whose inquiries of “What is he saying?” “What is the matter?” “Who is dead?” “Is it the General? Dear, what can have happened?” formed a running accompaniment to the trio which was being performed by Mrs. Larkins, Miss Healey, and Patrick.

“’Deed an’ they were just married at Maryville, and Mr. McKenna married them; and Mr. John, and me, and Mr. McKenna’s clerk, were the witnesses.”

“And were none of your ladies there?” inquired Mrs. Larkins.

“I do not think—asking your pardon, ma’am, for being so free—that it would be a very seemly thing for any of our ladies to be seen going to Maryville.”

From which remark it will be understood that Nettie’s relations did not intend to visit her, and that popular opinion already applauded their resolution.

And so Nettie’s return and marriage made a nine days’ talk, and caused a nine days’ wonder, at the expiration of which time another event occurred, which made a greater talk still.

END OF VOL. I.

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