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BRITISH AUTHORS
TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

VOL. 521.

CASTLE RICHMOND BY ANTHONY TROLLOPE

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. 2.

LEIPZIG: BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ.

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CASTLE
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A NOVEL.

BY

ANTHONY TROLLOPE,

AUTHOR OF "BARCHESTER TOWERS," "DOCTOR THORNE," "THE WEST
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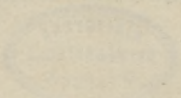
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CASTLE RICHMOND.

VOL. II.

CHAPTER I.

The Telling of the Tale.

THE dinner passed away as the former dinners had done; and as soon as Aunt Letty got up Mr. Prendergast also rose, and touching Herbert on his shoulder, whispered into his ear, "You'll come to me at eight then." Herbert nodded his head; and when he was alone he looked at his watch. These slow dinners were not actually very long, and there still remained to him some three-quarters of an hour for anticipation.

What was to be the nature of this history? That it would affect himself personally in the closest manner he could not but know. There seemed to be no doubt on the minds of any of them that the affair was one of money, and his father's money questions were his money questions. Mr. Prendergast would not have been sent for with reference to any trifle; nor would any pecuniary difficulty that was not very serious have thrown his father into such a state of misery. Could it be that the fair inheritance was absolutely in danger?

Herbert Fitzgerald was by no means a selfish man. As regarded himself, he could have met ruin in the face with more equanimity than most young men so circumstanced. The guilt of the world had not eaten into his soul; his heart was not as yet wedded to the splendour of pinchbeck. This is saying much for him; for how seldom is it that the hearts and souls of the young are able to withstand pinchbeck and gilding? He was free from this pusillanimity; free as yet as regarded himself; but he was hardly free as regarded his betrothed. He had promised her, not in spoken words but in his thoughts, rank, wealth, and all the luxuries of his promised high position; and now on her behalf, it nearly broke his heart to think that they might be endangered.

Of his mother's history, he can hardly be said to have known anything. That there had been something tragic in her early life; that something had occurred before his father's marriage; and that his mother had been married twice, he had learned, — he hardly knew when or from whom. But on such matters there had never been conversation between him and any of his own family; and it never occurred to him that all this sorrow arose in any way from this subject. That his father had taken some fatal step with regard to the property — had done some foolish thing for which he could not forgive himself, that was the idea with which his mind was filled.

He waited, with his watch in his hand, till the dial showed him that it was exactly eight; and then, with a sinking heart, he walked slowly out of the dining-room along the passage, and into his father's study. For an instant he stood with the handle in his hand.

He had been terribly anxious for the arrival of this moment, but now that it had come, he would almost fain have had it again postponed. His heart sank very low as he turned the lock, and entering, found himself in the presence of Mr. Prendergast.

Mr. Prendergast was standing with his back to the fire. For him, too, the last hour had been full of bitterness; his heart also had sunk low within him; his blood had run cold within his veins: he too, had it been possible, would have put off this wretched hour.

Mr. Prendergast, it may be, was not much given to poetry; but the feeling, if not the words, were there within him. The work which a friend has to perform for a friend is so much heavier than that which comes in the way of any profession!

When Herbert entered the room, Mr. Prendergast came forward from where he was standing, and took him by the hand. "This is a very sad affair," he said; "very sad."

"At present I know nothing about it," said Herbert. "As I see people about me so unhappy, I suppose it is sad. If there be anything that I hate, it is a mystery."

"Sit down, Mr. Fitzgerald," said the other; "sit down." And Mr. Prendergast himself sat down in the chair that was ordinarily occupied by Sir Thomas. Although he had been thinking about it all the day, he had not even yet made up his mind how he was to begin his story. Even now he could not help thinking whether it might be possible for him to leave it untold. But it was not possible.

"Mr. Fitzgerald," said he, "you must prepare your-

self for tidings which are very grievous indeed — very grievous.”

“Whatever it is I must bear it,” said he.

“I hope you have that moral strength which enables a man to bear misfortune. I have not known you in happy days, and therefore perhaps can hardly judge; but it seems to me that you do possess such courage. Did I not think so, I could hardly go through the task that is before me.”

Here he paused as though he expected some reply, some assurance that his young friend did possess this strength of which he spoke; but Herbert said nothing — nothing out loud. “If it were only for myself! if it were only for myself!” It was thus that he spoke to his own heart.

“Mr. Fitzgerald,” continued the lawyer, “I do not know how far you may be acquainted with the history of your mother’s first marriage.”

Herbert said that he was hardly acquainted with it in any degree; and explained that he merely knew the fact that his mother had been married before she met Sir Thomas.

“I do not know that I need recount all the circumstances to you now, though doubtless you will learn them. Your mother’s conduct throughout was, I believe, admirable.”

“I am quite sure of that. No amount of evidence could make me believe the contrary.”

“And there is no tittle of evidence to make any one think so. But in her early youth, when she was quite a child, she was given in marriage to a man — to a man of whom it is impossible to speak in terms too black, or in language too strong. And now, this day —”

But here he paused. It had been his intention to say that that very man, the first husband of this loved mother now looked upon as dead for so many years, this miscreant of whom he had spoken — that this man had been in that room that very day. But he hardly knew how to frame the words.

“Well,” said Herbert, “well;” and he spoke in a hoarse voice that was scarcely audible.

Mr. Prendergast was afraid to bring out the very pith of his story in so abrupt a manner. He wished to have the work over, to feel, that as regarded Herbert it was done, — but his heart failed him when he came to it.

“Yes,” he said, going back as it were to his former thoughts. “A heartless, cruel, debauched, unscrupulous man; one in whose bosom no good thing seemed to have been implanted. Your father, when he first knew your mother, had every reason to believe that this man was dead.”

“And he was not dead?” Mr. Prendergast could see that the young man’s face became perfectly pale as he uttered these words. He became pale, and clutched hold of the table with his hand, and there sat with mouth open and staring eyes.

“I am afraid not,” said Mr. Prendergast; “I am afraid not.”

“And —”

“I must go further than that, and tell you that he is still living.”

“Mr. Prendergast, Mr. Prendergast!” exclaimed the poor fellow, rising up from his chair and shouting out as though for mercy. Mr. Prendergast also rose from his seat, and coming up to him took him by the arm.

"My dear boy, my dear boy, I am obliged to tell you. It is necessary that you should know it. The fact is as I say, and it is now for you to show that you are a man."

Who was ever called upon for a stronger proof of manhood than this? In nine cases out of ten it is not for oneself that one has to be brave. A man, we may almost say, is no man, whose own individual sufferings call for the exercise of much courage. But we are all so mixed up and conjoined with others — with others who are weaker and dearer than ourselves, that great sorrows do require great powers of endurance.

By degrees, as he stood there in silence, the whole truth made its way into his mind, — as he stood there with his arm still tenderly pressed by that old man. No one now would have called the lawyer stern in looking at him, for the tears were coursing down his cheeks. But no tears came to the relief of young Fitzgerald as the truth slowly came upon him, fold by fold, black cloud upon cloud, till the whole horizon of his life's prospect was dark as death. He stood there silent for some few minutes hardly conscious that he was not alone, as he saw all his joys disappearing from before his mind's eye, one by one; his family pride, the pleasant high-toned duties of his station, his promised seat in Parliament and prosperous ambition, the full respect of all the world around him, his wealth and pride of place — for let no man be credited who boasts that he can part with these without regret. All these were gone. But there were losses more bitter than these. How could he think of his affianced bride? and how could he think of his mother?

No tears came to his relief while the truth, with

all its bearings, burnt itself into his very soul, but his face expressed such agony that it was terrible to be seen. Mr. Prendergast could stand that silence no longer, so at last he spoke. He spoke, — for the sake of words; for all his tale had been told.

“You saw the man that was here yesterday? That was he, who then called himself Talbot.”

“What! the man that went away in the car? Mollett?”

“Yes; that was the man.”

Herbert had said that no evidence could be sufficient to make him believe that his mother had been in any way culpable: and such probably was the case. He had that reliance on his mother — that assurance in his mind that everything coming from her must be good — that he could not believe her capable of ill. But, nevertheless, he could not prevent himself from asking within his own breast, how it had been possible that his mother should ever have been concerned with such a wretch as that. It was a question which could not fail to make itself audible. What being on earth was sweeter than this mother, more excellent, more noble, more fitted for the world's high places, more absolutely entitled to that universal respect which seemed to be given to her as her own by right? And what being could be more loathsome, more contemptible than he, who was, as he was now told, his mother's husband? There was in it a want of verisimilitude which almost gave him comfort, — which almost taught him to think that he might disbelieve the story that was told to him. Poor fellow! he had yet to learn the difference that years may make in men and women — for better as well as for worse. Circumstances had

given to the poor half-educated village girl the simple dignity of high station; as circumstances had also brought to the lowest dregs of human existence the man, whose personal bearing, and apparent worldly standing had been held sufficient to give warrant that he was of gentle breeding and of honest standing; nay, her good fortune in such a marriage had once been almost begrudged her by all her maiden neighbours.

But Herbert, as he thought of this, was almost encouraged to disbelieve the story. To him, with his knowledge of what his mother was, and such knowledge as he also had of that man, it did not seem possible. "But how is all this known?" he muttered forth at last.

"I fear there is no doubt of its truth," said Mr. Prendergast. "Your father has no doubt whatever; has had none — I must tell you this plainly — for some months."

"For some months! And why have I not been told?"

"Do not be hard upon your father."

"Hard! no; of course I would not be hard upon him."

"The burden he has had to bear has been very terrible. He has thought that by payments of money to this man the whole thing might be concealed. As is always the case when such payments are made, the insatiable love of money grew by what it fed on. He would have poured out every shilling into that man's hands, and would have died, himself a beggar — have died speedily too under such torments — and yet no good would have been done. The harpy would have come upon you; and you — after you had innocently

assumed a title that was not your own and taken a property to which you have no right, you then would have had to own — that which your father must own now."

"If it be so," said Herbert, slowly, "it must be acknowledged."

"Just so, Mr. Fitzgerald; just so. I know you will feel that — in such matters we can only sail safely by the truth. There is no other compass worth a man's while to look at."

"Of course not;" said Herbert, with hoarse voice. "One does not wish to be a robber and a thief. My cousin shall have what is his own." And then he involuntarily thought of the interview they had had on that very day. "But why did he not tell me when I spoke to him of her?" he said, with something approaching to bitterness in his voice and a slight struggle in his throat that was almost premonitory of a sob.

"Ah! it is there that I fear for you. I know what your feelings are; but think of his sorrows, and do not be hard on him."

"Ah me, ah me!" exclaimed Herbert.

"I fear that he will not be with you long. He has already endured till he is now almost past the power of suffering more. And yet there is so much more that he must suffer!"

"My poor father!"

"Think what such as he must have gone through in bringing himself into contact with that man; and all this has been done that he might spare you and your mother. Think of the wound to his conscience before he would have lowered himself to an unworthy bargain

with a swindler. But this has been done that you might have that which you have been taught to look on as your own. He has been wrong. No other verdict can be given. But you, at any rate, can be tender to such a fault; you and your mother."

"I will — I will," said Herbert. "But if it had happened a month since I could have borne it." And then he thought of his mother, and hated himself for what he had said. How could he have borne that with patience? "And there is no doubt, you say?"

"I think none. The man carries his proofs with him. An old servant here in the house, too, knows him."

"What, Mrs. Jones?"

"Yes; Mrs. Jones. And the burden of further proof must now, of course, be thrown on us, — not on him. Directly that we believe the statement, it is for us to ascertain its truth. You and your father must not be seen to hold a false position before the world."

"And what are we to do now?"

"I fear that your mother must be told, and Mr. Owen Fitzgerald; and then we must together openly prove the facts, either in one way or in the other. It will be better that we should do this together; — that is you and your cousin Owen conjointly. Do it openly, before the world, — so that the world may know that each of you desires only what is honestly his own. For myself I tell you fairly that I have no doubt of the truth of what I have told you; but further proof is certainly needed. Had I any doubt I would not propose to tell your mother. As it is I think it will be wrong to keep her longer in the dark."

"Does she suspect nothing?"

"I do not know. She has more power of self-control than your father. She has not spoken to me ten words since I have been in the house, and in not doing so I have thought that she was right."

"My own mother; my dear mother!"

"If you ask me my opinion, I think that she does suspect the truth, — very vaguely, with an indefinite feeling that the calamity which weighs so heavily on your father, has come from this source. She, dear lady, is greatly to be pitied. But God has made her of firmer material than your father, and I think that she will bear her sorrow with a higher courage."

"And she is to be told also?"

"Yes, I think so. I do not see how we can avoid it. If we do not tell her we must attempt to conceal it, and that attempt must needs be futile when we are engaged in making open inquiry on the subject. Your cousin, when he hears of this, will of course be anxious to know what his real prospects are."

"Yes, yes. He will be anxious, and determined too."

"And then, when all the world will know it, how is your mother to be kept in the dark? And that which she fears and anticipates is as bad, probably, as the actual truth. If my advice be followed nothing will be kept from her."

"We are in your hands, I suppose, Mr. Prendergast?"

"I can only act as my judgment directs me."

"And who is to tell her?" This he asked with a shudder, and almost in a whisper. The very idea of undertaking such a duty seemed almost too much for him. And yet he must undertake a duty almost as

terrible; he himself — no one but him — must endure the anguish of repeating this story to Clara Desmond and to the countess. But now the question had reference to his own mother. “And who is to tell her?” he asked.

For a moment or two Mr. Prendergast stood silent. He had not hitherto, in so many words, undertaken this task — this that would be the most dreadful of all. But if he did not undertake it, who would? “I suppose that I must do it,” at last he said, very gently.

“And when?”

“As soon as I have told your cousin. I will go down to him to-morrow after breakfast. Is it probable that I shall find him at home?”

“Yes, if you are there before ten. The hounds meet to-morrow at Cecilstown, within three miles of him, and he will not leave home till near eleven. But it is possible that he may have a house full of men with him.”

“At any rate I will try. On such an occasion as this he may surely let his friends go to the hunt without him.”

And then between nine and ten this interview came to an end. “Mr. Fitzgerald,” said Mr. Prendergast, as he pressed Herbert’s hand, “you have borne all this as a man should do. No loss of fortune can ruin one who is so well able to endure misfortune.” But in this Mr. Prendergast was perhaps mistaken. His knowledge of human nature had not carried him sufficiently far. A man’s courage under calamity is only tested when he is left in solitude. The meanest among us can bear

up while strange eyes are looking at us. And then Mr. Prendergast went away, and he was alone.

It had been his habit during the whole of this period of his father's illness to go to Sir Thomas at or before bedtime. These visits had usually been made to the study, the room in which he was now standing; but when his father had gone to his bedroom at an earlier hour, Herbert had always seen him there. Was he to go to him now — now that he had heard all this? And if so, how was he to bear himself there, in his father's presence? He stood still, thinking of this, till the hand of the clock showed him that it was past ten, and then it struck him that his father might be waiting for him. It would not do for him now, at such a moment, to appear wanting in that attention which he had always shown. He was still his father's son, though he had lost the right to bear his father's name. He was nameless now, a man utterly without respect or standing-place in the world, a being whom the law ignored except as the possessor of a mere life; such was he now, instead of one whose rights and privileges, whose property, and rank all the statutes of the realm and customs of his country delighted to honour and protect. This he repeated to himself over and over again. It was to such a pass as this, to this bitter disappointment that his father had brought him. But yet it should not be said of him that he had begun to neglect his father as soon as he had heard the story.

So with a weary step he walked up stairs, and found Sir Thomas in bed, with his mother sitting by the bedside. His mother held out her hand to him, and he took it, leaning against the bedside. "Has Mr. Prendergast left you?" she asked.

He told her that Mr. Prendergast had left him, and gone to his own room for the night. "And have you been with him all the evening?" she asked. She had no special motive in so asking, but both the father and the son shuddered at the question. "Yes," said Herbert; "I have been with him, and now I have come to wish my father good night; and you too, mother, if you intend to remain here." But Lady Fitzgerald got up, telling Herbert that she would leave him with Sir Thomas; and before either of them could hinder her from departing, the father and the son were alone together.

Sir Thomas, when the door closed, looked furtively up into his son's face. Might it be that he could read there how much had been already told, or how much still remained to be disclosed? That Herbert was to learn it all that evening, he knew; but it might be that Mr. Prendergast had failed to perform his task. Sir Thomas in his heart trusted that he had failed. He looked up furtively into Herbert's face, but at the moment there was nothing there that he could read. There was nothing there but black misery; and every face round him for many days past had worn that aspect.

For a minute or two Herbert said nothing, for he had not made up his mind whether or no he would that night disturb his father's rest. But he could not speak in his ordinary voice, or bid his father good-night as though nothing special to him had happened. "Father," said he, after a short pause, "father, I know it all now."

"My boy, my poor boy, my unfortunate boy!"

"Father," said Herbert, "do not be unhappy about

me, I can bear it." And then he thought again of his bride — his bride as she was to have been; but nevertheless he repeated his last words, "I can bear it, father!"

"I have meant it for the best, Herbert," said the poor man, pleading to his child.

"I know that; all of us well know that. But what Mr. Prendergast says is true; it is better that it should be known. That man would have killed you had you kept it longer to yourself."

Sir Thomas hid his face upon the pillow as the remembrance of what he had endured in those meetings came upon him. The blow that had told heaviest was that visit from the son, and the threats which the man had made still rung in his ears — "When that youngster was born Lady F. was Mrs. M., wasn't she? My governor could take her away to-morrow, according to the law of the land, couldn't he now?" These words, and more such as these, had nearly killed him at the time, and now, as they recurred to him, he burst out into childish tears. Poor man! the days of his manhood had gone, and nothing but the tears of a second bitter childhood remained to him. The hot iron had entered into his soul, and shrivelled up the very muscles of his mind's strength.

Herbert, without much thought of what he was doing, knelt down by the bedside and put his hand upon that of his father which lay out upon the sheet. There he knelt for one or two minutes, watching and listening to his father's sobs. "You will be better now, father," he said, "for the great weight of this terrible secret will be off your mind." But Sir Thomas did not answer him. With him there could never be any

better. All things belonging to him had gone to ruin. All those around him whom he had loved — and he had loved those around him very dearly — were brought to poverty, and sorrow, and disgrace. The power of feeling this was left to him, but the power of enduring this with manhood was gone. The blow had come upon him too late in life.

And Herbert himself, as he knelt there, could hardly forbear from tears. Now, at such a moment as this, he could think of no one but his father, the author of his being, who lay there so grievously afflicted by sorrows which were in nowise selfish. "Father," he said at last, "will you pray with me?" And then when the poor sufferer had turned his face towards him, he poured forth his prayer to his Saviour that they all in that family might be enabled to bear the heavy sorrows which God in his mercy and wisdom had now thought fit to lay upon them. I will not make his words profane by repeating them here, but one may say confidently that they were not uttered in vain.

"And now, dearest father, good night," he said as he rose from his knees; and stretching over the bed, he kissed his father's forehead.

CHAPTER II.

Before Breakfast at Hap House.

It may be imagined that Mr. Mollett's drive back to Cork after his last visit to Castle Richmond had not been very pleasant; and indeed it may be said that his present circumstances altogether were as unpleasant as his worst enemies could desire. I have endeavoured to

excite the sympathy of those who are going with me through this story for the sufferings of that family of the Fitzgeralds; but how shall I succeed in exciting their sympathy for this other family of the Molletts? And yet why not? If we are to sympathise only with the good, or worse still, only with the graceful, how little will there be in our character that is better than terrestrial? Those Molletts also were human, and had strings to their hearts, at which the world would now probably pull with sufficient vigour. For myself I can truly say that my strongest feeling is for their wretchedness.

The father and son had more than once boasted among themselves that the game they were now playing was a high one; that they were, in fact, gambling for mighty stakes. And in truth, as long as the money came in to them — flowing in as the result of their own craft in this game — the excitement had about it something that was very pleasurable. There was danger, which makes all games pleasant; there was money in hand for daily expenses — those daily wants of the appetite, which are to such men more important by far than the distant necessities of life; there was a possibility of future grandeur, an opening out of magnificent ideas of fortune, which charmed them greatly as they thought about it. What might they not do with forty thousand pounds divided between them, or even with a thousand a year each, settled on them for life? and surely their secret was worth that money! Nay, was it not palpable to the meanest calculation that it was worth much more? Had they not the selling of twelve thousand a year for ever and ever to this family of Fitzgerald?



But for the last fortnight things had begun to go astray with them. Money easily come by goes easily, and money badly come by goes badly. Theirs had come easily and badly, and had so gone. What necessity could there be for economy with such a milch-cow as that close to their elbows? So both of them had thought, if not argued; and there had been no economy — no economy in the use of that very costly amusement, the dice-box; and now, at the present moment, ready money having failed to be the result of either of the two last visits to Castle Richmond, the family funds were running low.

It may be said that ready money for the moment was the one desire nearest to the heart of Mollett père, when he took that last journey over the Boggeragh mountains — ready money wherewith to satisfy the pressing claims of Miss O'Dwyer, and bring back civility, or rather servility, to the face and manner of Tom the waiter at the Kanturk Hotel. Very little of that servility can be enjoyed by persons of the Mollett class when money ceases to be ready in their hands and pockets, and there is, perhaps, nothing that they enjoy so keenly as servility. Mollett père had gone down determined that that comfort should at any rate be forthcoming to him, whatever answer might be given to those other grander demands, and we know what success had attended his mission. He had looked to find his tame milch-cow trembling in her accustomed stall, and he had found a resolute bull there in her place — a bull whom he could by no means take by the horns. He had got no money, and before he had reached Cork he had begun to comprehend that it was not probable that he should get more from that source.

During a part of the interview between him and Mr. Prendergast, some spark of mercy towards his victims had glimmered into his heart. When it was explained to him that the game was to be given up, that the family at Castle Richmond was prepared to acknowledge the truth, and that the effort made was with the view of proving that the poor lady up stairs was not entitled to the name she bore rather than that she was so entitled, then some slight promptings of a better spirit did for a while tempt him to be merciful. "Oh, what are you about to do?" he would have said had Mr. Prendergast admitted of speech from him. "Why make this terrible sacrifice? Matters have not come to that. There is no need for you to drag to the light this terrible fact. I will not divulge it — no not, although you are hard upon me in regard to these terms of mine. I will still keep it to myself, and trust to you, — to you who are all so rich and able to pay, for what consideration you may please to give me." This was the state of his mind when Mrs. Jones's evidence was being slowly evoked from her; but it had undergone a considerable change before he reached Cork. By that time he had taught himself to understand that there was no longer a chance to him of any consideration whatever. Slowly he had brought it home to himself that these people had resolutely determined to blow up the ground on which they themselves stood. This he perceived was their honesty. He did not understand the nature of a feeling which could induce so fatal a suicide, but he did understand that the feeling was there, and that the suicide would be completed.

And now what was he to do next in the way of earn-

ing his bread? Various thoughts ran through his brain, and different resolves — half-formed but still, perhaps, capable of shape — presented themselves to him for the future. It was still on the cards — on the cards, but barely so — that he might make money out of these people; but he must wait perhaps for weeks before he again commenced such an attempt. He might perhaps make money out of them, and be merciful to them at the same time; not money by thousands and tens of thousands; that golden dream was gone for ever; but still money that might be comfortably luxurious as long as it could be made to last. But then on one special point he made a firm and final resolution, — whatever new scheme he might hatch he alone would manage. Never again would he call into his councils that son of his loins whose rapacious greed had, as he felt sure, brought upon him all this ruin. Had Aby not gone to Castle Richmond, with his cruelty and his greed, frightening to the very death the soul of that poor baronet by the enormity of his demands, Mr. Prendergast would not have been there. Of what further chance of Castle Richmond pickings there might be Aby should know nothing. He and his son would no longer hunt in couples. He would shake him off in that escape which they must both now make from Cork, and he would not care how long it might be before he again saw his countenance.

But then that question of ready money; and that other question, perhaps as interesting, touching a criminal prosecution! How was he to escape if he could not raise the wind? And how could he raise the wind now that his milch-cow had run so dry? He had promised the O'Dwyers money that evening, and had

struggled hard to make that promise with an easy face. He now had none to give them. His orders at the inn were treated almost with contempt. For the last three days they had given him what he wanted to eat and drink, but would hardly give him all that he wanted. When he called for brandy they brought him whisky, and it had only been by hard begging, and by oaths as to the promised money, that he had induced them to supply him with the car which had taken him on his fruitless journey to Castle Richmond. As he was driven up to the door in South Main Street, his heart was very sad on all these subjects.

Aby was again sitting within the bar, but was no longer basking in the sunshine of Fanny's smiles. He was sitting there because Fanny had not yet mustered courage to turn him out. He was half-drunk, for it had been found impossible to keep spirits from him. And there had been hot words between him and Fanny, in which she had twitted him with his unpaid bill, and he had twitted her with her former love. And things had gone from bad to worse, and she had all but called in Tom for aid in getting quit of him; she had, however, refrained, thinking of the money that might be coming, and waiting also till her father should arrive. Fanny's love for Mr. Abraham Mollett had not been long lived.

I will not describe another scene such as those which had of late been frequent in the Kanturk Hotel. The father and the son soon found themselves together in the small room in which they now both slept, at the top of the house; and Aby, tipsy as he was, understood the whole of what had happened at Castle Richmond. When he heard that Mr. Prendergast was seen in that room in lieu of Sir Thomas, he knew at once that the

game had been abandoned. "But something may yet be done at 'Appy 'ouse," Aby said to himself, "only one must be deuced quick."

The father and the son of course quarrelled frightfully, like dogs over the memory of a bone which had been arrested from the jaws of both of them. Aby said that his father had lost everything by his pusillanimity, and old Mollett declared that his son had destroyed all by his rashness. But we need not repeat their quarrels, nor repeat all that passed between them and Tom before food was forthcoming to satisfy the old man's wants. As he ate he calculated how much he might probably raise upon his watch towards taking him to London, and how best he might get off from Cork without leaving any scent in the nostrils of his son. His clothes he must leave behind him at the inn, at least all that he could not pack upon his person. Lately he had made himself comfortable in this respect, and he sorrowed over the fine linen which he had worn but once or twice since it had been bought with the last instalment from Sir Thomas. Nevertheless in this way he did make up his mind for the morrow's campaign.

And Aby also made up his mind. Something at any rate he had learned from Fanny O'Dwyer in return for his honeyed words. When Herbert Fitzgerald should cease to be the heir to Castle Richmond, Owen Fitzgerald of Hap House would be the happy man. That knowledge was his own in absolute independence of his father, and there might still be time for him to use it. He knew well the locality of Hap House, and he would be there early on the following morning. These tidings had probably not as yet reached the

owner of that blessed abode, and if he could be the first to tell him —! The game there too might be pretty enough, if it were played well, by such a master-hand as his own. Yes; he would be at Hap House early in the morning; — but then, how to get there?

He left his father preparing for bed, and going down into the bar found Mr. O'Dwyer and his daughter there in close consultation. They were endeavouring to arrive, by their joint wisdom, at some conclusion as to what they should do with their two guests. Fanny was for turning them out at once. "The first loss is the least," said she. "And they is so disrispectable. I niver know what they're afther, and always is expecting the p'lice will be down on them." But the father shook his head. He had done nothing wrong; the police could not hurt him; and thirty pounds, as he told his daughter, with much emphasis, was "a deuced sight of money." "The first loss is the least," said Fanny, perseveringly; and then Aby entered to them.

"My father has made a mull of this matter again," said he, going at once into the middle of the subject. "'E 'as come back without a shiner."

"I'll be bound he has," said Mr. O'Dwyer, sarcastically.

"And that when e'd only got to go two or three miles further, and hall his troubles would have been over."

"Troubles over, would they?" said Fanny. "I wish he'd have the goodness to get over his little troubles in this house, by paying us our bill. You'll have to walk if it's not done, and that to-morrow, Mr. Mollett; and so I tell you; and take nothing with you, I can tell you. Father 'll have the police to see to that."

"Don't you be so cruel now, Miss Fanny," said Aby, with a leering look. "I tell you what it is, Mr. O'Dwyer, I must go down again to them diggings very early to-morrow, starting, say, at four o'clock."

"You'll not have a foot out of my stables," said Mr. O'Dwyer. "That's all."

"Look here, Mr. O'Dwyer; there's been a sight of money due to us from those Fitzgerald people down there. You know 'em; and whether they're hable to pay or not. I won't deny but what father's 'ad the best of it, — 'ad the best of it, and sent it trolling, bad luck to him. But there's no good looking hafter spilt milk; is there?"

"If so be that Sir Thomas owed the likes of you money, he would have paid it without your tramping down there time after time to look for it. He's not one of that sort."

"No, indeed," said Fanny; "and I don't believe anything about your seeing Sir Thomas."

"Oh, we've seed him hoften enough. There's no mistake about that. But now —" and then, with a mysterious air and low voice, he explained to them, that this considerable balance of money still due to them was to be paid by the cousin, "Mr. Owen of Appy 'ouse." And to substantiate all his story, he exhibited a letter from Mr. Prendergast to his father, which some months since had intimated that a sum of money would be paid on behalf of Sir Thomas Fitzgerald, if Mr. Mollett would call at Mr. Prendergast's office at a certain hour. The ultimate effect of all this was, that the car was granted for the morning,

with certain dire threats as to any further breach of engagement.

Very early on the following morning Aby was astir, hoping that he might manage to complete his not elaborate toilet without disturbing his father's slumbers. For, it must be known, he had been very urgent with the O'Dwyers as to the necessity of keeping this journey of his a secret from his "governor." But the governor was wide awake, looking at him out of the corner of his closed eye whenever his back was turned, and not caring much what he was about to do with himself. Mollett père wished to be left alone for that morning, that he also might play his little game in his own solitary fashion, and was not at all disposed to question the movements of his son.

At about five Aby started for Hap House. His toilet, I have said, was not elaborate; but in this I have perhaps wronged him. Up there in the bedroom he did not waste much time over his soap and water; but he was aware that first impressions are everything, and that one young man should appear smart and clever before another if he wished to carry any effect with him; so he took his brush and comb in his pocket, and a pot of grease with which he was wont to polish his long side-locks, and he hurriedly grasped up his pins, and his rings, and the satin stock which Fanny in her kinder mood had folded for him; and then, during his long journey to Hap House, he did perform a toilet which may, perhaps, be fairly called elaborate.

There was a long, tortuous, narrow avenue, going from the Mallow and Kanturk road down to Hap House,

which impressed Aby with the idea that the man on whom he was now about to call was also a big gentleman, and made him more uneasy than he would have been had he entered a place with less pretence. There is a story current, that in the west of England the grandeur of middle-aged maiden ladies is measured by the length of the tail of their cats; and Aby had a perhaps equally correct idea, that the length of the private drive up to a gentleman's house, was a fair criterion of the splendour of his position. If this man had about him as much grandeur as Sir Thomas himself, would he be so anxious as Aby had hoped to obtain the additional grandeur of Sir Thomas? It was in that direction that his mind was operating when he got down from the car and rang at the door-bell.

Mr. Owen, as everybody called him, was at home, but not down; and so Aby was shown into the dining-room. It was now considerably past nine; and the servant told him that his master must be there soon, as he had to eat his breakfast and be at the hunt by eleven. The servant at Hap House was more unsophisticated than those at Castle Richmond, and Aby's personal adornments had had their effect. He found himself sitting in the room with the cups and saucers, — aye, and with the silver tea-spoons; and began again to trust that his mission might be successful.

And then the door opened, and a man appeared, clad from top to toe in hunting costume. This was not Owen Fitzgerald, but his friend Captain Donnellan. As it had happened, Captain Donnellan was the only guest who had graced the festivities of Hap House on the previous evening; and now he appeared at the breakfast table before his host. Aby got up from his chair

when the gentleman entered, and was proceeding to business; but the Captain gave him to understand that the master of the house was not yet in presence, and so Aby sat down again. What was he to do when the master did arrive? His story was not one which would well bear telling before a third person.

And then, while Captain Donnellan was scanning this visitor to his friend Owen, and bethinking himself whether he might not be a sheriff's officer, and whether if so some notice ought not to be conveyed up stairs to the master of the house, another car was driven up to the front door. In this case the arrival was from Castle Richmond, and the two servants knew each other well. "Thady," said Richard, with much authority in his voice, "this gentl'man is Mr. Prendergast from our place, and he must see the masther before he goes to the hunt." "Faix and the masther 'ill have something to do this blessed morning," said Thady, as he showed Mr. Prendergast also into the dining-room, and went up stairs to inform his master that there was yet another gentleman come upon business. "The Captain has got 'em both to himself," said Thady, as he closed the door.

The name of Mr. "Pendhrergrast," as the Irish servants generally called him, was quite unknown to the owner of Hap House, as was also that of Mr. Mollett, which had been brought up to him the first of the two; but Owen began to think that there must be something very unusual in a day so singularly ushered in to him. Callers at Hap House on business were very few, unless when tradesmen in want of money occasionally dropped in upon him. But now that he was so summoned Owen began to bestir himself with his

boots and breeches. A gentleman's costume for a hunting morning is always a slow one — sometimes so slow and tedious as to make him think of forswearing such articles of dress for all future ages. But now he did bestir himself, — in a moody melancholy sort of manner; for his manner in all things latterly had become moody and melancholy.

In the mean time Captain Donnellan and the two strangers sat almost in silence in the dining-room. The Captain, though he did not perhaps know much of things noticeable in this world, did know something of a gentleman, and was therefore not led away, as poor Thady had been, by Aby's hat and rings. He had stared Aby full in the face when he entered the room, and having explained that he was not the master of the house, had not vouchsafed another word. But then he had also seen that Mr. Prendergast was of a different class, and had said a civil word or two, asking him to come near the fire, and suggesting that Owen would be down in less than five minutes. "But the old cock wouldn't crow," as he afterwards remarked to his friend, and so they all three sat in silence, the Captain being very busy about his knees, as hunting gentlemen sometimes are when they come down to bachelor breakfasts.

And then at last Owen Fitzgerald entered the room. He has been described as a handsome man, but in no dress did he look so well as when equipped for a day's sport. And what dress that Englishmen ever wear is so handsome as this? Or we may perhaps say what other dress does English custom allow them that is in any respect not the reverse of handsome. We have come to be so dingy, — in our taste I was

going to say, but it is rather in our want of taste, — so careless of any of the laws of beauty in the folds and lines and hues of our dress, so opposed to grace in the arrangement of our persons, that it is not permitted to the ordinary English gentleman to be anything else but ugly. Chimney-pot hats, swallow-tailed coats, and pantaloons that fit nothing, came creeping in upon us, one after the other, while the Georges reigned — creeping in upon us with such pictures as we painted under the reign of West, and such houses as we built under the reign of Nash, till the English eye required to rest on that which was constrained, dull, and graceless. For the last two score of years it has come to this, that if a man go in handsome attire he is a popinjay and a vain fool; and as it is better to be ugly than to be accounted vain I would not counsel a young friend to leave the beaten track on the strength of his own judgment. But not the less is the beaten track to be condemned, and abandoned, and abolished, if such be in any way possible. Beauty is good in all things; and I cannot but think that those old Venetian senators, and Florentine men of Council, owed somewhat of their country's pride and power to the manner in which they clipped their beards and wore their flowing garments.

But an Englishman may still make himself brave when he goes forth into the hunting field. Custom there allows him colour, and garments that fit his limbs. Strength is the outward characteristic of manhood, and at the covert-side he may appear strong. Look at men as they walk along Fleet-street, and ask yourself whether any outward sign of manhood or strength can be seen there. And of gentle manhood

outward dignity should be the trade mark. I will not say that such outward dignity is incompatible with a black hat and plaid trousers, for the eye instructed by habit will search out dignity for itself wherever it may truly exist, let it be hidden by what vile covering it may. But any man who can look well at his club, will look better as he clusters round the hounds; while many a one who is comely there, is mean enough as he stands on the hearth-rug before his club fire. In my mind men, like churches and books, and women too, should be brave, not mean, in their outward garniture.

And Owen, as I have said, was brave as he walked into his dining-room. The sorrow which weighed on his heart had not wrinkled his brow, but had given him a set dignity of purpose. His tall figure, which his present dress allowed to be seen, was perfect in its symmetry of strength. His bright chestnut hair clustered round his forehead, and his eye shone like that of a hawk. They must have been wrong who said that he commonly spent his nights over the wine-cup. That pleasure always leaves its disgusting traces round the lips; and Owen Fitzgerald's lips were as full and lusty as Apollo's. Mollett, as he saw him, was stricken with envy. "If I could only get enough money out of this affair to look like that," was his first thought, as his eye fell on the future heir; not understanding, poor wretch that he was, that all the gold of California could not bring him one inch nearer to the goal he aimed at. I think I have said before, that your silk purse will not get itself made out of that coarse material with which there are so many attempts to manufacture that article. And Mr. Prendergast rose from his chair when

he saw him, with a respect that was almost involuntary. He had not heard men speak well of Owen Fitzgerald; — not that ill-natured things had been said by the family at Castle Richmond, but circumstances had prevented the possibility of their praising him. If a relative or friend be spoken of without praise, he is, in fact, censured. From what he had heard he had certainly not expected a man who would look so noble as did the owner of Hap House, who now came forward to ask him his business.

Both Mr. Prendergast and Aby Mollett rose at the same time. Since the arrival of the latter gentleman, Aby had been wondering who he might be, but no idea that he was that lawyer from Castle Richmond had entered his head. That he was a stranger like himself, Aby saw; but he did not connect him with his own business. Indeed he had not yet realized the belief, though his father had done so, that the truth would be revealed by those at Castle Richmond to him at Hap House. His object now was that the old gentleman should say his say and begone, leaving him to dispose of the other young man in the top-boots as best he might. But then, as it happened, that was also Mr. Prendergast's line of action.

"Gentlemen," said Owen, "I beg your pardon for keeping you waiting; but the fact is that I am so seldom honoured in this way in a morning, that I was hardly ready. Donnellan, there's the tea; don't mind waiting. These gentlemen will perhaps join us." And then he looked hard at Aby, as though he trusted in Providence that no such profanation would be done to his tablecloth.

"Thank you, I have breakfasted," said Mr. Prendergast.

"And so 'ave I," said Aby, who had eaten a penny loaf in the car, and would have been delighted to sit down at that rich table. But he was a little beside himself, and not able to pluck up courage for such an effort.

"I don't know whether you two gentlemen have come about the same business," said Owen, looking from one to the other.

"No," said Mr. Prendergast, very confidently, but not very correctly. "I wish to speak to you, Mr. Fitzgerald, for a few minutes: but my business with you is quite private."

"So is mine," said Aby, "very private; very private indeed."

"Well, gentlemen, I have just half-an-hour in which to eat my breakfast, attend to business, get on my horse and leave the house. Out of that twenty-five minutes are very much at your service. Donnellan, I beg your pardon. Do pitch into the broiled bones while they are hot; never mind me. And now, gentlemen, if you will walk with me into the other room. First come first served: that I suppose should be the order." And he opened the door and stood with it ajar in his hand.

"I will wait, Mr. Fitzgerald, if you please," said Mr. Prendergast; and as he spoke he motioned Mollett with his hand to go to the door.

"Oh! I can wait, sir; I'd rather wait, sir. I would indeed," said Aby. "My business is a little particular; and if you'll go on, sir, I'll take up with the gentleman as soon as you've done, sir."

But Mr. Prendergast was accustomed to have his own way. "I should prefer that you should go first, sir. And to tell the truth, Mr. Fitzgerald, what I have to say to you will take some time. It is of much importance, to yourself and to others; and I fear that you will probably find that it will detain you from your amusement to-day."

Owen looked black as he heard this. The hounds were going to draw a covert of his own; and he was not in the habit of remaining away from the drawing of any coverts, belonging to himself or others, on any provocation whatever. "That will be rather hard," said he, "considering that I do not know any more than the man in the moon what you've come about."

"You shall be the sole judge yourself, sir, of the importance of my business with you," said Mr. Prendergast.

"Well, Mr. — I forget your name," said Owen.

"My name's Mollett," said Aby. Whereupon Mr. Prendergast looked up at him very sharply, but he said nothing. — He said nothing, but he looked very sharply indeed. He now knew well who this man was, and guessed with tolerable accuracy the cause of his visit. But, nevertheless, at the moment he said nothing.

"Come along, then, Mr. Mollett. I hope your affair is not likely to be a very long one also. Perhaps you'll excuse my having a cup of tea sent in to me as you talk to me. There is nothing like saving time when such very important business is on the tapis. Donnellan, send Thady in with a cup of tea, like a good fellow. Now, Mr. Mollett."

Mr. Mollett rose slowly from his chair, and followed his host. He would have given all he possessed in the

world, and that was very little, to have had the coast clear. But in such an emergency, what was he to do? By the time he had reached the door of the drawing-room, he had all but made up his mind to tell Fitzgerald that, seeing there was so much other business on hand this morning at Hap House, this special piece of business of his must stand over. But then, how could he go back to Cork empty-handed? So he followed Owen into the room, and there opened his budget with what courage he had left to him.

Captain Donnellan as he employed himself on the broiled bones, twice invited Mr. Prendergast to assist him; but in vain. Donnellan remained there, waiting for Owen, till eleven; and then got on his horse. "You'll tell Fitzgerald, will you, that I've started? He'll see nothing of to-day's hunt; that's clear."

"I don't think he will," said Mr. Prendergast.

CHAPTER III.

After Breakfast at Hap House.

"I DON'T think he will," said Mr. Prendergast; and as he spoke, Captain Donnellan's ear could detect that there was something approaching to sarcasm in the tone of the old man's voice. The Captain was quite sure that his friend would not be even at the heel of the hunt that day; and without further compunction proceeded to fasten his buckskin gloves round his wrists. The meet was so near to them, that they had both intended to ride their own hunters from the door; and the two nags were now being led up and down upon the gravel.

But at this moment a terrible noise was heard to take place in the hall. There was a rush and crushing there which made even Mr. Prendergast to jump from his chair, and drove Captain Donnellan to forget his gloves and run to the door.

It was as though all the winds of heaven were being driven down the passage, and as though each separate wind was shod with heavy-heeled boots. Captain Donnellan ran to the door, and Mr. Prendergast with slower steps followed him. When it was opened, Owen was to be seen in the hall, apparently in a state of great excitement; and the gentleman whom he had lately asked to breakfast, — he was to be seen also, in a position of unmistakeable discomfort. He was at that moment proceeding, with the utmost violence, into a large round bed of bushes, which stood in the middle of the great sweep before the door of the house, his feet just touching the ground as he went; and then, having reached his bourne, he penetrated face foremost into the thicket, and in an instant disappeared. He had been kicked out of the house. Owen Fitzgerald had taken him by the shoulders, with a run along the passage and hall, and having reached the door, had applied the flat of his foot violently to poor Aby's back, and sent him flying down the stone steps. And now, as Captain Donnellan and Mr. Prendergast stood looking on, Mr. Mollett junior buried himself altogether out of sight among the shrubs.

"You have done for that fellow, at any rate, Owen," said Captain Donnellan, glancing for a moment at Mr. Prendergast. "I should say that he will never get out of that alive."

"Not if he wait till I pick him out," said Owen,

breathing very hard after his exertion. "An infernal scoundrel! And now, Mr. Prendergast, if you are ready, sir, I am." It was as much as he could do to finish these few words with that sang froid which he desired to assume, so violent was his attempt at breathing after his late exercise.

It was impossible not to conceive the idea that, as one disagreeable visitor had been disposed of in a somewhat summary fashion, so might be the other also. Mr. Prendergast did not look like a man who was in the habit of leaving gentlemen's houses in the manner just now adopted by Mr. Mollett; but nevertheless, as they had come together, both unwished for and unwelcome, Captain Donnellan did for a moment bethink himself whether there might not be more of such fun, if he remained there on the spot. At any rate, it would not do for him to go to the hunt while such deeds as these were being done. It might be that his assistance would be wanted.

Mr. Prendergast smiled, with a saturnine and somewhat bitter smile — the nearest approach to a laugh in which he was known to indulge, — for the same notion came also into his head. "He has disposed of him, and now he is thinking how he will dispose of me." Such was Mr. Prendergast's thought about the matter; and that made him smile. And then, too, he was pleased at what he had seen. That this Mollett was the son of that other Mollett, with whom he had been closeted at Castle Richmond, was plain enough; it was plain enough also to him, used as he was to trace out in his mind the courses of action which men would follow, that Mollett junior, having heard of his father's calamitous failure at Castle Richmond, had come down

to Hap House to see what he could make out of the hitherto unconscious heir. It had been matter of great doubt with Mr. Prendergast, when he first heard young Mollett's name mentioned, whether or no he would allow him to make his attempt. He, Mr. Prendergast, could by a word have spoilt the game; but acting, as he was forced to act, on the spur of the moment, he resolved to permit Mr. Mollett junior to play out his play. He would be yet in time to prevent any ill result to Mr. Fitzgerald, should that gentleman be weak enough to succumb to any such ill results. As things had now turned out Mr. Prendergast rejoiced that Mr. Mollett junior had been permitted to play out his play. "And now, Mr. Prendergast, if you are ready, I am," said Owen.

"Perhaps we had better first pick up the gentleman among the trees," said Mr. Prendergast. And he and Captain Donnellan went down into the bushes.

"Do as you please about that," said Owen. "I have touched him once and shall not touch him again." And he walked back into the dining-room.

One of the grooms who were leading the horses had now gone to the assistance of the fallen hero; and as Captain Donnellan also had already penetrated as far as Aby's shoulders, Mr. Prendergast, thinking that he was not needed, returned also to the house. "I hope he is not seriously hurt," he said.

"Not he," said Owen. "Those sort of men are as used to be kicked, as girls are to be kissed; and it comes as naturally to them. But anything short of having his bones broken will be less than he deserves."

"May I ask what was the nature of his offence?"

Owen remained silent for a moment, looking his guest full in the face. "Well; not exactly," said he. "He has been talking of people of whom he knows nothing, but it would not be well for me to repeat what he has said to a perfect stranger."

"Quite right, Mr. Fitzgerald; it would not be well. But there can be no harm in my repeating it to you. He came here to get money from you for certain tidings which he brought; tidings which if true would be of great importance to you. As I take it, however, he has altogether failed in his object."

"And how do you come to know all this, sir?"

"Merely from having heard that man mention his own name. I also have come with the same tidings; and as I ask for no money for communicating them, you may believe them to be true on my telling."

"What tidings?" asked Owen, with a frown, and an angry jerk in his voice. No remotest notion had yet come in upon his mind that there was any truth in the story that had been told him. He had looked upon it all as a lie, and had regarded Mollett as a sorry knave who had come to him with a poor and low attempt at raising a few pounds. And even now he did not believe. Mr. Prendergast's words had been too sudden to produce belief of so great a fact, and his first thought was that an endeavour was being made to fool him.

"Those tidings which that man has told you," said Mr. Prendergast, solemnly. "That you should not have believed them from him shows only your discretion. But from me you may believe them. I have come from Castle Richmond, and am here as a messenger from Sir Thomas, — from Sir Thomas and from his son.

When the matter became clear to them both, then it was felt that you also should be made acquainted with it."

Owen Fitzgerald now sat down, and looked up into the lawyer's face, staring at him. I may say that the power of saying much was for the moment taken away from him by the words that he heard. What! was it really possible that that title, that property, that place of honour in the country was to be his when one frail old man should drop away? And then again was it really true that all this immeasurable misery was to fall — had fallen — upon that family whom he had once known so well? It was but yesterday that he had been threatening all manner of evil to his cousin Herbert; and had his threats been proved true so quickly? But there was no shadow of triumph in his feelings. Owen Fitzgerald was a man of many faults. He was reckless, passionate, prone to depreciate the opinion of others, extravagant in his thoughts and habits, ever ready to fight, both morally and physically, those who did not at a moment's notice agree with him. He was a man who would at once make up his mind that the world was wrong when the world condemned him, and who would not in compliance with any argument allow himself to be so. But he was not avaricious, nor cruel, nor self-seeking, nor vindictive. In his anger he could pronounce all manner of ill things against his enemy, as he had pronounced some ill things against Herbert; but it was not in him to keep up a sustained wish that those ill things should really come to pass. This news which he now heard, and which he did not yet fully credit, struck him with awe, but created no triumph in his bosom. He realized the catastrophe as it affected

his cousins of Castle Richmond rather than as it affected himself.

"Do you mean to say that Lady Fitzgerald —" and then he stopped himself. He had not the courage to ask the question which was in his mind. Could it really be the case that Lady Fitzgerald, — that she whom all the world had so long honoured under that name, was in truth the wife of that man's father; — of the father of that wretch whom he had just spurned from his house? The tragedy was so deep that he could not believe in it.

"We fear that it is so, Mr. Fitzgerald," said Mr. Prendergast. "That it certainly is so I cannot say. And therefore, if I may take the liberty to give you counsel, I would advise you not to make too certain of this change in your prospects."

"Too certain!" said he, with a bitter laugh. "Do you suppose then that I would wish to see all this ruin accomplished? Heavens and earth! Lady Fitzgerald —! I cannot believe it."

And then Captain Donnellan also returned to the room. "Fitzgerald," said he, "what the mischief are we to do with this fellow? He says that he can't walk, and he bleeds from his face like a pig."

"What fellow? Oh, do what you like with him. Here: give him a pound note, and let him go to the d——. And Donnellan, for heaven's sake go to Cecilstown at once. Do not wait for me. I have business that will keep me here all day."

"But I do not know what to do with this fellow that's bleeding," said the captain, piteously, as he took the proffered note. "If he puts up with a pound note

for what you've done to him, he's softer than what I take him for."

"He will be very glad to be allowed to escape without being given up to the police," said Mr. Prendergast.

"But I don't know what to do with him," said Captain Donnellan. "He says that he can't stand."

"Then lay him down on the dunghill," said Owen Fitzgerald; "but for heaven's sake do not let him interrupt me. And, Donnellan, you will altogether lose the day if you stay any longer." Whereupon the captain, seeing that in very truth he was not wanted, did take himself off, casting as he went one farewell look on Aby as he lay groaning on the turf on the far side of the tuft of bushes.

"He's kilt intirely, I'm thinking, yer honor," said Thady, who was standing over him on the other side.

"He'll come to life again before dinner-time," said the Captain.

"Oh, in course he'll do that, yer honor," said Thady; and then added sotto voce, to himself, as the captain rode down the avenue, "Faix, an' I don't know about that. Shure an' it's the masther has a heavy hand." And then Thady stood for a while perplexed, endeavouring to reanimate Aby by a sight of the pound note which he held out visibly between his thumb and fingers.

And now Mr. Prendergast and Owen were again alone. "And what am I to do?" said Owen, after a pause of a minute or two; and he asked the question with a serious solemn voice.

"Just for the present — for the next day or two —

I think that you should do nothing. As soon as the first agony of this time is over at Castle Richmond, I think that Herbert should see you. It would be very desirable that he and you should take in concert such proceedings as will certainly become necessary. The absolute proof of the truth of this story must be obtained. You understand, I hope, Mr. Fitzgerald, that the case still admits of doubt."

Owen nodded his head impatiently, as though it were needless on the part of Mr. Prendergast to insist upon this. He did not wish to take it for true a moment sooner than was necessary.

"It is my duty to give you this caution. Many lawyers—I presume you know that I am a lawyer—"

"I did not know it," said Owen; "but it makes no difference."

"Thank you; that's very kind," said Mr. Prendergast; but the sarcasm was altogether lost upon his hearer. "Some lawyers, as I was saying, would in such a case have advised their clients to keep all their suspicions, nay all their knowledge, to themselves. Why play the game of an adversary? they would ask. But I have thought it better that we should have no adversary."

"And you will have none," said Owen; "none in me at least."

"I am much gratified in so perceiving, and in having such evidence that my advice has not been indiscreet. It occurred to me that if you received the first intimation of these circumstances from other sources, you would be bound on your own behalf to employ an agent to look after your own interests."

"I should have done nothing of the kind," said Owen.

"Ah, but, my dear young friend, in such a case it would have been your duty to do so."

"Then I should have neglected my duty. And do you tell Herbert this from me, that let the truth be what it may, I shall never interrupt him in his title or his property. It is not there that I shall look either for justice or revenge. He will understand what I mean."

But Mr. Prendergast did not, by any means; nor did he enter into the tone of Owen Fitzgerald's mind. They were both just men, but just in an essentially different manner. The justice of Mr. Prendergast had come of thought and education. As a young man, when entering on his profession, he was probably less just than he was now. He had thought about matters of law and equity, till thought had shown to him the beauty of equity as it should be practised, — often by the aid of law, and not unfrequently in spite of law. Such was the justice of Mr. Prendergast. That of Owen Fitzgerald had come of impulse and nature, and was the justice of a very young man rather than of a very wise one. That title and property did not, as he felt, of justice belong to him, but to his cousin. What difference could it make in the true justice of things, whether or no that wretched man was still alive whom all the world had regarded as dead? In justice he ought to be dead. Now that this calamity of the man's life had fallen upon Sir Thomas and Lady Fitzgerald and his cousin Herbert, it would not be for him to aggravate it by seizing upon a heritage which might possibly accrue to him under the letter of the world's

law, but which could not accrue to him under heaven's law. Such was the justice of Owen Fitzgerald; and we may say this of it in its dispraise, as comparing it with that other justice, that whereas that of Mr. Prendergast would wear for ever, through ages and ages, that other justice of Owen's would hardly have stood the pull of a ten years' struggle. When children came to him, would he not have thought of what might have been theirs by right; and then have thought of what ought to be theirs by right; and so on?

But in speaking of justice, he had also spoken of revenge, and Mr. Prendergast was altogether in the dark. What revenge? He did not know that poor Owen had lost a love, and that Herbert had found it. In the midst of all the confused thoughts which this astounding intelligence had brought upon him, Owen still thought of his love. There Herbert had robbed him — robbed him by means of his wealth; and in that matter he desired justice — justice or revenge. He wanted back his love. Let him have that and Herbert might yet be welcome to his title and estates.

Mr. Prendergast remained there for some half-hour longer, explaining what ought to be done, and how it ought to be done. Of course he combated that idea of Owen's, that the property might be allowed to remain in the hands of the wrong heir. Had that been consonant with his ideas of justice he would not have made his visit to Hap House this morning. Right must have its way, and if it should be that Lady Fitzgerald's marriage with Sir Thomas had not been legal, Owen, on Sir Thomas's death, must become Sir Owen, and Herbert could not become Sir Herbert. So much to the mind of Mr. Prendergast was as clear as crystal.

Let justice be done, even though these Castle Richmond heavens should fall in ruins.

And then he took his departure, leaving Owen to his solitude, much perplexed. "And where is that man?" Mr. Prendergast asked, as he got on to his car.

"Bedad thin, yer honer, he's very bad intirely. He's jist sitthing over the kitchen fire, moaning and croning this way and that, but sorrow a word he's spoke since the masther hoisted him out o' the big hall door. And thin for blood — why, saving yer honer's presence, he's one mash of gore."

"You'd better wash his face for him, and give him a little tea," said Mr. Prendergast, and then he drove away.

And strange ideas floated across Owen Fitzgerald's brain as he sat there alone, in his hunting gear, leaning on the still covered breakfast-table. They floated across his brain backwards and forwards, and at last remained there, taking almost the form of a definite purpose. He would make a bargain with Herbert; let each of them keep that which was fairly his own; let Herbert have all the broad lands of Castle Richmond; let him have the title, the seat in parliament, and the county honour; but for him, Owen — let him have Clara Desmond. He desired nothing that was not fairly his own; but as his own he did regard her, and without her he did not know how to face the future of his life. And in suggesting this arrangement to himself, he did not altogether throw over her feelings; he did take into account her heart, though he did not take into account her worldly prospects. She had loved him — him — Owen; and he would not teach himself to believe that

she did not love him still. Her mother had been too powerful for her, and she had weakly yielded; but as to her heart — Owen could not bring himself to believe that that was gone from him.

They two would make a bargain, — he and his cousin. Honour and renown, and the money and the title would be everything to his cousin. Herbert had been brought up to expect these things, and all the world around him had expected them for him. It would be terrible to him to find himself robbed of them. But the loss of Clara Desmond was equally terrible to Owen Fitzgerald. He allowed his heart to fill itself with a romantic sense of honour, teaching him that it behoved him as a man not to give up his love. Without her he would live disgraced in his own estimation; but who would not think the better of him for refraining from the possession of those Castle Richmond acres? Yes; he would make a bargain with Herbert. Who was there in the world to deny his right to do so?

As he sat revolving these things in his mind, he suddenly heard a rushing sound, as of many horsemen down the avenue, and going to the window, he saw two or three leading men of the hunt, accompanied by the gray-haired old huntsman; and through and about and under the horsemen were the dogs, running in and out of the laurels which skirted the road, with their noses down, giving every now and then short yelps as they caught up the uncertain scent from the leaves on the ground, and hurried on upon the trail of their game.

“Yo ho! to him, Messenger; hark to him, Maybird; good bitch, Merrylass. He’s down here, gen’lemen, and

he'll never get away alive. He came to a bad place when he looked out for going to ground anywhere near Mr. Owen."

And then there came, fast trotting down through the other horsemen, making his way eagerly to the front, a stout heavy man, with a florid handsome face and eager eye. He might be some fifty years of age, but no lad there of three-and-twenty was so anxious and impetuous as he. He was riding a large-boned, fast-trotting bay horse, that pressed on as eagerly as his rider. As he hurried forward all made way for him, till he was close to the shrubs in the front of the house.

"Bless my soul, gentlemen," he said, in an angry voice, "how, in the name of all that's good, are hounds to hunt if you press them down the road in that way? By heaven's, Barry, you are enough to drive a man wild. Yoicks, Merrylass! there it is, Pat;" — Pat was the huntsman — "outside the low wall there, down towards the river." This was Sam O'Grady, the master of the Duhallow hounds, the god of Owen's idolatry. No better fellow ever lived, and no master of hounds, so good; such at least was the opinion common among Duhallow sportsmen.

"Yes, yer honer, — he did skirt round there, I knows that; but he's been among them laurels at the bottom, and he'll be about the place and out-houses somewhere. There's a drain here that I knows on, and he knows on. But Mr. Owen, he knows on it too; and there aint a chance for him." So argued Pat, the Duhallow huntsman, the experienced craft of whose aged mind enabled him to run counter to the cutest

dodges of the cutest fox in that and any of the three neighbouring baronies.

And now the sweep before the door was crowded with red coats; and Owen, looking from his dining-room window, felt that he must take some step. As an ordinary rule, had the hunt thus drifted near his homestead, he would have been off his horse and down among his bottles, sending up sherry and cherry-brandy; and there would have been comfortable drink in plenty, and cold meat, perhaps, not in plenty; and every one would have been welcome in and out of the house. But now there was that at his heart which forbade him to mix with the men who knew him so well, and among whom he was customarily so loudly joyous. Dressed as he was, he could not go among them without explaining why he had remained at home; and as to that, he felt that he was not able to give any explanation at the present moment.

"What's the matter with Owen?" said one fellow to Captain Donnellan.

"Upon my word I hardly know. Two chaps came to him this morning, before he was up; about business, they said. He nearly murdered one of them out of hand; and I believe that he's locked up somewhere with the other this minute."

But in the meantime a servant came up to Mr. O'Grady, and, touching his hat, asked the master of the hunt to go into the house for a moment; and then Mr. O'Grady, dismounting, entered in through the front door. He was only there two minutes, for his mind was still outside, among the laurels, with the fox; but as he put his foot again into the stirrup, he said to those around him that they must hurry away, and not

disturb Owen Fitzgerald that day. It may, therefore, easily be imagined that the mystery would spread quickly through that portion of the county of Cork.

They must hurry away; — but not before they could give an account of their fox. Neither for gods nor men must he be left, as long as his skin was whole above ground. There is an importance attaching to the pursuit of a fox, which gives it a character quite distinct from that of any other amusement which men follow in these realms. It justifies almost anything that men can do, and that at any place and in any season. There is about it a sanctity which forbids interruption, and makes its votaries safe under any circumstances of trespass or intrusion. A man in a hunting county who opposes the county hunt must be a misanthrope, willing to live in seclusion, fond of being in Coventry, and in love with the enmity of his fellow-creatures. There are such men, but they are regarded as lepers by those around them. All this adds to the nobleness of the noble sport, and makes it worthy of a man's energies.

And then the crowd of huntsmen hurried round from the front of the house to a paddock at the back, and then again through the stable yard to the front. The hounds were about — here, there, and everywhere, as any one ignorant of the craft would have said, but still always on the scent of that doomed beast. From one thicket to another he tried to hide himself, but the moist leaves of the underwood told quickly of his whereabouts. He tried every hole and cranny about the house, but every hole and corner had been stopped by Owen's jealous care. He would have lived disgraced for ever in his own estimation, had a fox

gone to ground anywhere about his domicile. At last a loud whoop was heard just in front of the hall door. The poor fox, with his last gasp of strength, had betaken himself to the thicket before the door, and there the dogs had killed him, at the very spot on which Aby Mollett had fallen.

Standing well back from the window, still thinking of Clara Desmond, Owen Fitzgerald saw the fate of the hunted animal, he saw the head and tail severed from the carcass by old Pat, and the body thrown to the hounds, — a ceremony over which he had presided so many scores of times; and then, when the dogs had ceased to growl over the bloody fragments, he saw the hunt move away, back along the avenue to the high road. All this he saw, but still he was thinking of Clara Desmond.

CHAPTER IV.

A muddy Walk on a wet Morning.

ALL that day of the hunt was passed very quietly at Castle Richmond. Herbert did not once leave the house, having begged Mr. Somers to make his excuse at a Relief Committee which it would have been his business to attend. A great portion of the day he spent with his father, who lay all but motionless, in a state that was apparently half comatose. During all those long hours very little was said between them about this tragedy of their family. Why should more be said now; now that the worst had befallen them — all that worst, to hide which Sir Thomas had endured such superhuman agony? And then four or five times

during the day he went to his mother, but with her he did not stay long. To her he could hardly speak upon any subject, for to her as yet the story had not been told.

And she, when he thus came to her from time to time, with a soft word or two, or a softer kiss, would ask him no question. She knew that he had learned the whole, and knew also from the solemn cloud on his brow that that whole must be very dreadful. Indeed we may surmise that her woman's heart had by this time guessed somewhat of the truth. But she would inquire of no one. Jones, she was sure, knew it all; but she did not ask a single question of her servant. It would be told to her when it was fitting. Why should she move in the matter?

Whenever Herbert entered her room she tried to receive him with something of a smile. It was clear enough that she was always glad of his coming, and that she made some little show of welcoming him. A book was always put away, very softly and by the slightest motion; but Herbert well knew what that book was, and whence his mother sought that strength which enabled her to live through such an ordeal as this.

And his sisters were to be seen, moving slowly about the house like the very ghosts of their former selves. Their voices were hardly heard; no ring of customary laughter ever came from the room in which they sat; when they passed their brother in the house they hardly dared to whisper to him. As to sitting down at table now with Mr. Prendergast, that effort was wholly abandoned; they kept themselves even from the sound of his footsteps.

Aunt Letty perhaps spoke more than the others, but what could she speak to the purpose? "Herbert," she once said, as she caught him close by the door of the library and almost pulled him into the room — "Herbert, I charge you to tell me what all this is!"

"I can tell you nothing, dear aunt, nothing; — nothing as yet."

"But, Herbert, tell me this; is it about my sister?" For very many years past Aunt Letty had always called Lady Fitzgerald her sister.

"I can tell you nothing; — nothing to-day."

"Then, to-morrow."

"I do not know — we must let Mr. Prendergast manage this matter as he will. I have taken nothing on myself, Aunt Letty — nothing."

"Then I tell you what, Herbert; it will kill me. It will kill us all, as it is killing your father and your darling mother. I tell you that it is killing her fast. Human nature cannot bear it. For myself I could endure anything if I were trusted." And sitting down in one of the high-backed library chairs she burst into a flood of tears; a sight which, as regarded Aunt Letty, Herbert had never seen before.

What if they all died? thought Herbert to himself in the bitterness of the moment. There was that in store for some of them which was worse than death. What business had Aunt Letty to talk of her misery? Of course she was wretched, as they all were; but how could she appreciate the burden that was on his back? What was Clara Desmond to her?

Shortly after noon Mr. Prendergast was back at the house; but he slunk up to his room, and no one saw anything of him. At half-past six he came down,

and Herbert constrained himself to sit at the table while dinner was served; and so the day passed away. One more day only Mr. Prendergast was to stay at Castle Richmond; and then, if, as he expected, certain letters should reach him on that morning, he was to start for London late on the following day. It may well be imagined that he was not desirous of prolonging his visit.

Early on the following morning Herbert started for a long solitary walk. On that day Mr. Prendergast was to tell everything to his mother, and it was determined between them that her son should not be in the house during the telling. In the evening, when he came home, he was to see her. So he started on his walk, resolving some other things also in his mind before he went. He would reach Desmond Court before he returned home that day, and let the two ladies there know the fate that was before them. Then, after that, they might let him know what was to be his fate; — but on this head he would not hurry them.

So he started on his walk, resolving to go round by Gortnaclough on his way to Desmond Court, and then to return home from that place. The road would be more than twenty long Irish miles; but he felt that the hard work would be of service. It was instinct rather than thought which taught him that it would be good for him to put some strain on the muscles of his body, and thus relieve the muscles of his mind. If his limbs could become thoroughly tired, — thoroughly tired so that he might wish to rest — then he might hope that for a moment he might cease to think of all this sorrow which encompassed him.

So he started on his walk, taking with him a thick cudgel and his own thoughts. He went away across the demesne and down into the road that led away by Gortnaclough and Boherbue towards Castleisland and the wilds of county Kerry. As he went, the men about the place refrained from speaking to him, for they all knew that bad news had come to the big house. They looked at him with lowered eyes and with tenderness in their hearts, for they loved the very name of Fitzgerald. The love which a poor Irishman feels for the gentleman whom he regards as his master — "his masther," though he has probably never received from him, in money, wages for a day's work, and in all his intercourse has been the man who has paid money and not the man who received it — the love which he nevertheless feels, if he has been occasionally looked on with a smiling face and accosted with a kindly word, is astonishing to an Englishman. I will not say that the feeling is altogether good. Love should come of love. Where personal love exists on one side, and not even personal regard on the other, there must be some mixture of servility. That unbounded respect for human grandeur cannot be altogether good; for human greatness, if the greatness be properly sifted, it may be so.

He got down into the road, and went forth upon his journey at a rapid pace. The mud was deep upon the way, but he went through the thickest without a thought of it. He had not been out long before there came on a cold, light, drizzling rain, such a rain as gradually but surely makes its way into the innermost rag of a man's clothing, running up the inside of his waterproof coat, and penetrating by its perseverance

the very folds of his necktie. Such cold, drizzling rain is the commonest phase of hard weather during Irish winters, and those who are out and about get used to it and treat it tenderly. They are euphemistical as to the weather, calling it hazy and soft, and never allowing themselves to carry bad language on such a subject beyond the word dull. And yet at such a time one breathes the rain and again exhales it, and becomes as it were oneself a water spirit, assuming an aqueous fishlike nature into one's inner fibres. It must be acknowledged that a man does sometimes get wet in Ireland; but then a wetting there brings no cold in the head, no husky voice, no need for multitudinous pocket-handkerchiefs, as it does here in this land of catarrhs. It is the east wind and not the rain that kills; and of east wind in the south of Ireland they know nothing.

But Herbert walked on quite unmindful of the mist, swinging his thick stick in his hand, and ever increasing his pace as he went. He was usually a man careful of such things, but it was nothing to him now whether he were wet or dry. His mind was so full of the immediate circumstances of his destiny that he could not think of small external accidents. What was to be his future life in this world, and how was he to fight the battle that was now before him? That was the question which he continually asked himself, and yet never succeeded in answering. How was he to come down from the throne on which early circumstances had placed him, and hustle and struggle among the crowd for such approach to other thrones as his sinews and shoulders might procure for him? If he had been only born to the struggle, he said to himself, how easy and pleasant it would have been to him! But to find himself thus

cast out from his place by an accident — cast out with the eyes of all the world upon him; to be talked of, and pointed at, and pitied; to have little aids offered him by men whom he regarded as beneath him — all this was terribly sore, and the burden was almost too much for his strength. “I do not care for the money,” he said to himself a dozen times; and in saying so he spoke in one sense truly. But he did care for things which money buys; for outward respect, permission to speak with authority among his fellow-men, for power and place, and the feeling that he was prominent in his walk of life. To be in advance of other men, that is the desire which is strongest in the hearts of all strong men; and in that desire how terrible a fall had he not received from this catastrophe!

And what were they all to do, he and his mother and his sisters? How were they to act — now, at once? In what way were they to carry themselves when this man of law and judgment should have gone from them? For himself, his course of action must depend much upon the word which might be spoken to him to-day at Desmond Court. There would still be a drop of comfort left at the bottom of his cup if he might be allowed to hope there. But in truth he feared greatly. What the countess would say to him he thought he could foretell; what it would behove him to say himself — in matter, though not in words — that he knew well. Would not the two sayings tally well together? and could it be right for him even to hope that the love of a girl of seventeen should stand firm against her mother's will, when her lover himself could not dare to press his suit? And then another reflection pressed on his mind sorely. Clara had already given

up one poor lover at her mother's instance; might she not resume that lover, also at her mother's instance, now that he was no longer poor? What if Owen Fitzgerald should take from him everything!

And so he walked on through the mud and rain, always swinging his big stick. Perhaps after all, the worst of it was over with him, when he could argue with himself in this way. It is the first plunge into the cold water that gives the shock. We may almost say that every human misery will cease to be miserable if it be duly faced; and something is done towards conquering our miseries, when we face them in any degree, even if not with due courage. Herbert had taken his plunge into the deep, dark, cold, comfortless pool of misfortune; and he felt that the waters around him were very cold. But the plunge had been taken, and the worst, perhaps, was gone by.

As he approached near to Gortnaclough, he came upon one of those gangs of road-destroyers who were now at work everywhere, earning their pittance of "yellow meal" with a pickaxe and a wheelbarrow. In some sort or other the labourers had been got to their work. Gangsmen there were with lists, who did see, more or less accurately, that the men, before they received their sixpence or eightpence for their day's work, did at any rate pass their day with some sort of tool in their hands. And consequently the surface of the hill began to disappear, and there were chasms in the road, which caused those who travelled on wheels to sit still, staring across with angry eyes, and sometimes to apostrophize the doer of these deeds with very naughty words. The doer was the Board of Works, or the "Board" as it was familiarly termed; and were it

not that those ill words must have returned to the bosoms which vented them, and have flown no further, no Board could ever have been so terribly curse-laden. To find oneself at last utterly stopped, after proceeding with great strain to one's horse for half a mile through an artificial quagmire of slush up to the wheelbox, is harassing to the customary traveller; and men at that crisis did not bethink themselves quite so frequently as they should have done, that a people perishing from famine is more harassing.

But Herbert was not on wheels, and was proceeding through the slush and across the chasm, regardless of it all, when he was stopped by some of the men. All the land thereabouts was Castle Richmond property; and it was not probable that the young master of it all would be allowed to pass through some two score of his own tenantry without greetings, and petitions, and blessings, and complaints.

"Faix, yer honer, thin, Mr. Herbert," said one man, standing at the bottom of the hill, with the half-filled wheelbarrow still hanging in his hands — an Englishman would have put down the barrow while he was speaking, making some inner calculation about the waste of his muscles; but an Irishman would despise himself for such low economy — "Faix, thin, yer honer, Mr. Herbert; an' it's yourself is a sight good for sore eyes. May the heavens be your bed, for it's you is the frind to a poor man."

"How are you, Pat?" said Herbert, without intending to stop. "How are you, Mooney? I hope the work suits you all." And then he would at once have passed on, with his hat pressed down low over his brow.

But this could be by no means allowed. In the

first place, the excitement arising from the young master's presence was too valuable to be lost so suddenly; and then, when might again occur so excellent a time for some mention of their heavy grievances? Men whose whole amount of worldly good consists in a bare allowance of nauseous food, just sufficient to keep body and soul together, must be excused if they wish to utter their complaints to ears that can hear them.

"Arrah, yer honer, thin, we're none on us very well; and how could we, with the male at a penny a pound?" said Pat.

"Sorrow to it for male," said Mooney. "It's the worst vittles iver a man tooked into the inside of him. Saving yer honer's presence it's as much as I can do to raise the bare arm of me since the day I first began with the yally male."

"It's as wake as cats we all is," said another, who from the weary way in which he dragged his limbs about certainly did not himself seem to be gifted with much animal strength.

"And the childer is worse, yer honer," said a fourth. "The male is bad for them intirely. Saving yer honer's presence, their bellies is gone away most to nothing."

"And there's six of us in family, yer honer," said Pat. "Six mouths to feed; and what's eight pennorth of yally male among such a lot as that; let alone the Sundays, when there's nothing?"

"An' shure, Mr. Herbert," said another, a small man with a squeaking voice, whose rags of clothes hardly hung on to his body, "warn't I here with the other boys the last Friday as iver was? Ax Pat Condon else, yer honer; and yet when they comed to give out the

wages, they scorned me of — —." And so on. There were as many complaints to be made as there were men, if only he could bring himself to listen to them.

On ordinary occasions Herbert would listen to them, and answer them, and give them, at any rate, the satisfaction which they derived from discoursing with him, if he could give them no other satisfaction. But now, on this day, with his own burden so heavy at his heart, he could not even do this. He could not think of their sorrows; his own sorrow seemed to him to be so much the heavier. So he passed on, running the gauntlet through them as best he might, and shaking them off from him, as they attempted to cling round his steps. Nothing is so powerful in making a man selfish as misfortune.

And then he went on to Gortnaclough. He had not chosen his walk to this place with any fixed object, except this perhaps, that it enabled him to return home round by Desmond Court. It was one of the places at which a Relief Committee sat every fortnight, and there was a soup-kitchen here, which, however, had not been so successful as the one at Berryhill; and it was the place of residence selected by Father Barney's coadjutor. But in spite of all this, when Herbert found himself in the wretched, dirty, straggling, damp street of the village, he did not know what to do or where to betake himself. That every eye in Gortnaclough would be upon him was a matter of course. He could hardly turn round on his heel and retrace his steps through the village, as he would have to do in going to Desmond Court, without showing some pretext for his coming there; so he walked into the little shop which was attached to the soup-kitchen, and there he found the Rev. Mr. Columb

Creagh, giving his orders to the little girl behind the counter.

Herbert Fitzgerald was customarily very civil to the Roman Catholic priests around him, — somewhat more so, indeed, than seemed good to those very excellent ladies, Mrs. Townsend and Aunt Letty; but it always went against the grain with him to be civil to the Rev. Columb Creagh; and on this special day it would have gone against the grain with him to be civil to anybody. But the coadjutor knew his character, and was delighted to have an opportunity of talking to him, when he could do so without being snubbed either by Mr. Somers, the chairman, or by his own parish priest. Mr. Creagh had rejoiced much at the idea of forming one at the same council board with county magistrates and Protestant parsons; but the fruition of his promised delights had never quite reached his lips. He had been like Sancho Panza in his government; he had sat down to the grand table day after day, but had never yet been allowed to enjoy the rich dish of his own oratory. Whenever he had proposed to help himself, Mr. Somers or Father Barney had stopped his mouth. Now probably he might be able to say a word or two; and though the glory would not be equal to that of making a speech at the Committee, still it would be something to be seen talking on equal terms, and on affairs of state, to the young heir of Castle Richmond.

“Mr. Fitzgerald! well, I declare! And how are you, sir?” And he took off his hat and bowed, and got hold of Herbert’s hand, shaking it ruthlessly; and altogether he made him very disagreeable.

Herbert, though his mind was not really intent on the subject, asked some question of the girl as to the

amount of meal that had been sold, and desired to see the little passbook that they kept at the shop.

"We are doing pretty well, Mr. Fitzgerald," said the coadjutor; "pretty well. I always keep my eye on, for fear things should go wrong, you know."

"I don't think they'll do that," said Herbert.

"No; I hope not. But it's always good to be on the safe side, you know. And to tell you the truth, I don't think we're altogether on the right tack about them shops. It's very hard on a poor woman —"

Now the fact was, though the Relief Committee at Gortnaclough was attended by magistrates, priests, and parsons, the shop there was Herbert Fitzgerald's own affair. It had been stocked with his or his father's money; the flour was sold without profit at his risk, and the rent of the house and wages of the woman who kept it came out of his own pocket-money. Under these circumstances he did not see cause why Mr. Creagh should interfere, and at the present moment was not well inclined to put up with such interference.

"We do the best we can, Mr. Creagh," said he, interrupting the priest. "And no good will be done at such a time as this by unnecessary difficulties."

"No, no, certainly not. But still I do think —" And Mr. Creagh was girding up his loins for eloquence, when he was again interrupted.

"I am rather in a hurry to-day," said Herbert, "and therefore, if you please, we won't make any change now. Never mind the book to-day, Sally. Good day, Mr. Creagh." And so saying, he left the shop and walked rapidly back out of the village.

The poor coadjutor was left alone at the shop-door, anathematizing in his heart the pride of all Protestants.

He had been told that this Mr. Fitzgerald was different from others, that he was a man fond of priests and addicted to the "ould religion;" and so hearing, he had resolved to make the most of such an excellent disposition. But he was forced to confess to himself that they were all alike. Mr. Somers could not have been more imperious, nor Mr. Townsend more insolent.

And then, through the still drizzling rain, Herbert walked on to Desmond Court. By the time that he reached the desolate-looking lodge at the demesne gate, he was nearly wet through, and was besmeared with mud up to his knees. But he had thought nothing of this as he walked along. His mind had been intent on the scene that was before him. In what words was he to break the news to Clara Desmond and her mother? and with what words would they receive the tidings? The former question he had by no means answered to his own satisfaction, when, all muddy and wet, he passed up to the house through that desolate gate.

"Is Lady Desmond at home?" he asked of the butler. "Her ladyship is at home," said the gray-haired old man, with his blandest smile, "and so is Lady Clara." He had already learned to look on the heir of Castle Richmond as the coming saviour of the impoverished Desmond family.

CHAPTER V.

Comfortless.

"BUT, Mr. Herbert, yer honor, you're wet through and through — surely," said the butler, as soon as Fitzgerald was well inside the hall. Herbert muttered

something about his being only damp, and that it did not signify. But it did signify, — very much, — in the butler's estimation. Whose being wet through could signify more; for was not Mr. Herbert to be a baronet, and to have the spending of twelve thousand a year; and would he not be the future husband of Lady Clara? not signify indeed!

"An' shure, Mr. Herbert, you haven't walked to Desmond Court this blessed morning. Tare an' ages! Well; there's no knowing what you young gentlemen won't do. But I'll see and get a pair of trousers of my Lord's ready for you in two minutes. Faix, and he's nearly as big as yourself now, Mr. Herbert."

But Herbert would hardly speak to him, and gave no assent whatever as to his proposition for borrowing the Earl's clothes. "I'll go in as I am," said he. And the old man looking into his face saw that there was something wrong. "Shure an' he ain't going to sthrike off now," said this Irish Caleb Balderstone to himself. He also as well as some others about Desmond Court had feared greatly that Lady Clara would throw herself away upon a poor lover.

It was now past noon, and Fitzgerald pressed forward into the room in which Lady Clara usually sat. It was the same in which she had received Owen's visit, and here of a morning she was usually to be found alone; but on this occasion when he opened the door he found that her mother was with her. Since the day on which Clara had disposed of herself so excellently, the mother had spent more of her time with her daughter. Looking at Clara now through Herbert Fitzgerald's eyes, the Countess had begun to confess to herself that her child did possess beauty and charm.

She got up to greet her future son-in-law with a sweet smile and that charming quiet welcome with which a woman so well knows how to make her house pleasant to a man that is welcome to it. And Clara, not rising, but turning her head round and looking at him, greeted him also. He came forward and took both their hands, and it was not till he had held Clara's for half a minute in his own that they both saw that he was more than ordinarily serious. "I hope Sir Thomas is not worse," said Lady Desmond, with that voice of feigned interest which is so common. After all, if anything should happen to the poor old weak gentleman, might it not be as well?

"My father has not been very well these last two days," he said.

"I am so sorry," said Clara. "And your mother, Herbert?"

"But Herbert, how wet you are. You must have walked," said the Countess.

Herbert, in a few dull words said that he had walked. He had thought that the walk would be good for him, and he had not expected that it would be so wet. And then Lady Desmond, looking carefully into his face, saw that in truth he was very serious; — so much so that she knew that he had come there on account of his seriousness. But still his sorrow did not in any degree go to her heart. He was grieving doubtless for his father, — or his mother. The house at Castle Richmond was probably sad, because sickness and fear of death were there; — nay perhaps death itself now hanging over some loved head. But what was this to her? She had had her own sorrows; — enough of them perhaps to account for her being selfish. So with

a solemn face, but with nothing amiss about her heart, she again asked for tidings from Castle Richmond.

"Do tell us," said Clara, getting up. "I am afraid Sir Thomas is very ill." The old baronet had been kind to her, and she did regard him. To her it was a sorrow to think that there should be any sorrow at Castle Richmond.

"Yes; he is ill," said Herbert. "We have had a gentleman from London with us for the last few days — a friend of my father's. His name is Mr. Prendergast."

"Is he a doctor?" asked the Countess.

"No, not a doctor," said Herbert. "He is a lawyer."

It was very hard for him to begin his story; and perhaps the more so in that he was wet through and covered with mud. He now felt cold and clammy, and began to have an idea that he should not be seated there in that room in such a guise. Clara, too, had instinctively learned from his face, and tone, and general bearing that something truly was the matter. At other times when he had been there, since that day on which he had been accepted, he had been completely master of himself. Perhaps it had almost been deemed a fault in him that he had had none of the timidity or hesitation of a lover. He had seemed to feel, no doubt, that he, with his fortune and position at his back, need feel no scruple in accepting as his own the fair hand for which he had asked. But now — nothing could be more different from this than his manner was now.

Lady Desmond was now surprised, though probably not as yet frightened. Why should a lawyer have come from London to visit Sir Thomas at a period of such

illness? and why should Herbert have walked over to Desmond Court to tell them of this illness? There must be something in this lawyer's coming which was intended to bear in some way on her daughter's marriage. "But, Herbert," she said, "you are quite wet. Will you not put on some of Patrick's things?"

"No, thank you," said he; "I shall not stay long. I shall soon have said what I have got to say."

"But do, Herbert," said Clara. "I cannot bear to see you so uncomfortable. And then you will not be in such a hurry to go back."

"Ill as my father is," said he, "I cannot stay long; but I have thought it my duty to come over and tell you — tell you what has happened at Castle Richmond."

And now the countess was frightened. There was that in Herbert's tone of voice and the form of his countenance which was enough to frighten any woman. What had happened at Castle Richmond? what could have happened there to make necessary the presence of a lawyer, and at the same time thus to sadden her future son-in-law? And Clara also was frightened, though she knew not why. His manner was so different from that which was usual; he was so cold, and serious, and awe-struck, that she could not but be unhappy.

"And what is it?" said the Countess.

Herbert then sat for a few minutes silent, thinking how best he should tell them his story. He had been all the morning resolving to tell it, but he had in nowise as yet fixed upon any method. It was all so terribly tragic, so frightful in the extent of its reality,

that he hardly knew how it would be possible for him to get through his task.

"I hope that no misfortune has come upon any of the family," said Lady Desmond, now beginning to think that there might be misfortunes which would affect her own daughter more nearly than the illness either of the baronet or of his wife.

"Oh, I hope not!" said Clara, getting up and clasping her hands. "What is it, Herbert? why don't you speak?" And coming round to him, she took hold of his arm.

"Dearest Clara," he said, looking at her with more tenderness than had ever been usual with him, "I think that you had better leave us. I could tell it better to your mother alone."

"Do, Clara, love. Go, dearest, and we will call you by-and-by."

Clara moved away very slowly towards the door, and then she turned round. "If it is any thing that makes you unhappy, Herbert," she said, "I must know it before you leave me."

"Yes, yes; either I or your mother —. You shall be told, certainly."

"Yes, yes, you shall be told," said the countess. "And now go, my darling." Thus dismissed, Clara did go, and betook herself to her own chamber. Had Owen had sorrows to tell her, he would have told them to herself; of that she was quite sure. "And now, Herbert, for heaven's sake what is it?" said the countess, pale with terror. She was fully certain now that something was to be spoken which would be calculated to interfere with her daughter's prospects.

We all know the story which Herbert had to tell,

and we need not therefore again be present at the telling of it. Sitting there, wet through, in Lady Desmond's drawing-room, he did contrive to utter it all — the whole of it from the beginning to the end, making it clearly to be understood that he was no longer Fitzgerald of Castle Richmond, but a nameless, pennyless outcast, without the hope of portion or position, doomed from henceforth to earn his bread in the sweat of his brow — if only he could be fortunate enough to find the means of earning it.

Nor did Lady Desmond once interrupt him in his story. She sat perfectly still, listening to him almost with unmoved face. She was too wise to let him know what the instant working of her mind might be before she had made her own fixed resolve; and she had conceived the truth much before he had completed the telling of it. We generally use three times the number of words which are necessary for the purpose which we have in hand; but had he used six times the number, she would not have interrupted him. It was good in him to give her this time to determine in what tone and with what words she would speak, when speaking on her part should become absolutely necessary. "And now," he concluded by saying — and at this time he was standing up on the rug — "you know it all, Lady Desmond. It will perhaps be best that Clara should learn it from you."

He had said not a word of giving up his pretensions to Lady Clara's hand; but then neither had he in any way hinted that the match should, in his opinion, be regarded as unbroken. He had not spoken of his sorrow at bringing down all this poverty on his wife; and surely he would have so spoken had he thought

their engagement was still valid; but then he had not himself pointed out that the engagement must necessarily be broken, as, in Lady Desmond's opinion, he certainly should have done.

"Yes," said she, in a cold, low, meaningless voice — in a voice that told nothing by its tones — "Lady Clara had better hear it from me." But in the title which she gave her daughter, Herbert instantly read his doom. He, however, remained silent. It was for the countess now to speak.

"But it is possible it may not be true," she said, speaking almost in a whisper, looking, not into his face, but by him, at the fire.

"It is possible; but so barely possible, that I did not think it right to keep the matter from you any longer."

"It would have been very wrong — very wicked, I may say," said the countess.

"It is only two days since I knew anything of it myself," said he, vindicating himself.

"You were of course bound to let me know immediately," she said, harshly.

"And I have let you know immediately, Lady Desmond." And then they were both again silent for a while.

"And Mr. Prendergast thinks there is no doubt?" she asked.

"None," said Herbert, very decidedly.

"And he has told your cousin Owen?"

"He did so yesterday; and by this time my poor mother knows it also." And then there was another period of silence.

During the whole time Lady Desmond had uttered

not one word of condolence — not a syllable of commiseration for all the sufferings that had come upon Herbert and his family; and he was beginning to hate her for her harshness. The tenor of her countenance had become hard; and she received all his words as a judge might have taken them, merely wanting evidence before he pronounced his verdict. The evidence she was beginning to think sufficient, and there could be no doubt as to her verdict. After what she had heard, a match between Herbert Fitzgerald and her daughter would be out of the question. "It is very dreadful," she said, thinking only of her own child, and absolutely shivering at the danger which had been incurred.

"It is very dreadful," said Herbert, shivering also. It was almost incredible to him that his great sorrow should be received in such a way by one who had professed to be so dear a friend to him.

"And what do you propose to do, Mr. Fitzgerald?" said the countess.

"What do I propose?" he said, repeating her words. "Hitherto I have had neither time nor heart to propose anything. Such a misfortune as that which I have told you does not break upon a man without disturbing for a while his power of resolving. I have thought so much of my mother, and of Clara, since Mr. Prendergast told me all this, that — that — that —" And then a slight gurgling struggle fell upon his throat and hindered him from speaking. He did not quite sob out, and he determined that he would not do so. If she could be so harsh and strong, he would be harsh and strong also.

And again Lady Desmond sat silent, still thinking how she had better speak and act. After all she was

not so cruel nor so bad as Herbert Fitzgerald thought her. What had the Fitzgeralds done for her that she should sorrow for their sorrows? She had lived there, in that old ugly barrack, long desolate, full of dreary wretchedness and poverty, and Lady Fitzgerald in her prosperity had never come to her to soften the hardness of her life. She had come over to Ireland a countess, and a countess she had been, proud enough at first in her little glory — too proud, no doubt; and proud enough afterwards in her loneliness and poverty; and there she had lived — alone. Whether the fault had been her own or no, she owed little to the kindness of any one; for no one had done aught to relieve her bitterness. And then her weak puny child had grown up in the same shade, and was now a lovely woman, gifted with high birth, and that special priceless beauty which high blood so often gives. There was a prize now within the walls of that old barrack — something to be won — something for which a man would strive, and a mother smile that her son might win it. And no Lady Fitzgerald had come to her. She had never complained of this, she said to herself. The bargain between Clara Desmond and Herbert Fitzgerald had been good for both of them, and let it be made and settled as a bargain. Young Herbert Fitzgerald had money and position; her daughter had beauty and high blood. Let it be a bargain. But in all this there was nothing to make her love that rich prosperous family at Castle Richmond. There are those whose nature it is to love new-found friends at a few hours' warning, but the Countess of Desmond was not one of them. The bargain had been made, and her daughter would have been able to perform her part of it. She was

still able to give that which she had stipulated to give. But Herbert Fitzgerald was now a bankrupt, and could give nothing! Would it not have been madness to suppose that the bargain should still hold good?

One person and one only had come to her at Desmond Court, whose coming had been a solace to her weariness. Of all those among whom she had lived in cold desolateness for so many years, one only had got near her heart. There had been but one Irish voice that she had cared to hear; and the owner of that voice had loved her child instead of loving her.

And she had borne that wretchedness too, if not well, at least bravely. True she had separated that lover from her daughter; but the circumstances of both had made it right for her, as a mother, to do so. What mother, circumstanced as she had been, would have given her girl to Owen Fitzgerald? So she had banished from the house the only voice that sounded sweetly in her ears, and again she had been alone.

And then, perhaps, thoughts had come to her, when Herbert Fitzgerald was frequent about the place, a rich and thriving wooer, that Owen might come again to Desmond Court, when Clara had gone to Castle Richmond. Years were stealing over her. Ah, yes. She knew that full well. All her youth and the pride of her days she had given up for that countess-ship which she now wore so gloomily — given up for pieces of gold which had turned to stone and slate and dirt within her grasp. Years, alas, were fast stealing over her! But nevertheless she had something to give. Her woman's beauty was not all faded; and she had a heart which was as yet virgin — which had hitherto loved no other man. Might not that suffice to cover a

few years, seeing that in return she wanted nothing but love? And so she had thought, lingering over her hopes, while Herbert was there at his wooing.

It may be imagined with what feelings at her heart she had seen and listened to the frantic attempt made by Owen to get back his childish love. But that too she had borne, bravely, if not well. It had not angered her that her child was loved by the only man she had ever loved herself. She had stroked her daughter's hair that day, and kissed her cheek, and bade her be happy with her better, richer lover. And had she not been right in this? Nor had she been angry even with Owen. She could forgive him all, because she loved him. But might there not even yet be a chance for her when Clara should in very truth have gone to Castle Richmond?

But now! How was she to think about all this now? And thinking of these things, how was it possible that she should have heart left to feel for the miseries of Lady Fitzgerald? With all her miseries would not Lady Fitzgerald still be more fortunate than she? Let come what might, Lady Fitzgerald had had a life of prosperity and love. No; she could not think of Lady Fitzgerald, nor of Herbert: she could only think of Owen Fitzgerald, of her daughter, and of herself.

He, Owen, was now the heir to Castle Richmond, and would, as far as she could learn, soon become the actual possessor. He, who had been cast forth from Desmond Court as too poor and contemptible in the world's eye to be her daughter's suitor, would become the rich inheritor of all those broad acres, and that old coveted family honour. And this Owen still loved her

daughter — loved her not as Herbert did, with a quiet, gentleman-like, every-day attachment, but with the old, true, passionate love of which she had read in books, and dreamed herself, before she had sold herself to be a countess. That Owen did so love her daughter, she was very sure. And then, as to her daughter; that she did not still love this new heir in her heart of hearts — of that the mother was by no means sure. That her child had chosen the better part in choosing money and a title, she had not doubted; and that having so chosen Clara would be happy, — of that also she did not doubt. Clara was young, she would say, and her heart in a few months would follow her hand.

But now! How was she to decide, sitting there with Herbert Fitzgerald before her, gloomy as death, cold, shivering, and muddy, telling of his own disasters with no more courage than a whipped dog? As she looked at him she declared to herself twenty times in half a second that he had not about him a tithe of the manhood of his cousin Owen. Women love a bold front, and a voice that will never own its master to have been beaten in the world's fight. Had Owen come there with such a story, he would have claimed his right boldly to the lady's hand, in spite of all that the world had done to him.

"Let her have him," said Lady Desmond to herself; and the struggle within her bosom was made and over. No wonder that Herbert, looking into her face for pity, should find that she was harsh and cruel. She had been sacrificing herself, and had completed the sacrifice. Owen Fitzgerald, the heir to Castle Richmond, Sir Owen as he would soon be, should have her daughter. They two, at any rate, should be happy.

And she — she would live there at Desmond Court, lonely as she had ever lived. While all this was passing through her mind, she hardly thought of Herbert and his sorrows. That he must be given up and abandoned, and left to make what best fight he could by himself; as to that how was it possible that she as a mother should have any doubt?

And yet it was a pity — a thousand pities. Herbert Fitzgerald, with his domestic virtues, his industry and thorough respectability, would so exactly have suited Clara's taste and mode of life — had he only continued to be the heir of Castle Richmond. She and Owen would not enter upon the world together with nearly the same fair chance of happiness. Who could prophesy to what Owen might be led with his passionate impulses, his strong will, his unbridled temper, and his love of pleasure? That he was noble-hearted, affectionate, brave, and tender in his inmost spirit, Lady Desmond was very sure; but were such the qualities which would make her daughter happy? When Clara should come to know her future lord as Clara's mother knew him, would Clara love him and worship him as her mother did? The mother believed that Clara had not in her bosom heart enough for such a love. But then, as I have said before, the mother did not know the daughter.

"You say that you will break all this to Clara," said Herbert, having during this silence turned over some of his thoughts also in his mind. "If so I may as well leave you now. You can imagine that I am anxious to get back to my mother."

"Yes, it will be better that I should tell her. It is very sad, very sad, very sad indeed."

"Yes; it is a hard load for a man to bear," he answered, speaking very, very slowly. "But for myself I think I can bear it, if —"

"If what?" asked the countess.

"If Clara can bear it."

And now it was necessary that Lady Desmond should speak out. She did not mean to be unnecessarily harsh; but she did mean to be decided, and as she spoke her face became stern and ill-favoured. "That Clara will be terribly distressed," she said, "terribly, terribly distressed," repeating her words with great emphasis, "of that I am quite sure. She is very young, and will, I hope, in time get over it. And then too I think she is one whose feelings, young as she is, have never conquered her judgment. Therefore I do believe that, with God's mercy, she will be able to bear it. But, Mr. Fitzgerald —"

"Well?"

"Of course you feel with me — and I am sure that with your excellent judgment it is a thing of course — that everything must be over between you and Lady Clara." And then she came to a full stop as though all had been said that could be considered necessary.

Herbert did not answer at once, but stood there shivering and shaking in his misery. He was all but overcome by the chill of his wet garments; and though he struggled to throw off the dead feeling of utter cold which struck him to the heart, he was quite unable to master it. He could hardly forgive himself that on such an occasion he should have been so conquered by his own outer feelings, but now he could not help himself. He was weak with hunger too — though he did

not know it, for he had hardly eaten food that day, and was nearly exhausted with the unaccustomed amount of hard exercise which he had taken. He was moreover thoroughly wet through, and heavy laden with the mud of the road. It was no wonder that Lady Desmond had said to herself that he looked like a whipped dog.

"That must be as Lady Clara shall decide," he said at last, barely uttering the words through his chattering teeth.

"It must be as I say," said the countess firmly; "whether by her decision or by yours — or if necessary by mine. But if your feelings are, as I take them to be, those of a man of honour, you will not leave it to me or to her. What! now that you have the world to struggle with, would you seek to drag her down into the struggle?"

"Our union was to be for better or worse. I would have given her all the better, and —"

"Yes; and had there been a union she would have bravely borne her part in sharing the worst. But who ought to be so thankful as you that this truth has broken upon you before you had clogged yourself with a wife of high birth but without fortune? Alone, a man educated as you are, with your talents, may face the world without fearing anything. But how could you make your way now if my daughter were your wife? When you think of it, Mr. Fitzgerald, you will cease to wish for it."

"Never; I have given my heart to your daughter, and I cannot take back the gift. She has accepted it, and she cannot return it."

"And what would you have her do?" Lady Des-

mond asked, with anger and almost passion in her voice.

"Wait — as I must wait," said Herbert. "That will be her duty, as I believe it will also be her wish."

"Yes, and wear out her young heart here in solitude for the next ten years, and then learn when her beauty and her youth are gone —. But no, Mr. Fitzgerald; I will not allow myself to contemplate such a prospect either for her or for you. Under the lamentable circumstances which you have now told me it is imperative that this match should be broken off. Ask your own mother and hear what she will say. And if you are a man you will not throw upon my poor child the hard task of declaring that it must be so. You, by your calamity, are unable to perform your contract with her; and it is for you to announce that that contract is therefore over."

Herbert in his present state was unable to argue with Lady Desmond. He had in his brain, and mind, and heart, and soul — at least so he said to himself afterwards, having perhaps but a loose idea of the different functions of these four different properties — a thorough conviction that as he and Clara had sworn to each other that for life they would live together and love each other, no misfortune to either of them could justify the other in breaking that oath; — could even justify him in breaking it, though he was the one on whom misfortune had fallen. He, no doubt, had first loved Clara for her beauty; but would he have ceased to love her, or have cast her from him, if, by God's will, her beauty had perished and gone from her? Would he not have held her closer to his heart, and

told her, with strong comforting vows, that his love had now gone deeper than that; that they were already of the same bone, of the same flesh, of the same family and hearth-stone? He knew himself in this, and knew that he would have been proud so to do, and so to feel, — that he would have cast from him with utter indignation any who would have counselled him to do or to feel differently. And why should Clara's heart be different from his?

All this, I say, was his strong conviction. But, nevertheless, her heart might be different. She might look on that engagement of theirs with altogether other thoughts and other ideas; and if so his voice should never reproach her; — not his voice, however his heart might do so. Such might be the case with her, but he did not think it; and therefore he would not pronounce that decision which Clara's mother expected from him.

“When you have told her of this, I suppose I may be allowed to see her,” he said, avoiding the direct proposition which Lady Desmond had made to him.

“Allowed to see her?” said Lady Desmond now also in her turn speaking very slowly. “I cannot answer the question as yet; not quite immediately, I should say. But if you will leave the matter in my hands, I will write to you, if not to-morrow, then the next day.”

“I would sooner that she should write.”

“I cannot promise that — I do not know how far her good sense and strength may support her under this affliction. That she will suffer terribly, on your account as well as on her own, you may be quite

sure." And then, again, there was a pause of some moments.

"I at any rate shall write to her," he then said, "and shall tell her that I expect her to see me. Her will in this matter shall be my will. If she thinks that her misery will be greater in being engaged to a poor man, than, — than in relinquishing her love, she shall hear no word from me to overpersuade her. But, Lady Desmond, I will say nothing that shall authorize her to think that she is given up by me, till I have in some way learned from herself, what her own feelings are. And now I will say good-bye to you."

"Good-bye," said the countess, thinking that it might be as well that the interview should be ended. "But, Mr. Fitzgerald, you are very wet; and I fear that you are very cold. You had better take something before you go." Countess as she was she had no carriage in which she could send him home; no horse even on which he could ride. "Nothing, thank you, Lady Desmond," he said; and so, without offering her the courtesy of his hand he walked out of the room.

He was very angry with her, as he tried to make the blood run quicker in his veins by hurrying down the avenue into the road at his quickest pace. So angry with her, that for a while, in his indignation, he almost forgot his father and his mother and his own family tragedy. That she should have wished to save her daughter from such a marriage might have been natural; but that she should have treated him so coldly, so harshly — without one spark of love or pity, — him, who to her had been so loyal during his courtship of her daughter! It was almost incredible to him.

Was not his story one that would have melted the heart of a stranger — at which men would weep? He himself had seen tears in the eyes of that dry time-worn world-used London lawyer, as the full depth of the calamity had forced itself upon his heart. Yes, Mr. Prendergast had not been able to repress his tears when he told the tale; but Lady Desmond had shed no tears when the tale had been told to her. No soft woman's message had been sent to the afflicted mother on whom it had pleased God to allow so heavy a hand to fall. No word of tenderness had been uttered for the sinking father. There had been no feeling for the household which was to have been so nearly linked with her own. No. Looking round with greedy eyes for wealth for her daughter, Lady Desmond had found a match that suited her. Now that match no longer suited her greed, and she could throw from her without a struggle to her feelings the suitor that was now poor, and the family of the suitor that was now neither grand nor powerful.

And then too he felt angry with Clara, though he knew that as yet, at any rate, he had no cause. In spite of what he had said and felt, he would imagine to himself that she also would be cold and untrue. "Let her go," he said to himself. "Love is worth nothing — nothing if it does not believe itself to be of more worth than everything beside. If she does not love me now in my misery — if she would not choose me now for her husband — her love has never been worthy the name. Love that has no faith in itself, that does not value itself above all worldly things, is nothing. If it be not so with her, let her go back to him."

It may easily be understood who was the him. And then Herbert walked on so rapidly that at length his strength almost failed him, and in his exhaustion he had more than once to lean against a gate on the road-side. With difficulty at last he got home, and dragged himself up the long avenue to the front door. Even yet he was not warm through to his heart, and he felt as he entered the house that he was quite unfitted for the work which he might yet have to do before he could go to his bed.

CHAPTER VI.

Comforted.

WHEN Herbert Fitzgerald got back to Castle Richmond it was nearly dark. He opened the hall door without ringing the bell, and walking at once into the dining-room, threw himself into a large leathern chair which always stood near the fire-place. There was a bright fire burning on the hearth, and he drew himself close to it, putting his wet feet up on to the fender, thinking, that he would at any rate warm himself before he went in among any of the family. The room, with its deep red curtains and ruby-embossed paper, was almost dark, and he knew that he might remain there unseen and unnoticed for the next half hour. If he could only get a glass of wine! He tried the cellaret, which was as often open as locked, but now unfortunately it was closed. In such a case it was impossible to say whether the butler had the key or Aunt Letty; so he sat himself down without that luxury.

By this time, as he well knew, all would have been

told to his mother, and his first duty would be to go to her — to go to her and comfort her, if comfort might be possible, by telling her that he could bear it all; that as far as he was concerned title and wealth and a proud name were as nothing to him in comparison with his mother's love. In whatever guise he may have appeared before Lady Desmond, he would not go to his mother with a fainting heart. She should not hear his teeth chatter, nor see his limbs shake. So he sat himself down there that he might become warm, and in five minutes he was fast asleep.

How long he slept he did not know; not very long, probably; but when he awoke it was quite dark. He gazed at the fire for a moment, bethought himself of where he was and why, shook himself to get rid of his slumber, and then roused himself in his chair. As he did so a soft sweet voice close to his shoulder spoke to him. "Herbert," it said, "are you awake?" And he found that his mother, seated by his side on a low stool, had been watching him in his sleep."

"Mother!" he exclaimed.

"Herbert, my child, my son!" And the mother and son were fast locked in each other's arms.

He had sat down there thinking how he would go to his mother and offer her solace in her sorrow; how he would bid her be of good cheer, and encourage her to bear the world as the world had now fallen to her lot. He had pictured to himself that he would find her sinking in despair, and had promised himself that with his vows, his kisses, and his prayers, he would bring her back to her self-confidence, and induce her to acknowledge that God's mercy was yet good to her. But now, on awakening, he discovered that she had

been tending him in his misery, and watching him while he slept, that she might comfort him with her caresses the moment that he awoke to the remembrance of his misfortunes.

"Herbert, Herbert, my son, my son!" she said again, as she pressed him close in her arms.

"Mother, has he told you?"

Yes, she had learned it all; but hardly more than she had known before; or, at any rate, not more than she had expected. As she now told him, for many days past she had felt that this trouble which had fallen upon his father must have come from the circumstances of their marriage. And she would have spoken out, she said, when the idea became clear to her, had she not then been told that Mr. Prendergast had been invited to come thither from London. Then she knew that she had better remain silent, at any rate till his visit had been made.

And Herbert again sat in the chair, and his mother crouched, or almost kneeled, on the cushion at his knee. "Dearest, dearest, dearest mother," he said, as he supported her head against his shoulder, "we must love each other now more than ever we have loved."

"And you forgive us, Herbert, for all that we have done to you?"

"Mother, if you speak in that way to me you will kill me. My darling, darling mother!"

There was but little more said between them upon the matter — but little more, at least, in words; but there was an infinity of caresses, and deep — deep assurances of undying love and confidence. And then she asked him about his bride, and he told her where he had been, and what had happened. "You must not

claim her, Herbert," she said to him. "God is good, and will teach you to bear even that also."

"Must I not?" he asked, with a sadly plaintive voice.

"No, my child. You invited her to share your prosperity, and would it be just —"

"But, mother, if she wills it?"

"It is for you to give her back her troth, then leave it to time and her own heart."

"But if she love me, mother, she will not take back her troth. Would I take back hers because she was in sorrow?"

"Men and women, Herbert, are different. The oak cares not whether the creeper which hangs to it be weak or strong. If it be weak the oak can give it strength. But the staff which has to support the creeper must needs have strength of its own."

He made no further answer to her, but understood that he must do as she bade him. He understood now also, without many arguments within himself, that he had no right to expect from Clara Desmond that adherence to him and his misfortunes which he would have owed to her had she been unfortunate. He understood this now; but still he hoped. "Two hearts that have once become as one cannot be separated," he said to himself that night, as he resolved that it was his duty to write to her, unconditionally returning to her her pledges.

"But, Herbert, what a state you are in!" said Lady Fitzgerald, as the flame of the coal glimmering out, threw a faint light upon his clothes.

"Yes, mother; I have been walking."

"And you are wet!"

"I am nearly dry now. I was wet. But, mother, I am tired and fagged. It would do me good if I could get a glass of wine."

She rang the bell, and gave her orders calmly — though every servant in the house now knew the whole truth, — and then lit a candle herself, and looked at him. "My child, what have you done to yourself? Oh, Herbert, you will be ill! And then, with his arm round her waist, she took him up to her own room, and sat by him while he took off his muddy boots and clammy socks, and made him hot drinks, and tended him as she had done when he was a child. And yet she had that day heard of her great ruin! With truth, indeed, had Mr. Prendergast said that she was made of more enduring material than Sir Thomas.

And she endeavoured to persuade him to go to his bed; but in this he would not listen to her. He must, he said, see his father that night. "You have been with him, mother, since — since —."

"Oh, yes; directly after Mr. Prendergast left me."

"Well?"

"He cried like a child, Herbert. We both sobbed together like two children. It was very piteous. But I think I left him better than he has been. He knows now that those men cannot come again to harass him."

Herbert gnashed his teeth, and clenched his fist as he thought of them; but he could not speak of them, or mention their name before his mother. What must her thoughts be, as she remembered that elder man and looked back to her early childhood!"

"He is very weak," she went on to say: "almost helplessly weak now, and does not seem to think of leaving his bed. I have begged him to let me send

to Dublin for Sir Henry; but he says that nothing ails him."

"And who is with him now, mother?"

"The girls are both there."

"And Mr. Prendergast?"

Lady Fitzgerald then explained to him, that Mr. Prendergast had returned to Dublin that afternoon, starting twenty-four hours earlier than he intended, — or, at any rate, than he had said that he intended. Having done his work there, he had felt that he would now only be in the way. And, moreover, though his work was done at Castle Richmond, other work in the same matter had still to be done in England. Mr. Prendergast had very little doubt as to the truth of Mollett's story; — indeed we may say he had no doubt; otherwise he would hardly have made it known to all that world round Castle Richmond. But nevertheless it behoved him thoroughly to sift the matter. He felt tolerably sure that he should find Mollett in London; and whether he did or no, he should be able to identify, or not to identify, that scoundrel with the Mr. Talbot who had hired Chevy Chase Lodge, in Dorsetshire, and who had undoubtedly married poor Mary Wainwright.

"He left a kind message for you," said Lady Fitzgerald. — My readers must excuse me if I still call her Lady Fitzgerald, for I cannot bring my pen to the use of any other name. And it was so also with the dependents and neighbours of Castle Richmond, when the time came that the poor lady felt that she was bound publicly to drop her title. It was not in her power to drop it; no effort that she could make

would induce those around her to call her by another name.

"He bade me say," she continued, "that if your future course of life should take you to London, you are to go to him, and look to him as another father. He has no child of his own," he said, "and you shall be to him as a son."

"I will be no one's son but yours, — yours and my father's," he said, again embracing her.

And then, when, under his mother's eye, he had eaten and drank and made himself warm, he did go to his father and found both his sisters sitting there. They came and clustered round him, taking hold of his hands and looking up into his face, loving him, and pitying him, and caressing him with their eyes; but standing there by their father's bed, they said little or nothing. Nor did Sir Thomas say much; — except this, indeed, that, just as Herbert was leaving him, he declared with a faint voice, that henceforth his son should be master of that house, and the disposer of that property — "As long as I live!" he exclaimed with his weak voice; "as long as I live!"

"No, father; not so."

"Yes, yes! as long as I live. It will be little that you will have, even so — very little. But so it shall be as long as I live."

Very little indeed, poor man, for, alas! his days were numbered.

And then, when Herbert left the room, Emmeline followed him. She had ever been his dearest sister, and now she longed to be with him that she might tell him how she loved him, and comfort him with her tears. And Clara too — Clara whom she had

welcomed as a sister! — she must learn now how Clara would behave, for she had already made herself sure that her brother had been at Desmond Court, the herald of his own ruin.

“May I come with you, Herbert?” she asked, closing in round him and getting under his arm. How could he refuse her? So they went together and sat over a fire in a small room that was sacred to her and her sister, and there, with many sobs on her part and much would-be brave contempt of poverty on his, they talked over the altered world as it now showed itself before them.

“And you did not see her?” she asked, when with many efforts she had brought the subject round to Clara Desmond and her brother’s walk to Desmond Court.

“No; she left the room at my own bidding. I could not have told it myself to her.”

“And you cannot know then what she would say?”

“No, I cannot know what she would say; but I know now what I must say myself. All that is over, Emmeline. I cannot ask her to marry a beggar.”

“Ask her; no! there will be no need of asking her; she has already given you her promise. You do not think that she will desert you? you do not wish it?”

Herein were contained two distinct questions, the latter of which Herbert did not care to answer. “I shall not call it desertion,” he said; “indeed the proposal will come from me. I shall write to her, telling her that she need think about me no longer. Only that I am so weary I would do it now.”

"And how will she answer you? If she is the Clara that I take her for she will throw your proposal back into your face. She will tell you that it is not in your power to reject her now. She will swear to you, that let your words be what they may, she will think of you — more now than she has ever thought in better days. She will tell you of her love in words that she could not use before. I know she will. I know that she is good, and true, and honest, and generous. Oh, I should die if I thought she were false! But, Herbert, I am sure that she is true. You can write your letter, and we shall see."

Herbert, with wise arguments learned from his mother, reasoned with his sister, explaining to her that Clara was now by no means bound to cling to him; but as he spoke them his arm fastened itself closely round his sister's waist, for the words which she uttered with so much energy were comfortable to him.

And then, seated there, before he moved from the room, he made her bring him pens, ink, and paper, and he wrote his letter to Clara Desmond. She would fain have stayed with him while he did so, sitting at his feet, and looking into his face, and trying to encourage his hope as to what Clara's answer might be; but this he would not allow; so she went again to her father's room, having succeeded in obtaining a promise that Clara's answer should be shown to her. And the letter, when it was written, copied, and recopied, ran as follows: —

"Castle Richmond, — night.

"My dearest Clara," — It was with great difficulty that he could satisfy himself with that, or indeed with

any other mode of commencement. In the short little love-notes which had hitherto gone from him, sent from house to house, he had written to her with appellations of endearment of his own — as all lovers do; and as all lovers seem to think that no lovers have done before themselves — with appellations which are so sweet to those who write, and so musical to those who read, but which sound so ludicrous when barbarously made public in hideous law courts by brazen-browed lawyers with mercenary tongues. In this way only had he written, and each of these sweet silly songs of love had been as full of honey as words could make it. But he had never yet written to her, on a full sheet of paper, a sensible positive letter containing thoughts and facts, as men do write to women and women also to men, when the lollypops and candied sugar-drops of early love have passed away. Now he was to write his first serious letter to her, — and probably his last, — and it was with difficulty that he could get himself over the first three words; but there they were decided on at last.

“My dearest Clara,

“Before you get this your mother will have told you all that which I could not bring myself to speak out yesterday, as long as you were in the room. I am sure you will understand now why I begged you to go away, and will not think the worse of me for doing so. You now know the whole truth, and I am sure that you will feel for us all here.

“Having thought a good deal upon the matter, chiefly during my walk home from Desmond Court, and indeed since I have been at home, I have come to

the resolution that everything between us must be over. It would be unmanly in me to wish to ruin you because I myself am ruined. Our engagement was, of course, made on the presumption that I should inherit my father's estate; as it is I shall not do so, and therefore I beg that you will regard that engagement as at an end. Of my own love for you I will say nothing. But I know that you have loved me truly, and that all this, therefore, will cause you great grief. It is better, however, that it should be so, than that I should seek to hold you to a promise which was made under such different circumstances.

"You will, of course, show this letter to your mother. She, at any rate, will approve of what I am now doing; and so will you when you allow yourself to consider it calmly.

"We have not known each other so long that there is much for us to give back to each other. If you do not think it wrong I should like still to keep that lock of your hair, to remind me of my first love — and, as I think, my only one. And you, I hope, will not be afraid to have near you the one little present that I made you.

"And now, dearest Clara, good-bye. Let us always think, each of the other, as of a very dear friend. May God bless you, and preserve you, and make you happy.

"Yours, with sincere affection,

"HERBERT FITZGERALD."

This, when at last he had succeeded in writing it, he read over and over again; but on each occasion he said to himself that it was cold and passionless, stilted

and unmeaning. It by no means pleased him, and seemed as though it could bring but one answer — a cold acquiescence in the proposal which he so coldly made. But yet he knew not how to improve it. And after all it was a true exposition of that which he had determined to say. All the world — her world and his world — would think it better that they should part; and let the struggle cost him what it would he would teach himself to wish that it might be so — if not for his own sake, then for hers. So he fastened the letter, and taking it with him determined to send it over, so that it should reach Clara quite early on the following morning.

And then having once more visited his father, and once more kissed his mother, he betook himself to bed. It had been with him one of those days which seem to pass away without reference to usual hours and periods. It had been long dark, and he seemed to have been hanging about the house, doing nothing and aiding nobody, till he was weary of himself. So he went off to bed, almost wondering, as he bethought himself of what had happened to him within the last two days, that he was able to bear the burden of his life so easily as he did. He betook himself to bed; and with the letter close at his hand, so that he might despatch it when he awoke, he was soon asleep. After all, that walk, terrible as it had been, was in the end serviceable to him.

He slept without waking till the light of the February morning was beginning to dawn into his room, and then he was roused by a servant knocking at the door. It was grievous enough, that awaking to his sorrow after the pleasant dreams of the night.

"Here is a letter, Mr. Herbert, from Desmond Court," said Richard. "The boy as brought it says as how —"

"A letter from Desmond Court," said Herbert, putting out his hand greedily.

"Yes, Mr. Herbert. The boy's been here this hour and better. I warn't just up and about myself, or I wouldn't have let 'em keep it from you, not half a minute."

"And where is he? I have a letter to send to Desmond Court. But never mind. Perhaps —"

"It's no good minding, for the gossoon's gone back any ways." And then Richard, having drawn the blind, and placed a little table by the bed-head, left his young master to read the despatch from Desmond Court. Herbert, till he saw the writing, feared that it was from the countess; but the letter was from Clara. She also had thought good to write before she betook herself to bed, and she had been earlier in despatching her messenger. Here is her letter:

"Dear Herbert, my own Herbert,

"I have heard it all. But remember this; nothing, nothing, nothing, *nothing* can make any change between you and me. I will hear of no arguments that are to separate us. I know beforehand what you will say, but I will not regard it — not in the least. I love you ten times the more for all your unhappiness; and as I would have shared your good fortune, I claim my right to share your bad fortune. *Pray believe me*, that nothing shall turn me from this; for I will *not be given up*.

"Give my kindest love to your dear, dear, dearest

mother — my mother, as she is and must be; and to my darling girls. I do so wish I could be with them, and with you, my own Herbert. I cannot help writing in confusion, but I will explain all when I see you. I have been so unhappy.

“Your own faithful
“CLARA.”

Having read this, Herbert Fitzgerald, in spite of his affliction, was comforted.

CHAPTER VII.

For a' that and a' that.

HERBERT as he started from his bed with this letter in his hand felt that he could yet hold up his head against all that the world could do to him. How could he be really unhappy while he possessed such an assurance of love as this, and while his mother was able to give him so glorious an example of endurance? He was not really unhappy. The low-spirited broken-hearted wretchedness of the preceding day seemed to have departed from him as he hurried on his clothes, and went off to his sister's room that he might show his letter to Emmeline in accordance with the promise he had made her.

“May I come in?” he said, knocking at the door. “I must come in, for I have something to show you.” But the two girls were dressing and he could not be admitted. Emmeline, however, promised to come to him, and in about three minutes she was out in the cold little sitting-room which adjoined their bed-room with her

slippers on, and her dressing gown wrapped round her, an object presentable to no male eyes but those of her brother.

"Emmeline," said he, "I have got a letter this morning."

"Not from Clara?"

"Yes, from Clara. There; you may read it;" and he handed her the precious epistle.

"But she could not have got your letter?" said Emmeline, before she looked at the one in her hand.

"Certainly not, for I have it here. I must write another now; but in truth I do not know what to say. I can be as generous as she is."

And then his sister read the letter. "My own Clara!" she exclaimed, as she saw what was the tenor of it. "Did I not tell you so, Herbert? I knew well what she would do and say. Love you ten times better! — of course she does. What honest girl would not? My own beautiful Clara, I knew I could depend on her. I did not doubt her for one moment." But in this particular it must be acknowledged that Miss Emmeline Fitzgerald hardly confined herself to the strictest veracity, for she had lain awake half the night perplexed with doubt. What, oh what, if Clara should be untrue! Such had been the burden of her doubting midnight thoughts. "I will not be given up," she continued, quoting the letter. "No; of course not. And I tell you what, Herbert, you must not dare to talk of giving her up. Money and titles may be tossed to and fro, but not hearts. How beautifully she speaks of dear mamma!" and now the tears began to run down the young lady's cheeks. "Oh, I do wish she could be with us! My darling, darling, darling Clara! Unhappy?"

Yes: I am sure Lady Desmond will give her no peace. But never mind. She will be true through it all; and I said so from the first." And then she fell to crying, and embracing her brother, and declaring that nothing now should make her altogether unhappy.

"But, Emmeline, you must not think that I shall take her at her word. It is very generous of her —"

"Nonsense, Herbert!" And then there was another torrent of eloquence, in answering which Herbert found that his arguments were of very little efficacy.

And now we must go back to Desmond Court, and see under what all but overwhelming difficulties poor Clara wrote her affectionate letter. And in the first place it should be pointed out how very wrong Herbert had been in going to Desmond Court on foot, through the mud and rain. A man can hardly bear himself nobly unless his outer aspect be in some degree noble. It may be very sad, this having to admit that the tailor does in great part make the man; but such I fear is undoubtedly the fact. Could the Chancellor look dignified on the woolsack, if he had had an accident with his wig, or allowed his robes to be torn or soiled? Does not half the piety of a bishop reside in his lawn sleeves, and all his meekness in his anti-virile apron? Had Herbert understood the world he would have had out the best pair of horses standing in the Castle Richmond stables, when going to Desmond Court on such an errand. He would have brushed his hair, and anointed himself; he would have clothed himself in his rich Spanish cloak; he would have seen that his hat was brushed, and his boots spotless; and then with all due solemnity but with head erect, he would have told his tale out boldly. The countess would still have

wished to be rid of him, hearing that he was a pauper; but she would have lacked the courage to turn him from the house as she had done.

But seeing how woe-begone he was and wretched, how mean to look at, and low in his outward presence, she had been able to assume the mastery, and had kept it throughout the interview. And having done this her opinion of his prowess naturally became low, and she felt that he would have been unable to press his cause against her.

For some time after he had departed, she sat alone in the room in which she had received him. She expected every minute that Clara would come down to her, still wishing however that she might be left for a while alone. But Clara did not come, and she was able to pursue her thoughts.

How very terrible was this tragedy that had fallen out in her close neighbourhood! That was the first thought that came to her now that Herbert had left her. How terrible, overwhelming, and fatal! What calamity could fall upon a woman so calamitous as this which had now overtaken that poor lady at Castle Richmond? Could she live and support such a burden? Could she bear the eyes of people, when she knew the light in which she must be now regarded? To lose at one blow, her name, her pride of place, her woman's rank and high respect! Could it be possible that she would still live on? It was thus that Lady Desmond thought; and had any one told her that this degraded mother would that very day come down from her room, and sit watchful by her sleeping son, in order that she might comfort and encourage him when he awoke, she would not have found it in her heart to believe such a

marvel. But then Lady Desmond knew but one solace in her sorrows — had but one comfort in her sad reflections. She was Countess of Desmond, and that was all. To Lady Fitzgerald had been vouchsafed other solace and other comforts.

And then, on one point the countess made herself fixed as fate, by thinking and re-thinking upon it till no doubt remained upon her mind. The match between Clara and Herbert must be broken off, let the cost be what it might; and — a point on which there was more room for doubt, and more pain in coming to a conclusion — that other match with the more fortunate cousin must be encouraged and carried out. For herself, if her hope was small while Owen was needy and of poor account, what hope could there be now that he would be rich and great? Moreover, Owen loved Clara, and not herself; and Clara's hand would once more be vacant and ready for the winning. For herself, her only chance had been in Clara's coming marriage.

In all this she knew that there would be difficulty. She was sure enough that Clara would at first feel the imprudent generosity of youth, and offer to join her poverty to Herbert's poverty. That was a matter of course. She, Lady Desmond herself, would have done this, at Clara's age, — so at least to herself she said, and also to her daughter. But a little time, and a little patience, and a little care would set all this in a proper light. Herbert would go away and would gradually be forgotten. Owen would again come forth from beneath the clouds, with renewed splendour; and then, was it not probable that, in her very heart of hearts, Owen was the man whom Clara had ever loved?

And thus having realized to herself the facts which

Herbert had told her, she prepared to make them known to her daughter. She got up from her chair, intending at first to seek her, and then, changing her purpose, rang the bell and sent for her. She was astonished to find how violently she herself was affected; not so much by the circumstances, as by this duty which had fallen to her of telling them to her child. She put one hand upon the other and felt that she herself was in a tremor, and was conscious that the blood was running quick round her heart. Clara came down, and going to her customary seat waited till her mother should speak to her.

"Mr. Fitzgerald has brought very dreadful news," Lady Desmond said, after a minute's pause.

"Oh mamma!" said Clara. She had expected bad tidings, having thought of all manner of miseries while she had been up stairs alone; but there was that in her mother's voice which seemed to be worse than the worst of her anticipations.

"Dreadful, indeed, my child! It is my duty to tell them to you; but I must caution you, before I do so, to place a guard upon your feelings. That which I have to say must necessarily alter all your future prospects, and, unfortunately, make your marrying Herbert Fitzgerald quite impossible."

"Mamma!" she exclaimed, with a loud voice, jumping from her chair. "Not marry him! Why; what can he have done? Is it his wish to break it off?"

Lady Desmond had calculated that she would best effect her object by at once impressing her daughter with the idea that, under the circumstances which were about to be narrated, this marriage would not only be imprudent, but altogether impracticable and out of the

question. Clara must be made to understand at once, that the circumstances gave her no option, — that the affair was of such a nature as to make it a thing manifest to everybody, that she could not now marry Herbert Fitzgerald. She must not be left to think whether she could, or whether she could not, exercise her own generosity. And therefore, not without discretion, the countess announced at once to her the conclusion at which it would be necessary to arrive. But Clara was not a girl to adopt such a conclusion on any other judgment than her own, or to be led in such a matter by the feelings of any other person.

“Sit down, my dear, and I will explain it all. But, dearest Clara, grieved as I must be to grieve you, I am bound to tell you again that it must be as I say. For both your sakes it must be so; but especially, perhaps, for his. But when I have told you my story, you will understand that this must be so.”

“Tell me, then, mother.” She said this, for Lady Desmond had again paused.

“Won’t you sit down, dearest?”

“Well, yes; it does not matter;” and Clara, at her mother’s bidding, sat down, and then the story was told to her.

It was a difficult tale for a mother to tell to so young a child — to a child whom she had regarded as being so very young. There were various little points of law which she thought that she was obliged to explain; how it was necessary that the Castle Richmond property should go to an heir-at-law, and how it was impossible that Herbert should be that heir-at-law, seeing that he had not been born in lawful wedlock. All these things Lady Desmond attempted to explain,

or was about to attempt such explanation, but desisted on finding that her daughter understood them as well as she herself did. And then she had to make it also intelligible to Clara that Owen would be called on, when Sir Thomas should die, to fill the position and enjoy the wealth accruing to the heir of Castle Richmond. When Owen Fitzgerald's name was mentioned a slight blush came upon Clara's cheek; it was very slight, but nevertheless her mother saw it, and took advantage of it to say a word in Owen's favour.

"Poor Owen!" she said. "He will not be the first to triumph in this change of fortune."

"I am sure he will not," said Clara. "He is much too generous for that." And then the countess began to hope that the task might not be so very difficult. Ignorant woman! Had she been able to read one page in her daughter's heart, she would have known that the task was impossible. After that the story was told out to the end without further interruption; and then Clara, hiding her face within her hands on the head of the sofa, uttered one long piteous moan.

"It is all very dreadful," said the countess.

"Oh, Lady Fitzgerald, dear Lady Fitzgerald!" sobbed forth Clara.

"Yes, indeed. Poor Lady Fitzgerald! Her fate is so dreadful that I know not how to think of it."

"But, mamma —" and as she spoke Clara pushed back from her forehead her hair with both her hands, showing, as she did so, the form of her forehead, and the firmness of purpose that was written there, legible to any eyes that could read. "But, mamma, you are wrong about my not marrying Herbert Fitzgerald. Why should I not marry him? Not now, as we, per-

haps, might have done but for this; but at some future time when he may think himself able to support a wife. Mamma, I shall not break our engagement; certainly not."

This was said in a tone of voice so very decided that Lady Desmond had to acknowledge to herself that there would be difficulty in her task. But she still did not doubt that she would have her way, if not by concession on the part of her daughter, then by concession on the part of Herbert Fitzgerald. "I can understand your generosity of feeling, my dear," she said; "and at your age I should probably have felt the same. And therefore I do not ask you to take any steps towards breaking your engagement. The offer must come from Mr. Fitzgerald, and I have no doubt that it will come. He, as a man of honour, will know that he cannot now offer to marry you; and he will also know, as a man of sense, that it would be ruin for him to think of — of such a marriage under his present circumstances."

"Why, mamma? Why should it be ruin to him?"

"Why, my dear? Do you think that a wife with a titled name can be of advantage to a young man who has not only got his bread to earn, but even to look out for a way in which he may earn it?"

"If there be nothing to hurt him but the titled name, that difficulty shall be easily conquered."

"Dearest Clara, you know what I mean. You must be aware that a girl of your rank, and brought up as you have been, cannot be a fitting wife for a man who will now have to struggle with the world at every turn."

Clara, as this was said to her, and as she prepared to answer, blushed deeply, for she felt herself obliged

to speak on a matter which had never yet been subject of speech between her and her mother. "Mamma," she said, "I cannot agree with you there. I may have what the world calls rank; but nevertheless we have been poor, and I have not been brought up with costly habits. Why should I not live with my husband as — as — as poorly as I have lived with my mother? You are not rich, dear mamma, and why should I be?"

Lady Desmond did not answer her daughter at once; but she was not silent because an answer failed her. Her answer would have been ready enough had she dared to speak it out. "Yes, it is true; we have been poor. I, your mother, did by my imprudence bring down upon my head and on yours absolute, unrelenting, pitiless poverty. And because I did so, I have never known one happy hour. I have spent my days in bitter remorse — in regretting the want of those things which it has been the more terrible to want as they are the customary attributes of people of my rank. I have been driven to hate those around me who have been rich, because I have been poor. I have been utterly friendless because I have been poor. I have been able to do none of those sweet, soft, lovely things, by doing which other women win the smiles of the world, because I have been poor. Poverty and rank together have made me wretched — have left me without employment, without society, and without love. And now would you tell me that because I have been poor you would choose to be poor also?" It would have been thus that she would have answered, had she been accustomed to speak out her thoughts. But she had ever been accustomed to conceal them.

"I was thinking quite as much of him as of you," at last she said. "Such an engagement to you would be fraught with much misery, but to him it would be ruinous."

"I do not think it, mamma."

"But it is not necessary, Clara, that you should do anything. You will wait, of course, and see what Herbert may say himself."

"Herbert —"

"Wait half a moment, my love. I shall be very much surprised if we do not find that Mr. Fitzgerald himself will tell you that the match must be abandoned."

"But that will make no difference, mamma."

"No difference, my dear! You cannot marry him against his will. You do not mean to say that you would wish to bind him to his engagement, if he himself thought it would be to his disadvantage?"

"Yes; I will bind him to it."

"Clara!"

"I will make him know that it is not for his disadvantage. I will make him understand that a friend and companion who loves him as I love him — as no one else will ever love him now — for I love him because he was so high-fortuned when he came to me, and because he is now so low-fortuned — that such a wife as I will be, cannot be a burden to him. I will cling to him whether he throws me off or no. A word from him might have broken our engagement before, but a thousand words cannot do it now."

Lady Desmond stared at her daughter, for Clara, in her excitement, was walking up and down the room. The countess had certainly not expected all this, and she was beginning to think that the subject for the

present might as well be left alone. But Clara had not done as yet.

"Mamma," she said, "I will not do anything without telling you; but I cannot leave Herbert in all his misery to think that I have no sympathy with him. I shall write to him."

"Not before he writes to you, Clara! You would not wish to be indelicate?"

"I know but little about delicacy — what people call delicacy; but I will not be ungenerous or unkind. Mamma, you brought us two together. Was it not so? Did you not do so, fearing that I might — might still care for Herbert's cousin? You did it; and half wishing to obey you, half attracted by all his goodness, I did learn to love Herbert Fitzgerald; and I did learn to forget — no; but I learned to cease to love his cousin. You did this and rejoiced at it; and now what you did must remain done."

"But, dearest Clara, it will not be for his good."

"It shall be for his good. Mamma, I would not desert him now for all that the world could give me. Neither for mother nor brother could I do that. Without your leave I would not have given him the right to regard me as his own; but now I cannot take that right back again, even at your wish. I must write to him at once, mamma, and tell him this."

"Clara, at any rate you must not do that; that at least I must forbid."

"Mother, you cannot forbid it now," the daughter said, after walking twice the length of the room in silence. "If I be not allowed to send a letter, I shall leave the house and go to him."

This was all very dreadful. Lady Desmond was

astounded at the manner in which her daughter carried herself, and the voice with which she spoke. The form of her face was altered, and the very step with which she trod was unlike her usual gait. What would Lady Desmond do? She was not prepared to confine her daughter as a prisoner, nor could she publicly forbid the people about the place to go upon her message.

"I did not expect that you would have been so undutiful," she said.

"I hope I am not so," Clara answered. "But now my first duty is to him. Did you not sanction our loving each other? People cannot call back their hearts and their pledges."

"You will at any rate wait till to-morrow, Clara."

"It is dark now," said Clara, despondingly, looking out through the window upon the falling night; "I suppose I cannot send to-night."

"And you will show me what you write, dearest?"

"No, mamma. If I wrote it for your eyes it could not be the same as if I wrote it only for his."

Very gloomy, sombre, and silent, was the Countess of Desmond all that night. Nothing further was said about the Fitzgeralds between her and her daughter, before they went to bed; and then Lady Desmond did speak a few futile words.

"Clara," she said. "You had better think over what we have been saying, in bed to-night. You will be more collected to-morrow morning."

"I shall think of it of course," said Clara; "but thinking can make no difference," and then just touching her mother's forehead with her lips she went off slowly to her room.

What sort of a letter she wrote when she got there

we have already seen; and have seen also that she took effective steps to have her letter carried to Castle Richmond at an hour sufficiently early in the morning. There was no danger that the countess would stop the message, for the letter had been read twenty times by Emmeline and Mary, and had been carried by Herbert to his mother's room, before Lady Desmond had left her bed. "Do not set your heart on it too warmly," said Herbert's mother to him.

"But is she not excellent?" said Herbert. "It is because she speaks of you in such a way —"

"You would not wish to bring her into misery because of her excellence."

"But, mother, I am still a man," said Herbert. This was too much for the suffering woman, the one fault of whose life had brought her son to such a pass, and throwing her arm round his neck she wept upon his shoulders.

There were other messengers went and came that day between Desmond Court and Castle Richmond. Clara and her mother saw nothing of each other early in the morning; they did not breakfast together, nor was there a word said between them on the subject of the Fitzgeralds. But Lady Desmond early in the morning — early for her that is — sent her note also to Castle Richmond. It was addressed to Aunt Letty, Miss Letitia Fitzgerald, and went to say that Lady Desmond was very anxious to see Miss Letty. Under the present circumstances of the family, as described to Lady Desmond by Mr. Herbert Fitzgerald, she felt that she could not ask to see "his mother"; — it was thus that she overcame the difficulty which presented itself to her as to the proper title now to be given to Lady

Fitzgerald; — but perhaps Miss Letty would be good enough to see her, if she called at such and such an hour. Aunt Letty, much perplexed, had nothing for it, but to say that she would see her. The countess must now be looked on as closely connected with the family — at any rate until that match were broken off; and therefore Aunt Letty had no alternative. And so, precisely at the hour named, the countess and Aunt Letty were seated together in the little breakfast-room of which mention has before been made.

No two women were ever closeted together who were more unlike each other, — except that they had one common strong love for family rank. But in Aunt Letty it must be acknowledged that this passion was not unwholesome or malevolent in its course of action. She delighted in being a Fitzgerald, and in knowing that her branch of the Fitzgeralds had been considerable people ever since her Norman ancestor had come over to Ireland with Strongbow. But then she had a useful idea that considerable people should do a considerable deal of good. Her family pride operated more inwardly than outwardly, — inwardly as regarded her own family, and not outwardly as regarded the world. Her brother, and her nephew, and her sister-in-law, and nieces, were, she thought, among the highest commoners in Ireland; they were gentlefolks of the first water, and walked openly before the world accordingly, proving their claim to gentle blood by gentle deeds and honest conduct. Perhaps she did think too much of the Fitzgeralds of Castle Richmond; but the sin was one of which no recording angel could have made much in his entry. That she was a stupid old woman, prejudiced in the highest degree, and horribly ignorant of all the

world beyond her own very narrow circle, — even of that, I do not think that the recording angel could, under the circumstances, have made a great deal.

And now how was her family pride affected by this horrible catastrophe that had been made known to her? Herbert the heir, whom as heir she had almost idolized, was nobody. Her sister-in-law, whom she had learned to love with the whole of her big heart, was no sister-in-law. Her brother was one, who, in lieu of adding glory to the family, would always be regarded as the most unfortunate of the Fitzgerald baronets. But with her, human nature was stronger than family pride, and she loved them all, not better, but more tenderly than ever.

The two ladies were closeted together for about two hours; and then, when the door was opened, Aunt Letty might have been seen with her bonnet much on one side, and her poor old eyes and cheeks red with weeping. The countess, too, held her handkerchief to her eyes as she got back into her pony carriage. She saw no one else there but Aunt Letty; and from her mood when she returned to Desmond Court it might be surmised that from Aunt Letty she had learned little to comfort her.

“They will be beggars!” she said to herself — “beggars!” — when the door of her own room had closed upon her. And there are few people in the world who held such beggary in less esteem than did the Countess of Desmond. It may almost be said that she hated herself on account of her own poverty.

CHAPTER VIII.

III News Flies Fast.

A DULL, cold, wretched week passed over their heads at Castle Richmond, during which they did nothing but realize the truth of their position; and then came a letter from Mr. Prendergast, addressed to Herbert, in which he stated that such inquiries as he had hitherto made left no doubt on his mind that the man named Mollett, who had lately made repeated visits at Castle Richmond, was he who had formerly taken the house in Dorsetshire under the name of Talbot. In his packet Mr. Prendergast sent copies of documents and of verbal evidence which he had managed to obtain; but with the actual details of these it is not necessary that I should trouble those who are following me in this story. In this letter Mr. Prendergast also recommended that some intercourse should be had with Owen Fitzgerald. It was expedient, he said, that all the parties concerned should recognise Owen's position as the heir presumptive to the title and estate; and as he, he said, had found Mr. Fitzgerald of Hap House to be forbearing, generous, and high-spirited, he thought that this intercourse might be conducted without enmity or ill blood. And then he suggested that Mr. Somers should see Owen Fitzgerald.

All this Herbert explained to his father gently and without complaint; but it seemed now as though Sir Thomas had ceased to interest himself in the matter. Such battle as it had been in his power to make he had made to save his son's heritage and his wife's name and happiness, even at the expense of his own con-

science. That battle had gone altogether against him, and now there was nothing left for him but to turn his face to the wall and die. Absolute ruin, through his fault, had come upon him and all that belonged to him, — ruin that would now be known to the world at large; and it was beyond his power to face that world again. In that the glory was gone from the house of his son, and of his son's mother, the glory was gone from his own house. He made no attempt to leave his bed, though strongly recommended so to do by his own family doctor. And then a physician came down from Dublin, who could only feel, whatever he might say, how impossible it is to administer to a mind diseased. The mind of that poor man was diseased past all curing in this world, and there was nothing left for him but to die.

Herbert, of course, answered Clara's letter, but he did not go over to see her during that week, nor indeed for some little time afterwards. He answered it at considerable length, professing his ready willingness to give back to Clara her troth, and even recommending her, with very strong logic and unanswerable arguments of worldly sense, to regard their union as unwise and even impossible; but nevertheless there protruded through all his sense and all his rhetoric, evidences of love and of a desire for love returned, which were much more unanswerable than his arguments, and much stronger than his logic. Clara read his letter, not as he would have advised her to read it, but certainly in the manner which best pleased his heart, and answered it again, declaring that all that he said was no avail. He might be false to her if he would. If through fickleness of heart and purpose he

chose to abandon her, she would never complain — never at least aloud. But she would not be false to him; nor were her inclinations such as to make it likely that she should be fickle, even though her affection might be tried by a delay of years. Love with her had been too serious to be thrown aside. All which was rather strong language on the part of a young lady, but was thought by those other young ladies at Castle Richmond to show the very essence of becoming young-ladyhood. They pronounced Clara to be perfect in feeling and in judgment, and Herbert could not find it in his heart to contradict them.

And of all these doings, writings, and resolves, Clara dutifully told her mother. Poor Lady Desmond was at her wits' end in the matter. She could scold her daughter, but she had no other power of doing anything. Clara had so taken the bit between her teeth that it was no longer possible to check her with any usual rein. In these days young ladies are seldom deprived by force of paper, pen, and ink; and the absolute incarceration of such an offender would be still more unusual. Another countess would have taken her daughter away, either to London and a series of balls, or to the South of Italy, or to the family castle in the North of Scotland; but poor Lady Desmond had not the power of other countesses. Now that it was put to the trial, she found that she had no power, even over her own daughter. "Mamma, it was your own doing," Clara would say; and the countess would feel that this alluded not only to her daughter's engagement with Herbert the disinherited, but also to her non-engagement with Owen the heir.

Under these circumstances Lady Desmond sent for

her son. The earl was still at Eton, but was now grown to be almost a man — such a man as forward Eton boys are at sixteen — tall, and lathy, and handsome, with soft incipient whiskers, a bold brow and blushing cheeks, with all a boy's love for frolic still strong within him, but some touch of a man's pride to check it. In her difficulty Lady Desmond sent for the young earl, who had now not been home since the previous midsummer, hoping that his young manhood might have some effect in saving his sister from the disgrace of a marriage which would make her so totally bankrupt both in wealth and rank.

Mr. Somers did go once to Hap House, at Herbert's instigation; but very little came of his visit. He had always disliked Owen, regarding him as an unthrif, any close connexion with whom could only bring contamination on the Fitzgerald property; and Owen had returned the feeling tenfold. His pride had been wounded by what he had considered to be the agent's insolence, and he had stigmatised Mr. Somers to his friends as a self-seeking, mercenary prig. Very little, therefore, came of the visit. Mr. Somers, to give him his due, had attempted to do his best; being anxious, for Herbert's sake, to conciliate Owen; perhaps having — and why not? — some eye to the future agency. But Owen was hard, and cold, and uncommunicative, — very unlike what he had before been to Mr. Prendergast. But then Mr. Prendergast had never offended his pride.

“You may tell my cousin Herbert,” he said, with some little special emphasis on the word cousin, “that I shall be glad to see him, as soon as he feels himself able to meet me. It will be for the good of us both

that we should have some conversation together. Will you tell him, Mr. Somers, that I shall be happy to go to him, or to see him here? Perhaps my going to Castle Richmond, during the present illness of Sir Thomas, may be inconvenient." And this was all that Mr. Somers could get from him.

In a very short time the whole story became known to everybody round the neighbourhood. And what would have been the good of keeping it secret? There are some secrets, — kept as secrets because they cannot well be discussed openly, — which may be allowed to leak out with so much advantage! The day must come, and that apparently at no distant time, when all the world would know the fate of that Fitzgerald family; when Sir Owen must walk into the hall of Castle Richmond, the undoubted owner of the mansion and demesne. Why then keep it secret? Herbert openly declared his wish to Mr. Somers that there should be no secret in the matter. "There is no disgrace," he said, thinking of his mother; "nothing to be ashamed of, let the world say what it will."

Down in the servants' hall the news came to them gradually, whispered about from one to another. They hardly understood what it meant, or how it had come to pass; but they did know that their master's marriage had been no marriage, and that their master's son was no heir. Mrs. Jones said not a word in the matter to any one. Indeed, since that day on which she had been confronted with Mollett, she had not associated with the servants at all, but had kept herself close to her mistress. She understood what it all meant perfectly; and the depth of the tragedy had so cowed her

spirit that she hardly dared to speak of it. Who told the servants, — or who does tell servants of such matters, it is impossible to say; but before Mr. Prendergast had been three days out of the house they all knew that the Mr. Owen of Hap House was to be the future master of Castle Richmond.

"An' a sore day it'll be; a sore day, a sore day," said Richard, seated in an arm-chair by the fire, at the end of the servants' hall, shaking his head despondingly.

"Faix, an' you may say that," said Corney, the footman. "That Misther Owen will go tattering away to the divil, when the old place comes into his hans. No fear he'll make it fly."

"Sorrow seize the ould lawyer for coming down here at all at all," said the cook.

"I never knew no good come of thim dry ould bachelors," said Biddy the housemaid; "specially the Englishers."

"The two of yez are no better nor simpletons," said Richard, magisterially. "Twarn't he that done it. The likes of him couldn't do the likes o' that."

"And what was it as done it?" said Biddy.

"Ax no questions, and may be you'll be tould no lies," replied Richard.

"In course we all knows it's along of her ladyship's marriage which warn't no marriage," said the cook. "May the heavens be her bed when the Lord takes her! A betther lady nor a kinder-hearted niver stepped the floor of a kitchen."

"Deed an that's thru for you, cook," said Biddy, with the corner of her apron up to her eyes. "But

tell me, Richard, won't poor Mr. Herbert have nothing?"

"Never you mind about Mr. Herbert," said Richard, who had seen Bidy grow up from a slip of a girl, and therefore was competent to snub her at every word.

"Ah, but I do mind," said the girl. "I minds more about him than ere a one of 'em; and av' that Lady Clara won't have em a cause of this —"

"Not a step she won't, thin," said Corney. "She'll go back to Mr. Owen. He was her fust love. You'll see else." And so the matter was discussed in the servants' hall at the great house.

But perhaps the greatest surprise, the greatest curiosity, and the greatest consternation, were felt at the parsonage. The rumour reached Mr. Townsend at one of the Relief Committees; — and Mrs. Townsend from the mouth of one of her servants, during his absence, on the same day; and when Mr. Townsend returned to the parsonage, they met each other with blank faces.

"Oh, Æneas!" said she, before she could get his greatcoat from off his shoulders, "have you heard the news?"

"What news? — about Castle Richmond?"

"Yes; about Castle Richmond." And then she knew that he had heard it.

Some glimmering of Lady Fitzgerald's early history had been known to both of them, as it had been known almost to all in the country; but in late years this history had been so much forgotten, that men had ceased to talk of it, and this calamity therefore came with all the weight of a new misfortune.

"And, Æneas, who told you of it?" she asked, as

they sat together over the fire, in their dingy, dirty parlour.

"Well, strange to say, I heard it first from Father Barney."

"Oh, mercy! and is it all about the country in that way?"

"Herbert, you know, has not been at any one of the Committees for the last ten days, and Mr. Somers, for the last week past has been as silent as death; so much so, that that horrid creature, Father Columb, would have made a regular set speech the other day at Gortnaclough, if I hadn't put him down."

"Dear, dear, dear!" said Mrs. Townsend.

"And I was talking to Father Barney about this, to-day — about Mr. Somers, that is."

"Yes, yes, yes!"

"And then he said, 'I suppose you know what has happened at Castle Richmond?'"

"How on earth had he learned?" asked Mrs. Townsend, jealous that a Roman Catholic priest should have heard such completely Protestant news before the Protestant parson and his wife.

"Oh, they learn everything — from the servants I suppose."

"Of course, the mean creatures!" said Mrs. Townsend, forgetting, probably, her own little conversation with her own man of all work that morning. "But go on, Æneas."

"'What has happened,' said I, 'at Castle Richmond?' 'Oh, you haven't heard,' said he. And I was obliged to own that I had not, though I saw that it gave him a kind of triumph. 'Why,' said he, 'very bad news has reached them indeed; the worst of news.'

And then he told me about Lady Fitzgerald. To give him his due, I must say that he was very sorry — very sorry. ‘The poor young fellow!’ he said — ‘The poor young fellow!’ And I saw that he turned away his face to hide a tear.”

“Crocodile tears!” said Mrs. Townsend.

“No, they were not,” said her reverend lord; “and Father Barney is not so bad as I once thought him.”

“I hope you are not going over too, Æneas?” And his consort almost cried as such a horrid thought entered her head. In her ideas any feeling short of absolute enmity to a servant of the Church of Rome was an abandonment of some portion of the Protestant basis of the Church of England. “The small end of the wedge,” she would call it, when people around her would suggest that the heart of a Roman Catholic priest might possibly not be altogether black and devilish.

“Well, I hope not, my dear,” said Mr. Townsend, with a slight touch of sarcasm in his voice. “But, as I was saying, Father Barney told me then that this Mr. Prendergast —”

“Oh, I had known of his being there from the day of his coming.”

“This Mr. Prendergast, it seems, knew the whole affair, from beginning to end.”

“But how did he know it, Æneas?”

“That I can’t tell you. He was a friend of Sir Thomas before his marriage; I know that. And he has told them that it is of no use their attempting to keep it secret. He was over at Hap House with Owen Fitzgerald before he went.

“And has Owen Fitzgerald been told?”

"Yes; he has been told — told that he is to be the next heir; so Father Barney says."

Mrs. Townsend wished in her heart that the news could have reached her through a purer source; but all this, coming though it did from Father Barney, tallied too completely with what she herself had heard to leave on her mind any doubt of its truth. And then she began to think of Lady Fitzgerald and her condition, of Herbert and of his, and of the condition of them all, till by degrees her mind passed away from Father Barney and all his iniquities.

"It is very dreadful," she said, in a low voice.

"Very dreadful, very dreadful. I hardly know how to think of it. And I fear that Sir Thomas will not live many months to give them even the benefit of his life interest."

"And when he dies all will be gone?"

"Everything."

And then tears stood in her eyes also, and in his also after a while. It is very easy for a clergyman in his pulpit to preach eloquently upon the vileness of worldly wealth, and the futility of worldly station; but where will you ever find one, who, when the time of proof shall come, will give proof that he himself feels what he preaches? Mr. Townsend was customarily loud and eager upon this subject, and yet he was now shedding tears because his young friend Herbert was deprived of his inheritance.

CHAPTER IX.

Pallida Mors.

MR. SOMERS, returning from Hap House, gave Owen's message to Herbert Fitzgerald, but at the same time told him that he did not think any good would come of such a meeting.

"I went over there," he said, "because I would not willingly omit anything that Mr. Prendergast had suggested; but I did not expect any good to come of it. You know what I have always thought of Owen Fitzgerald."

"But Mr. Prendergast said that he behaved so well."

"He did not know Prendergast, and was cowed for the moment by what he had heard. That was natural enough. You do as you like, however; only do not have him over to Castle Richmond."

Owen, however, did not trust solely to Mr. Somers, but on the following day wrote to Herbert, suggesting that they had better meet, and begging that the place and time of meeting might be named. He himself again suggested Hap House, and declared that he would be at home on any day and at any hour that his "cousin" might name, "only," as he added, "the sooner the better." Herbert wrote back by the same messenger, saying that he would be with him early on the following morning; and on the following morning he drove up to the door of Hap House, while Owen was still sitting with his coffee-pot and knife and fork before him.

Captain Donnellan, whom we saw there on the occasion of our first morning visit, was now gone, and

Owen Fitzgerald was all alone in his home. The captain had been an accustomed guest, spending perhaps half his time there during the hunting season; but since Mr. Prendergast had been at Hap House, he had been made to understand that the master would fain be alone. And since that day Owen had never hunted, nor been noticed in his old haunts, nor had been seen talking to his old friends. He had remained at home, sitting over the fire thinking, wandering up and down his own avenue, or standing about the stable, idly, almost unconscious of the grooming of his horses. Once and once only he had been mounted; and then as the dusk of evening was coming on he had trotted over quickly to Desmond Court, as though he had in hand some purport of great moment; but if so he changed his mind when he came to the gate, for he walked on slowly for three or four hundred yards beyond it, and then turning his horse's head, slowly made his way back past the gate, and then trotted quickly home to Hap House. In these moments of his life he must make or mar himself for life; 'twas so that he felt it; and how should he make himself, or how avoid the marring? That was the question which he now strove to answer.

When Herbert entered the room, he rose from his chair, and walked quickly up to his visitor, with extended hand, and a look of welcome in his face. His manner was very different from that with which he had turned and parted from his cousin, not many days since in the demesne at Castle Richmond. Then he had intended absolutely to defy Herbert Fitzgerald; but there was no spirit of defiance now, either in his hand, or face, or in the tone of his voice.

"I am very glad you have come," said he. "I hope you understood that I would have gone to you, only that I thought it might be better for both of us to be here."

Herbert said something to the effect that he had been quite willing to come over to Hap House. But he was not at the moment so self-possessed as the other, and hardly knew how to begin the subject which was to be discussed between them.

"Of course you know that Mr. Prendergast was here?" said Owen.

"Oh yes," said Herbert.

"And Mr. Somers also? I tell you fairly, Herbert, that when Mr. Somers came, I was not willing to say much to him. What has to be said must be said between you and me, and not to any third party. I could not open my heart, nor yet speak my thoughts to Mr. Somers."

In answer to this, Herbert again said that Owen need have no scruple in speaking to him. "It is all plain sailing; too plain, I fear," said he. "There is no doubt whatever now as to the truth of what Mr. Prendergast has told you."

And then having said so much, Herbert waited for Owen to speak. He, Herbert himself, had little or nothing to say. Castle Richmond with its title and acres was not to be his, but was to be the property of this man with whom he was now sitting. When that was actually and positively understood between them, there was nothing further to be said; nothing as far as Herbert knew. That other sorrow of his, that other and deeper sorrow which affected his mother's name and station, — as to that he did not find himself

called on to speak to Owen Fitzgerald. Nor was it necessary that he should say anything as to his great consolation — the consolation which had reached him from Clara Desmond.

“And is it true, Herbert,” asked Owen at last, “that my uncle is so very ill?” In the time of their kindly intercourse, Owen had always called Sir Thomas his uncle, though latterly he had ceased to do so.

“He is very ill; very ill indeed,” said Herbert. This was a subject in which Owen had certainly a right to feel interested, seeing that his own investiture would follow immediately on the death of Sir Thomas; but Herbert almost felt that the question might as well have been spared. It had been asked, however, almost solely with the view of gaining some few moments.

“Herbert,” he said at last, standing up from his chair, as he made an effort to begin his speech, “I don’t know how far you will believe me when I tell you that all this news has caused me great sorrow. I grieve for your father and your mother, and for you, from the very bottom of my heart.”

“It is very kind of you,” said Herbert. “But the blow has fallen, and as for myself, I believe that I can bear it. I do not care so very much about the property.”

“Nor do I;” and now Owen spoke rather louder, and with his own look of strong impulse about his mouth and forehead. “Nor do I care so much about the property. You were welcome to it; and are so still. I have never coveted it from you, and do not covet it.”

“It will be yours now without coveting,” replied Herbert; and then there was another pause, during

which Herbert sat still, while Owen stood leaning with his back against the mantelpiece.

"Herbert," said he, after they had thus remained silent for two or three minutes, "I have made up my mind on this matter, and I will tell you truly what I do desire, and what I do not. I do not desire your inheritance, but I do desire that Clara Desmond shall be my wife."

"Owen," said the other, also getting up, "I did not expect when I came here that you would have spoken to me about this."

"It was that we might speak about this that I asked you to come here. But listen to me. When I say that I want Clara Desmond to be my wife, I mean to say that I want that, and that only. It may be true that I am, or shall be, legally the heir to your father's estate. Herbert, I will relinquish all that, because I do not feel it to be my own. I will relinquish it in any way that may separate myself from it most thoroughly. But in return, do you separate yourself from her who was my own before you had ever known her."

And thus he did make the proposition as to which he had been making up his mind since the morning on which Mr. Prendergast had come to him.

Herbert for a while was struck dumb with amazement, not so much at the quixotic generosity of the proposal, as at the singular mind of the man in thinking that such a plan could be carried out. Herbert's best quality was no doubt his sturdy common sense, and that was shocked by a suggestion which presumed that all the legalities and ordinary bonds of life could be upset by such an agreement between two young men.

He knew that Owen Fitzgerald could not give away his title to an estate of fourteen thousand a year in this off-hand way, and that no one could accept such a gift were it possible to be given. The estate and title must belong to Owen, and could not possibly belong to any one else, merely at his word and fancy. And then again, how could the love of a girl like Clara Desmond be bandied to and fro at the will of any suitor or suitors? That she had once accepted Owen's love, Herbert knew; but since that, in a soberer mood, and with maturer judgment, she had accepted his. How could he give it up to another, or how could that other take possession of it if so abandoned? The bargain was one quite impossible to be carried out; and yet Owen in proposing it had fully intended to be as good as his word.

"That is impossible," said Herbert in a low voice.

"Why impossible? May I not do what I like with that which is my own? It is not impossible. I will have nothing to do with that property of yours. In fact, it is not my own, and I will not take it; I will not rob you of that which you have been born to expect. But in return for this ——"

"Owen, do not talk of it; would you abandon a girl whom you loved for any wealth, or any property?"

"You cannot love her as I love her. I will talk to you on this matter openly, as I have never yet talked to any one. Since first I saw Clara Desmond, the only wish of my life has been that I might have her for my wife. I have longed for her as a child longs — if you know what I mean by that. When I saw that she was old enough to understand what love meant, I told her what was in my heart, and she

accepted my love. She swore to me that she would be mine, let mother or brother say what they would. As sure as you are standing there a living man she loved me with 'all truth. And that I loved her ——! Herbert, I have never loved aught but her; nothing else! — neither man nor woman, nor wealth nor title. All I ask is that I may have that which was my own."

"But, Owen ——" and Herbert touched his cousin's arm.

"Well; why do you not speak? I have spoken plainly enough."

"It is not easy to speak plainly on all subjects. I would not, if I could avoid it, say a word that would hurt your feelings."

"Never mind my feelings. Speak out, and let us have the truth, in God's name. My feelings have never been much considered yet — either in this matter or in any other."

"It seems to me," said Herbert, "that the giving of Lady Clara's hand cannot depend on your will, or on mine."

"You mean her mother."

"No, by no means. Her mother now would be the last to favour me. I mean herself. If she loves me, as I hope and believe — nay, am sure ——"

"She did love me!" shouted Owen.

"But even if so ——. I do not now say anything of that; but even if so, surely you would not have her marry you if she does not love you still? You would not wish her to be your wife if her heart belongs to me?"

"It has been given you at her mother's bidding."

"However given it is now my own and it cannot be returned. Look here, Owen. I will show you her last two letters, if you will allow me; not in pride, I hope, but that you may truly know what are her wishes." And he took from his breast, where they had been ever since he received them, the two letters which Clara had written to him. Owen read them both twice over before he spoke, first one and then the other, and an indescribable look of pain fell on his brow as he did so. They were so tenderly worded, so sweet, so generous! He would have given all the world to have had those letters addressed by her to himself. But even they did not convince him. His heart had never changed, and he could not believe that there had been any change in hers.

"I might have known," he said, as he gave them back, "that she would be too noble to abandon you in your distress. As long as you were rich I might have had some chance of getting her back, despite the machinations of her mother. But now that she thinks you are poor —" And then he stopped, and hid his face between his hands.

And in what he had last said there was undoubtedly something of truth. Clara's love for Herbert had never been passionate, till passion had been created by his misfortune. And in her thoughts of Owen there had been much of regret. Though she had resolved to withdraw her love, she had not wholly ceased to love him. Judgment had bade her to break her word to him, and she had obeyed her judgment. She had admitted to herself that her mother was right in telling her that she could not join her own bankrupt fortunes to the fortunes of one who was both poor and a spend-

thrift; and thus she had plucked from her heart the picture of the man she had loved, — or endeavoured so to pluck it. Some love for him, however, had unwittingly lingered there. And then Herbert had come with his suit, a suitor fitted for her in every way. She had not loved him as she had loved Owen. She had never felt that she could worship him, and tremble at the tones of his voice, and watch the glance of his eye, and gaze into his face as though he were half divine. But she acknowledged his worth, and valued him: she knew that it behoved her to choose some suitor as her husband; and now that her dream was gone, where could she choose better than here? And thus Herbert had been accepted. He had been accepted, but the dream was not wholly gone. Owen was in adversity, ill spoken of by those around her, shunned by his own relatives, living darkly, away from all that is soft in life; and for these reasons Clara could not wholly forget her dream. She had, in some sort, unconsciously clung to her old love, till he to whom she had plighted her new troth was in adversity, — and then all was changed. Then her love for Herbert did become a passion; and then, as Owen had become rich, she felt that she could think of him without remorse. He was quite right in perceiving that his chance was gone now that Herbert had ceased to be rich.

“Owen,” said Herbert, and his voice was full of tenderness, for at this moment he felt that he did love and pity his cousin, “we must each of us bear the weight which fortune has thrown on us. It may be that we are neither of us to be envied. I have lost all that men generally value, and you —.”

“I have lost all on earth that is valuable to me.

But no; it is not lost, — not lost as yet. As long as her name is Clara Desmond, she is as open for me to win as she is for you. And, Herbert, think of it before you make me your enemy. See what I offer you, — not as a bargain, mind you. I give up all my title to your father's property. I will sign any paper that your lawyers may bring to me, which may serve to give you back your inheritance. As for me, I would scorn to take that which belongs in justice to another. I will not have your property. Come what may, I will not have it. I will give it up to you, either as to my enemy or as to my friend."

"I sincerely hope that we may be friends, but what you say is impossible."

"It is not impossible. I hereby pledge myself that I will not take an acre of your father's lands; but I pledge myself also that I will always be your enemy if Clara Desmond becomes your wife: and I mean what I say. I have set my heart on one thing, and on one thing only, and if I am ruined in that I am ruined indeed."

Herbert remained silent, for he had nothing further that he knew how to plead; he felt as other men would feel, that each of them must keep that which Fate had given him. Fate had decreed that Owen should be the heir to Castle Richmond, and the decree thus gone forth must stand valid; and Fate had also decreed that Owen should be rejected by Clara Desmond, which other decree, as Herbert thought, must be held as valid also. But he had no further inclination to argue upon the subject: his cousin was becoming hot and angry; and Herbert was beginning to wish that he was on his way home, that he might be once more at his father's bed-

side, or in his mother's room, comforting her and being comforted.

"Well," said Owen, after a while in his deep-toned voice; "what do you say to my offer?"

"I have nothing further to say: we must each take our own course; as for me, I have lost everything but one thing, and it is not likely that I shall throw that away from me."

"Nor, so help me Heaven in my need! will I let that thing be filched from me. I have offered you kindness and brotherly love, and wealth, and all that friendship could do for a man; give me my way in this, and I will be to you such a comrade and such a brother."

"Should I be a man, Owen, were I to give up this?"

"Be a man! Yes! It is pride on your part. You do not love her; you have never loved her as I have loved; you have not sat apart long months and months thinking of her, as I have done. From the time she was a child I marked her as my own. As God will help me when I die, she is all that I have coveted in this world; — all! But her I have coveted with such longings of the heart, that I cannot bring myself to live without her; — nor will I." And then again they both were silent.

"It may be as well that we should part now," said Herbert at last. "I do not know that we can gain anything by further talking on this subject."

"Well, you know that best; but I have one further question to ask you."

"What is it, Owen?"

"You still think of marrying Clara Desmond?"

"Certainly; of course I think of it."

"And when? I presume you are not so chicken-hearted as to be afraid of speaking out openly what you intend to do."

"I cannot say when; I had hoped that it would have been very soon; but all this will of course delay it. It may be years first."

These last were the only pleasant words that Owen had heard. If there were to be a delay of years, might not his chance still be as good as Herbert's? But then this delay was to be the consequence of his cousin's ruined prospects — and the accomplishment of that ruin Owen had pledged himself to prevent! Was he by his own deed to enable his enemy to take that very step which he was so firmly resolved to prevent?

"You will give me your promise," said he, "that you will not marry her for the next three years? Make me that promise, and I will make you the same?"

Herbert felt that there could be no possibility of his now marrying within the time named, but nevertheless he would not bring himself to make such a promise as this. He would make no bargain about Clara Desmond, about his Clara, which could in any way admit a doubt as to his own right. Had Owen asked him to promise that he would not marry her during the next week he would have given no such pledge. "No," said he, "I cannot promise that."

"She is now only seventeen."

"It does not matter. I will make no such promise, because on such a subject you have no right to ask for any. When she will consent to run her risk of happiness in coming to me, then I shall marry her."

Owen was now walking up and down the room

with rapid steps. "You have not the courage to fight me fairly," said he.

"I do not wish to fight you at all."

"Ah, but you must fight me! Shall I see the prey taken out of my jaws, and not struggle for it? No, by heavens! you must fight me; and I tell you fairly, that the fight shall be as hard as I can make it. I have offered you that which one living man is seldom able to offer to another, — money, and land, and wealth, and station; all these things I throw away from me, because I feel that they should be yours; and I ask only in return the love of a young girl. I ask that because I feel that it should be mine. If it has gone from me — which I do not believe — it has been filched and stolen by a thief in the night. She did love me, if a girl ever loved a man; but she was separated from me, and I bore that patiently because I trusted her. But she was young and weak, and her mother was strong and crafty. She has accepted you at her mother's instance; and were I base enough to keep from you your father's inheritance, her mother would no more give her to you now than she would to me then. This is true; and if you know it to be true — as you do know, you will be mean, and dastard, and a coward — you will be no Fitzgerald if you keep from me that which I have a right to claim as my own. Not fight! Ay, but you must fight. We cannot both live here in this country if Clara Desmond become your wife. Mark my words, if that take place, you and I cannot live here alongside of each other's houses." He paused for a moment after this, and then added, "You can go now if you will, for I have said out my say."

And Herbert did go, — almost without uttering a

word of adieu. What could he say in answer to such threats as these? That his cousin was in every way unreasonable, — as unreasonable in his generosity as he was in his claims, he felt convinced. But an unreasonable man, though he is one whom one would fain conquer by arguments were it possible, is the very man on whom arguments have no avail. A madman is mad because he is mad. Herbert had a great deal that was very sensible to allege in favour of his views, but what use of alleging anything of sense to such a mind as that of Owen Fitzgerald? So he went his way without further speech.

When he was gone, Owen for a time went on walking his room, and then sank again into his chair. Abominably irrational as his method of arranging all these family difficulties will no doubt seem to all who may read of it, to him it had appeared not only an easy but a happy mode of bringing back contentment to everybody. He was quite serious in his intention of giving up his position as heir to Castle Richmond. Mr. Prendergast had explained to him that the property was entailed as far as him, but no farther; and had done this, doubtless, with the view, not then expressed, to some friendly arrangement by which a small portion of the property might be saved and restored to the children of Sir Thomas. But Owen had looked at it quite in another light. He had, in justice, no right to inquire into all those circumstances of his old cousin's marriage. Such a union was a marriage in the eye of God, and should be held as such by him. He would take no advantage of so terrible an accident.

He would take no advantage. So he said to himself over and over again; but yet, as he said it, he re-

solved that he would take advantage. He would not touch the estate; but surely if he abstained from touching it, Herbert would be generous enough to leave to him the solace of his love! And he had no scruple in allotting to Clara the poorer husband instead of the richer. He was no poorer now than when she had accepted him. Looking at it in that light, had he not a right to claim that she should abide by her first acceptance? Could any one be found to justify the theory that a girl may throw over a poor lover because a rich lover comes in the way? Owen had his own ideas of right and wrong — ideas which were not without a basis of strong, rugged justice; and nothing could be more antagonistic to them than such a doctrine as this. And then he still believed in his heart that he was dearer to Clara than that other richer suitor. He heard of her from time to time, and those who had spoken to him had spoken of her as pining for love of him. In this there had been much of the flattery of servants, and something of the subservience of those about him who wished to stand well in his graces. But he had believed it. He was not a conceited man, nor even a vain man. He did not think himself more clever than his cousin; and as for personal appearance, it was a matter to which his thoughts never descended; but he had about him a self-dependence and assurance in his own manhood, which forbade him to doubt the love of one who had told him that she loved him.

And he did not believe in Herbert's love. His cousin was, as he thought, of a calibre too cold for love. That Clara was valued by him, Owen did not doubt — valued for her beauty, for her rank, for her grace and peerless manner; but what had such value as

that to do with love? Would Herbert sacrifice everything for Clara Desmond? would he bid Pelion fall on Ossa? would he drink up Esil? All this would Owen do, and more; he would do more than any Laertes had ever dreamed. He would give up for now and for ever all title to those rich lands which made the Fitzgeralds of Castle Richmond the men of greatest mark in all their county.

And thus he fanned himself into a fury as he thought of his cousin's want of generosity. Herbert would be the heir, and because he was the heir he would be the favoured lover. But there might yet be time and opportunity; and at any rate Clara should not marry without knowing what was the whole truth. Herbert was ungenerous, but Clara still might be just. If not, — then, as he had said before, he would fight out the battle to the end as with an enemy.

Herbert, when he got on to his horse to ride home, was forced to acknowledge to himself that no good whatever had come from his visit to Hap House. Words had been spoken which might have been much better left unspoken. An angry man will often cling to his anger because his anger has been spoken; he will do evil because he has threatened evil, and is ashamed to be better than his words. And there was no comfort to be derived from those lavish promises made by Owen with regard to the property. To Herbert's mind they were mere moonshine — very graceful on the part of the maker, but meaning nothing. No one could have Castle Richmond but him who owned it legally. Owen Fitzgerald would become Sir Owen, and would, as a matter of course, be Sir Owen of Castle Richmond. There was no comfort on that score; and then, on that

other score, there was so much discomfort. Of giving up his bride Herbert never for a moment thought; but he did think, with increasing annoyance, of the angry threats which had been pronounced against him.

When he rode into the stable-yard as was his wont, he found Richard waiting for him. This was not customary; as in these latter days Richard, though he always drove the car, as a sort of subsidiary coachman to the young ladies to whom the car was supposed to belong in fee, did not act as general groom. He had been promoted beyond this, and was a sort of hanger-on about the house, half indoor servant and half out, doing very much what he liked, and giving advice to everybody, from the cook downwards. He thanked God that he knew his place, he would often say; but nobody else knew it. Nevertheless everybody liked him; even the poor housemaid whom he snubbed.

"Is anything the matter?" asked Herbert, looking at the man's sorrow-laden face.

"Deed an' there is, Mr. Herbert; Sir Thomas is —"

"My father is not dead!" exclaimed Herbert.

"Oh no, Mr. Herbert; it's not so bad as that; but he is very failing, — very failing. My lady is with him now."

Herbert ran into the house, and at the bottom of the chief stairs he met one of his sisters who had heard the steps of his horse. "Oh, Herbert, I am so glad you have come!" said she. Her eyes and cheeks were red with tears, and her hand, as her brother took it, was cold and numbed.

"What is it, Mary? is he worse?"

"Oh, so much worse. Mamma and Emmeline are there. He has asked for you three or four times, and

always says that he is dying. I had better go up and say that you are here."

"And what does my mother think of it?"

"She has never left him, and therefore I cannot tell; but I know from her face that she thinks that he is — dying. Shall I go up, Herbert?" and so she went, and Herbert, following softly on his toes, stood in the corridor outside the bedroom-door, waiting till his arrival should have been announced. It was but a minute, and then his sister, returning to the door, summoned him to enter.

The room had been nearly darkened, but as there were no curtains to the bed, Herbert could see his mother's face as she knelt on a stool at the bedside. His father was turned away from him, and lay with his hand inside his wife's, and Emmeline was sitting on the foot of the bed, with her face between her hands, striving to stifle her sobs. "Here is Herbert now, dearest," said Lady Fitzgerald, with a low, soft voice, almost a whisper, yet clear enough to cause no effort in the hearing. "I knew that he would not be long." And Herbert, obeying the signal of his mother's eye, passed round to the other side of the bed.

"Father," said he, "are you not so well to-day?"

"My poor boy, my poor ruined boy!" said the dying man, hardly articulating the words as he dropped his wife's hand and took that of his son. Herbert found that it was wet, and clammy and cold, and almost powerless in its feeble grasp.

"Dearest father, you are wrong if you let that trouble you; all that will never trouble me. Is it not well that a man should earn his own bread? Is it not the lot of all good men?" But still the old man mur-

mured with his broken voice, "My poor boy, my poor boy!"

The hopes and aspirations of his eldest son are as the breath of his nostrils to an Englishman who has been born to land and fortune. What had not this poor man endured in order that his son might be Sir Herbert Fitzgerald of Castle Richmond? But this was no longer possible; and from the moment that this had been brought home to him, the father had felt that for him there was nothing left but to die. "My poor boy," he muttered, "tell me that you have forgiven me."

And then they all knelt round the bed and prayed with him; and afterwards they tried to comfort him, telling him how good he had been to them; and his wife whispered in his ear that if there had been fault, the fault was hers, but that her conscience told her that such fault had been forgiven; and while she said this she motioned the children away from him, and strove to make him understand that human misery could never kill the soul, and should never utterly depress the spirit. "Dearest love," she said, still whispering to him in her low, sweet voice — so dear to him, but utterly inaudible beyond — "if you would cease to accuse yourself so bitterly, you might yet be better, and remain with us to comfort us."

But the slender, half-knit man, whose arms are without muscles and whose back is without pith, will strive in vain to lift the weight which the brawny vigour of another tosses from the ground almost without an effort. It is with the mind and the spirit as with the body; only this, that the muscles of the body can be measured, but not so those of the spirit. Lady Fitzgerald was made of other stuff than Sir Thomas;

and that which to her had cost an effort, but with an effort had been done surely, was to him as impossible as the labour of Hercules. "My poor boy, my poor ruined boy!" he still muttered, as she strove to comfort him.

"Mamma has sent for Mr. Townsend," Emmeline whispered to her brother, as they stood together in the bow of the window.

"And do you really think he is so bad as that?"

"I am sure that mamma does. I believe he had some sort of a fit before you came. At any rate, he did not speak for two hours."

"And was not Finucane here?" Finucane was the Mallow doctor.

"Yes; but he had left before papa became so much worse. Mamma has sent for him also."

But I do not know that it boots to dally longer in a dying chamber. It is an axiom of old that the stage curtain should be drawn before the inexorable one enters in upon his final work. Doctor Finucane did come, but his coming was all in vain. Sir Thomas had known that it was in vain, and so also had his patient wife. There was that mind diseased, towards the cure of which no Doctor Finucane could make any possible approach. And Mr. Townsend came also, let us hope not in vain; though the cure which he fain would have perfected can hardly be effected in such moments as those. Let us hope that it had been already effected. The only crying sin which we can lay to the charge of the dying man is that of which we have spoken; he had endeavoured by pensioning falsehood and fraud to preserve for his wife her name, and for his son that son's inheritance. Even over this, deep as it was, the

recording angel may have dropped some cleansing tears of pity.

That night the poor man died, and the Fitzgeralds who sat in the chambers of Castle Richmond were no longer the owners of the mansion. There was no speech of Sir Herbert among the servants as there would have been had these tidings not reached them. Dr. Finucane had remained in the house, and even he, in speaking of the son, had shown that he knew the story. They were strangers there now, as they all knew — intruders, as they would soon be considered in the house of their cousin Owen; or rather not their cousin. In that he was above them by right of his blood, they had no right to claim him as their relation.

It may be said that at such a moment all this should not have been thought of; but those who say so know little, as I imagine, of the true effect of sorrow. No wife and no children ever grieved more heartily for a father; but their grief was blacker and more gloomy in that they knew that they were outcasts in the world.

And during that long night as Herbert and his sisters sat up cowering round the fire, he told them of all that had been said at Hap House. "And can it not be as he says?" Mary had asked.

"And that Herbert should give up his wife!" said Emmeline.

"No; but that other thing."

"Do not dream of it," said Herbert. "It is all, all impossible. The house that we are now in belongs to Sir Owen Fitzgerald."

CHAPTER X.

The First Month.

AND now I will beg my readers to suppose a month to have passed by since Sir Thomas Fitzgerald died. It was a busy month in Ireland. It may probably be said that so large a sum of money had never been circulated in the country in any one month since money had been known there; and yet it may also be said that so frightful a mortality had never occurred there from the want of that which money brings. It was well understood by all men now that the customary food of the country had disappeared. There was no longer any difference of opinion between rich and poor, between Protestant and Roman Catholic; as to that, no man dared now to say that the poor, if left to themselves, could feed themselves, or to allege that the sufferings of the country arose from the machinations of money-making speculators. The famine was an established fact, and all men knew that it was God's doing, — all men knew this, though few could recognize as yet with how much mercy God's hand was stretched out over the country.

Or may it not perhaps be truer to say that in such matters there is no such thing as mercy — no special mercies — no other mercy than that fatherly, forbearing, all-seeing, perfect goodness by which the Creator is ever adapting this world to the wants of his creatures, and rectifying the evils arising from their faults and follies? *Sed quo, Musa, tendis?* Such discourses of the gods as these are not to be fitly handled in such small measures.

At any rate, there was the famine, undoubted now by any one; and death, who in visiting Castle Richmond may be said to have knocked at the towers of a king, was busy enough also among the cabins of the poor. And now the great fault of those who were the most affected was becoming one which would not have been at first sight expected. One would think that starving men would become violent, taking food by open theft — feeling, and perhaps not without some truth, that the agony of their want robbed such robberies of its sin. But such was by no means the case. I only remember one instance in which the bakers' shops were attacked; and in that instance the work was done by those who were undergoing no real suffering. At Clonmel, in Tipperary, the bread was one morning stripped away from the bakers' shops; but at that time, and in that place, there was nothing approaching to famine. The fault of the people was apathy. It was the feeling of the multitude that the world and all that was good in it was passing away from them; that exertion was useless, and hope hopeless. "Ah, me! your honour," said a man to me, "there'll never be a bit and a sup again in the county Cork! The life of the world is fairly gone!"

And it was very hard to repress this feeling. The energy of a man depends so much on the outward circumstances that encumber him! It is so hard to work when work seems hopeless — so hard to trust where the basis of our faith is so far removed from sight! When large tracts of land went out of cultivation, was it not natural to think that agriculture was receding from the country, leaving the green hills once more to be brown and barren, as hills once green have become

in other countries? And when men were falling in the highways, and women would sit with their babes in their arms, listless till death should come to them, was it not natural to think that death was making a huge success — that he, the inexorable one, was now the inexorable indeed?

There were greatly trusting hearts that could withstand the weight of this terrible pressure, and thinking minds which saw that good would come out of this great evil; but such hearts and such minds were not to be looked for among the suffering poor; and were not, perhaps, often found even among those who were not poor or suffering. It was very hard to be thus trusting and thoughtful while everything around was full of awe and agony.

The people, however, were conscious of God's work, and were becoming dull and apathetic. They clustered about the roads, working lazily while their strength lasted them; and afterwards, when strength failed them for this, they clustered more largely in the poor-houses. And in every town — in every assemblage of houses which in England would be called a village, there was a poor-house. Any big barrack of a tenement that could be obtained at a moment's notice, whatever the rent, became a poor-house in the course of twelve hours; — in twelve, nay, in two hours. What was necessary but the bare walls and a supply of yellow meal? Bad provision this for all a man's wants, — as was said often enough by irrational philanthropists; but better provision than no shelter and no yellow meal! It was bad that men should be locked up at night without any of the appliances of decency; bad that they should be herded together for day after day with

no resource but the eating twice a day of enough un-savoury food to keep life and soul together; — very bad, ye philanthropical irrationalists! But is not a choice of evils all that is left to us in many a contingency? Was not even this better than that life and soul should be allowed to part, without any effort at preserving their union?

And thus life and soul were kept together, the government of the day having wisely seen what, at so short a notice, was possible for them to do, and what was absolutely impossible. It is in such emergencies as these that the watching and the wisdom of a government are necessary; and I shall always think — as I did think then — that the wisdom of its action and the wisdom of its abstinence from action were very good. And now again the fields in Ireland are green, and the markets are busy, and money is chucked to and fro like a weathercock which the players do not wish to have abiding with them; and the tardy speculator going over to look for a bit of land comes back muttering angrily that fancy prices are demanded. "They'll run you up to thirty-three years' purchase," says the tardy speculator, thinking, as it seems, that he is specially ill used. Agricultural wages have been nearly doubled in Ireland during the last fifteen years. Think of that, Master Brook. Work for which, at six shillings a week, there would be a hundred hungry claimants in 1845, — in the good old days before the famine, when repeal was so immediately expected — will now fetch ten shillings, the claimants being by no means numerous. In 1843 and 1844, I knew men to work for fourpence a day — something over the dole on which we are told, being mostly incredulous as we hear it, that a

Coolie labourer can feed himself with rice in India; — not one man or two men, the broken down incapables of the parish, but the best labour of the country. One and twopence is now about the cheapest rate at which a man can be hired for agricultural purposes. While this is so, and while the prices are progressing, there is no cause for fear, let Bishops A and B, and Archbishops C and D fret and fume with never so great vexation touching the clipped honours of their father the Pope.

But again; Quo, Musa, tendis? I could write on this subject for a week were it not that Rhadamanthus awaits me, Rhadamanthus the critic; and Rhadamanthus is, of all things, impatient of an episode.

Life and soul were kept together in those terrible days; — that is, the Irish life and soul generally. There were many slips, in which the union was violently dissolved, — many cases in which the yellow meal allowed was not sufficient, or in which it did not reach the sufferer in time to prevent such dissolution, — cases which when numbered together amounted to thousands. And then the pestilence came, taking its victims by tens of thousands, — but that was after the time with which we shall have concern here; and immigration followed, taking those who were saved by hundreds of thousands. But the millions are still there, a thriving people; for His mercy endureth for ever.

During this month, the month ensuing upon the death of Sir Thomas Fitzgerald, Herbert could of course pay no outward attention to the wants or relief of the people. He could make no offer of assistance, for nothing belonged to him; nor could he aid in the councils of the committees, for no one could have de-

fined the position of the speaker. And during that month nothing was defined about Castle Richmond. Lady Fitzgerald was still always called by her title. The people of the country, including the tradesmen of the neighbouring towns, addressed the owner of Hap House as Sir Owen; and gradually the name was working itself into common use, though he had taken no steps to make himself legally entitled to wear it. But no one spoke of Sir Herbert. The story was so generally known, that none were so ignorant as to suppose him to be his father's heir. The servants about the place still called him Mr. Herbert, orders to that effect having been specially given; and the peasants of the country, with that tact which graces them, and with that anxiety to abstain from giving pain which always accompanies them unless when angered, carefully called him by no name. They knew that he was not Sir Herbert; but they would not believe but what, perchance, he might be so yet on some future day. So they took off their old hats to him, and passed him silently in his sorrow; or if they spoke to him, addressed his honour simply, omitting all mention of that Christian name, which the poor Irishman is generally so fond of using. "Mister Blake" sounds cold and unkindly in his ears. It is the "Masther," or "His honour," or if possible "Misther Thady." Or if there be any handle, that is used with avidity. Pat is a happy man when he can address his landlord as "Sir Patrick."

But now the "ould master's son" could be called by no name. Men knew not what he was to be, though they knew well that he was not that which he ought to be. And there were some who attempted to

worship Owen as the rising sun; but for such of them as had never worshipped him before that game was rather hopeless. In those days he was not much seen, neither hunting nor entertaining company; but when seen he was rough enough with those who made any deep attempt to ingratiate themselves with his coming mightiness. And during this month he went over to London, having been specially invited so to do by Mr. Prendergast: but very little came of his visit there, except that it was certified to him that he was beyond all doubt the baronet. "And there shall be no unnecessary delay, Sir Owen," said Mr. Prendergast, "in putting you into full possession of all your rights." In answer to which Owen had replied that he was not anxious to be put in possession of any rights. That as far as any active doing of his own was concerned, the title might lie in abeyance, and that regarding the property he would make known his wish to Mr. Prendergast very quickly after his return to Ireland. But he intimated at the same time that there could be no ground for disturbing Lady Fitzgerald, as he had no intention under any circumstances of living at Castle Richmond.

"Had you not better tell Lady Fitzgerald that yourself?" said Mr. Prendergast, catching at the idea that his friend's widow — my readers will allow me so to call her — might be allowed to live undisturbed at the family mansion, if not for life, at any rate for a few years. If this young man were so generous, why should it not be so? He would not want the big house, at any rate, till he were married.

"It would be better that you should say so," said

Owen. "I have particular reasons for not wishing to go there."

"But allow me to say, my dear young friend — and I hope I may call you so, for I greatly admire the way in which you have taken all these tidings — that I would venture to advise you to drop the remembrance of any unpleasantness that may have existed. You should now feel yourself to be the closest friend of that family."

"So I would if —," and then Owen stopped short, though Mr. Prendergast gave him plenty of time to finish his sentence were he minded to do so.

"In your present position," continued the lawyer, "your influence will be very great."

"I can't explain it all," said Owen; "but I don't think my influence will be great at all. And what is more, I do not want any influence of that sort. I wish Lady Fitzgerald to understand that she is at perfect liberty to stay where she is, — as far as I am concerned. Not as a favour from me, mind; for I do not think that she would take a favour from my hands."

"But, my dear sir!"

"Therefore you had better write to her about remaining there."

Mr. Prendergast did write to her, or rather to Herbert: but in doing so he thought it right to say that the permission to live at Castle Richmond should be regarded as a kindness granted them by their relative. "It is a kindness which, under the circumstances, your mother may, I think, accept without compunction; at any rate, for some time to come, — till she shall have suited herself without hurrying her choice; but, nevertheless, it must be regarded as a generous offer on his

part; and I do hope, my dear Herbert, that you and he will be fast friends."

But Mr. Prendergast did not in the least comprehend the workings of Owen's mind; and Herbert, who knew more of them than any one else, did not understand them altogether. Owen had no idea of granting any favour to his relatives, who, as he thought, had never granted any to him. What Owen wanted, — or what he told himself that he wanted, — was justice. It was his duty as a just man to abstain from taking hold of those acres, and he was prepared to do his duty. But it was equally Herbert's duty as a just man to abstain from taking hold of Clara Desmond, and he was resolved that he would never be Herbert's friend if Herbert did not perform that duty. And then, though he felt himself bound to give up the acres, — though he did regard this as an imperative duty, he nevertheless felt also that something was due to him for his readiness to perform such a duty, — that some reward should be conceded to him; what this reward was to be, or rather what he wished it to be, we all know.

Herbert had utterly refused to engage in any such negotiation; but Owen, nevertheless, would not cease to think that something might yet be done. Who was so generous as Clara, and would not Clara herself speak out if she knew how much her old lover was prepared to do for this newer lover? Half a dozen times Owen made up his mind to explain the whole thing to Mr. Prendergast; but when he found himself in the presence of the lawyer, he could not talk about love. Young men are so apt to think that their seniors in age cannot understand romance, or acknowledge the

force of a passion. But here they are wrong, for there would be as much romance after forty as before, I take it, were it not checked by the fear of ridicule. So Owen stayed a week in London, seeing Mr. Prendergast every day; and then he returned to Hap House.

In the mean time life went on at a very sad pace at Desmond Court. There was no concord whatever between the two ladies residing there. The mother was silent, gloomy, and sometimes bitter, seldom saying a word about Herbert Fitzgerald or his prospects, but saying that word with great fixity of purpose when it was spoken. "No one," she said, "should attribute to her the poverty and misery of her child. That marriage should not take place from her house, or with her consent." And Clara for the most part was silent also. In answer to such words as the above she would say nothing; but when, as did happen once or twice, she was forced to speak, she declared openly enough that no earthly consideration should induce her to give up her engagement.

And then the young earl came home, brought away from his school in order that his authority might have effect on his sister. To speak the truth, he was unwilling enough to interfere, and would have declined to come at all could he have dared to do so. Eton was now more pleasant to him than Desmond Court, which, indeed, had but little of pleasantness to offer to a lad such as he was now. He was sixteen, and manly for his age; but the question in dispute at Desmond Court offered little attraction even to a manly boy of sixteen. In that former question as to Owen he had said a word or two, knowing that Owen could not be looked upon as a fitting husband for his sister; but

now he knew not how to counsel her again as to Herbert, seeing that it was but the other day that he had written a long letter, congratulating her on that connection.

Towards the end of the month, however, he did arrive, making glad his mother's heart as she looked at his strong limbs and his handsome open face. And Clara, too, threw herself so warmly into his arms that he did feel glad that he had come to her. "Oh, Patrick, it is so sweet to have you here!" she said, before his mother had had time to speak to him.

"Dearest Clara!"

"But, Patrick, you must not be cruel to me. Look here, Patrick; you are my only brother, and I so love you that I would not offend you or turn you against me for worlds. You are the head of our family, too, and nothing should be done that you do not like. But if so much depends on you you must think well before you decide on anything."

He opened his young eyes and looked intently into her face, for there was an earnestness in her words that almost frightened him. "You must think well of it all before you speak, Patrick; and remember this, you and I must be honest and honourable, whether we be poor or no. You remember about Owen Fitzgerald, how I gave way then because I could do so without dishonour. But now —"

"But, Clara, I do not understand it all as yet."

"No; you cannot, — not as yet — and I will let mamma tell you the story. All I ask is this, that you will think of my honour before you say a word that can favour either her or me." And then he promised her that he would do so; and his mother, when on the

following morning she told him all the history, found him reserved and silent.

"Look at his position," said the mother, pleading her cause before her son. "He is illegitimate and —"

"Yes, but mother —"

"I know all that, my dear; I know what you would say; and no one can pity Mr. Fitzgerald's position more than I do; but you would not on that account have your sister ruined. It is romance on her part."

"But what does he say?"

"He is quite willing to give up the match. He has told me so, and said as much to his aunt, whom I have seen three times on the subject."

"Do you mean that he wishes to give it up?"

"No, — at least I don't know. If he does, he cannot express such a wish, because Clara is so headstrong. Patrick, in my heart I do not believe that she cares for him. I have doubted it for some time."

"But you wanted her to marry him."

"So I did. It was an excellent match, and in a certain way she did like him; and then, you know, there was that great danger about poor Owen. It was a great danger then. But now she is so determined about this, because she thinks it would be ungenerous to go back from her word; and in this way she will ruin the very man she wishes to serve. Of course he cannot break off the match if she persists in it. What I want you to perceive is this, that he, utterly penniless as he is, will have to begin the world with a clog round his neck, because she is so obstinate. What could possibly be worse for him than a titled wife

without a penny?" And in this way the countess pleaded her side of the question before her son.

It was quite true that she had been three times to Castle Richmond, and had thrice driven Aunt Letty into a state bordering on distraction. If she could only get the Castle Richmond people to take it up as they ought to do! It was thus she argued with herself, — and with Aunt Letty also, endeavouring to persuade her that these two young people would undoubtedly ruin each other, unless those who were really wise and prudent, and who understood the world — such as Aunt Letty, for instance — would interfere to prevent it.

Aunt Letty on the whole did agree with her, though she greatly disliked her. Miss Fitzgerald had strongly planted within her bosom the prudent old-world notion, that young gentlefolks should not love each other unless they have plenty of money; and that, if unfortunately such did love each other, it was better that they should suffer all the pangs of hopeless love than marry and trust to God and their wits for bread and cheese. To which opinion of Aunt Letty's, as well as to some others entertained by that lady with much pertinacity, I cannot subscribe myself as an adherent.

Lady Desmond had wit enough to discover that Aunt Letty did agree with her in the main, and on this account she was eager in seeking her assistance. Lady Fitzgerald of course could not be seen, and there was no one else at Castle Richmond who could be supposed to have any weight with Herbert. And therefore Lady Desmond was very eloquent with Aunt Letty, talking much of the future miseries of the two

young people, till the old lady had promised to use her best efforts in enlisting Lady Fitzgerald on the same side. "You cannot wonder, Miss Fitzgerald, that I should wish to put an end to the cruel position in which my poor girl is placed. You know how much a girl suffers from that kind of thing."

Aunt Letty did dislike Lady Desmond very much; but, nevertheless, she could not deny the truth of all this; and therefore it may be said that the visits of the countess to Castle Richmond were on the whole successful.

And the month wore itself away also in that sad household, and the Fitzgeralds were gradually becoming used to their position. Family discussions were held among them as to what they should do, and where they should live in future. Mr. Prendergast had written, seeing that Owen had persisted in refusing to make the offer personally himself — saying that there was no hurry for any removal. "Sir Owen," he said, — having considered deeply whether or no he would call him by the title or no, and having resolved that it would be best to do so at once — "Sir Owen was inclined to behave very generously. Lady Fitzgerald could have the house and demesne at any rate for twelve months, and by that time the personal property left by Sir Thomas would be realized, and there would be enough," Mr. Prendergast said, "for the three ladies to live 'in decent quiet comfort.'" Mr. Prendergast had taken care before he left Castle Richmond that a will should be made and duly executed by Sir Thomas, leaving what money he had to his three children by name, — in trust for their mother's use. Till the

girls should be of age that trust would be vested in Herbert.

"Decent quiet comfort!" said Mary to her brother and sister as they connd the letter over; "how comfortless it sounds!"

And so the first month after the death of Sir Thomas passed by, and the misfortunes of the Fitzgerald family ceased to be the only subject spoken of by the inhabitants of county Cork.

CHAPTER XI.

Preparations for Going.

At the end of the month, Herbert began to prepare himself for facing the world. The first question to be answered, was that one which is so frequently asked in most families, but which had never yet been necessary in this — What profession would he follow? All manners of ways by which an educated man can earn his bread had been turned over in his mind, and in the minds of those who loved him, beginning with the revenues of the Archbishop of Armagh, which was Aunt Letty's idea, and ending with a seat at a government desk, which was his own. Mr. Prendergast had counselled the law; not his own lower branch of the profession, but a barrister's full-blown wig, adding, in his letter to Lady Fitzgerald, that if Herbert would come to London, and settle in chambers, he, Mr. Prendergast, would see that his life was made agreeable to him. But Mr. Somers gave other advice. In those days Assistant Poor-Law Commissioners were being appointed in Ireland, almost by the score, and Mr. Somers de-

clared that Herbert had only to signify his wish for such a position, and he would get it. The interest which he had taken in the welfare of the poor around him was well known, and as his own story was well known also, there could be no doubt that the government would be willing to assist one so circumstanced, and who when assisted would make himself so useful. Such was the advice of Mr. Somers; and he might have been right but for this, that both Herbert and Lady Fitzgerald felt that it would be well for them to move out of that neighbourhood, — out of Ireland altogether, if such could be possible.

Aunt Letty was strong for the Church. A young man who had distinguished himself at the University so signally as her nephew had done, taking his degree at the very first attempt, and that in so high a class of honour as the fourth, would not fail to succeed in the Church. He might not perhaps succeed as to Armagh, that she admitted; but there were some thirty other bishoprics to be had, and it would be odd if, with his talents, he did not get one of them. Think what it would be if he were to return to his own country as Bishop of Cork, Cloyne, and Ross, as to which amalgamation of sees, however, Aunt Letty had her own ideas. He was slightly tainted with the venom of Puseyism, Aunt Letty said to herself; but nothing would dispel this with so much certainty as the theological studies necessary for ordination. And then Aunt Letty talked it over by the hour together with Mrs. Townsend, and both those ladies were agreed that Herbert should get himself ordained as quickly as possible; — not in England, where there might be danger even in ordination, but in good, wholesome, Protestant Ire-

land, where a Church of England clergyman was a clergyman of the Church of England, and not a priest, slipping about in the mud half way between England and Rome.

Herbert himself was anxious to get some employment by which he might immediately earn his bread, but not unnaturally wished that London should be the scene of his work. Anywhere in Ireland he would be known as the Fitzgerald who ought to have been Fitzgerald of Castle Richmond. And then too, he, as other young men, had an undefined idea, that as he must earn his bread London should be his ground. He had at first been not ill inclined to that Church project, and had thus given a sort of ground on which Aunt Letty was able to stand, — had, as it were, given her some authority for carrying on an agitation in furtherance of her own views; but Herbert himself soon gave up this idea. A man, he thought, to be a clergyman should have a very strong predilection in favour of that profession; and so he gradually abandoned that idea, — actuated, as poor Aunt Letty feared, by the agency of the evil one, working through the means of Puseyism.

His mother and sisters were in favour of Mr. Prendergast's views, and as it was gradually found by them all that there would not be any immediate pressure as regarded pecuniary means, that seemed at last to be their decision. Herbert would remain yet for three or four weeks at Castle Richmond, till matters there were somewhat more thoroughly settled, and would then put himself into the hands of Mr. Prendergast in London. Mr. Prendergast would select a legal tutor for him, and proper legal chambers; and then not long afterwards

his mother and sisters should follow, and they would live together at some small villa residence near St. John's Wood Road, or perhaps out at Brompton.

It is astonishing how quickly in this world of ours chaos will settle itself into decent and graceful order, when it is properly looked in the face, and handled with a steady hand which is not sparing of the broom. Some three months since, everything at Castle Richmond was ruin; such ruin, indeed, that the very power of living under it seemed to be doubtful. When first Mr. Prendergast arrived there, a feeling came upon them all as though they might hardly dare to live in a world which would look at them as so thoroughly degraded. As regards means, they would be beggars! and as regards position, so much worse than beggars! A broken world was in truth falling about their ears, and it was felt to be impossible that they should endure its convulsions and yet live.

But now the world had fallen, the ruin had come, and they were already strong in future hopes. They had dared to look at their chaos, and found that it still contained the elements of order. There was much still that marred their happiness, and forbade the joyousness of other days. Their poor father had gone from them in their misery, and the house was still a house of mourning; and their mother too, though she bore up so wonderfully against her fate, and for their sakes hoped and planned and listened to their wishes, was a stricken woman. That she would never smile again with any heartfelt joy they were all sure. But, nevertheless, their chaos was conquered, and there was hope that the fields of life would again show themselves green and fruitful.

On one subject their mother never spoke to them, nor had even Herbert dared to speak to her: not a word had been said in that house since Mr. Prendergast left it as to the future whereabouts or future doings of that man to whom she had once given her hand at the altar. But she had ventured to ask by letter a question of Mr. Prendergast. Her question had been this: What must I do that he may not come to me or to my children? In answer to this Mr. Prendergast had told her, after some delay, that he believed she need fear nothing. He had seen the man, and he thought that he might assure her that she would not be troubled in that respect.

"It is possible," said Mr. Prendergast, "that he may apply to you by letter for money. If so, give him no answer whatever, but send his letters to me."

"And are you all going?" asked Mrs. Townsend of Aunt Letty, with a lachrymose voice soon after the fate of the family was decided. They were sitting together with their knees over the fire in Mrs. Townsend's dining-parlour, in which the perilous state of the country had been discussed by them for many a pleasant hour together.

"Well, I think we shall; you see, my sister would never be happy here."

"No, no; the shock and the change would be too great for her. Poor Lady Fitzgerald! And when is that man coming into the house?"

"What, Owen?"

"Yes! Sir Owen I suppose he is now."

"Well, I don't know; he does not seem to be in any hurry. I believe that he has said that my sister

may continue to live there if she pleases. But of course she cannot do that."

"They do say about the country," whispered Mrs. Townsend, "that he refuses to be the heir at all. He certainly has not had any cards printed with the title on them — I know that as a fact."

"He is a very singular man, very. You know I never could bear him," said Aunt Letty.

"No, nor I either. He has not been to our church once these six months. But it's very odd, isn't it? Of course you know the story?"

"What story?" asked Aunt Letty.

"About Lady Clara. Owen Fitzgerald was dreadfully in love with her before your Herbert had ever seen her. And they do say that he has sworn his cousin shall never live if he marries her."

"They can never marry now, you know. Only think of it. There would be three hundred a year between them. — Not at present, that is," added Aunt Letty, looking forward to a future period after her own death.

"That is very little, very little indeed," said Mrs. Townsend, remembering, however, that she herself had married on less. "But, Miss Fitzgerald, if Herbert does not marry her do you think this Owen will?"

"I don't think she'd have him. I am quite sure she would not."

"Not when he has all the property, and the title too?"

"No, nor double as much. What would people say of her if she did? But, however, there is no fear, for she declares that nothing shall induce her to give up her engagement with our Herbert."

And so they discussed it backward and forward in every way, each having her own theory as to that singular rumour which was going about the country, signifying that Owen had declined to accept the title. Aunt Letty, however, would not believe that any good could come from so polluted a source, and declared that he had his own reasons for the delay. "It's not for any love of us," she said, "if he refuses to take either that or the estate." And in this she was right. But she would have been more surprised still had she learned that Owen's forbearance arose from a strong anxiety to do what was just in the matter.

"And so Herbert won't go into the Church?"

And Letty shook her head sorrowing.

"Æneas would have been so glad to have taken him for a twelvemonth's reading," said Mrs. Townsend. "He could have come here, you know, when you went away, and been ordained at Cork, and got a curacy close in the neighbourhood, where he was known. It would have been so nice; wouldn't it?"

Aunt Letty would not exactly have advised the scheme as suggested by Mrs. Townsend. Her ideas as to Herbert's clerical studies would have been higher than this. Trinity College, Dublin, was in her estimation the only place left for good Church of England ecclesiastical teaching. But as Herbert was obstinately bent on declining sacerdotal life, there was no use in dispelling Mrs. Townsend's bright vision.

"It's all of no use," she said; "he is determined to go to the bar."

"The bar is very respectable," said Mrs. Townsend, kindly.

"And you mean to go with them, too?" said Mrs.

Townsend, after another pause. "You'll hardly be happy, I'm thinking, so far away from your old home."

"It is sad to change at my time of life," said Aunt Letty, plaintively. "I'm sixty-two now."

"Nonsense," said Mrs. Townsend, who, however, knew her age to a day.

"Sixty-two if I live another week, and I have never yet had any home but Castle Richmond. There I was born, and till the other day I had every reason to trust that there I might die. But what does it matter?"

"No, that's true of course; what does it matter where we are while we linger in this vale of tears? But couldn't you get a little place for yourself somewhere near here? There's Callaghan's cottage, with the two-acre piece for a cow, and as nice a spot of a garden as there is in the county Cork."

"I wouldn't separate myself from her now," said Aunt Letty, "for all the cottages and all the gardens in Ireland. The Lord has been pleased to throw us together, and together we will finish our pilgrimage. Whither she goes, I will go, and where she lodges, I will lodge; her people shall be my people, and her God my God." And then Mrs. Townsend said nothing further of Callaghan's pretty cottage, or of the two-acre piece.

But one reason for her going Aunt Letty did not give, even to her friend Mrs. Townsend. Her income, that which belonged exclusively to herself, was in no way affected by these sad Castle Richmond revolutions. This was a comfortable, — we may say a generous provision for an old maiden lady, amounting to some six hundred a year, settled upon her for life, and this, if added to what could be saved and scraped together,

would enable them to live comfortably as far as means were concerned, in that suburban villa to which they were looking forward. But without Aunt Letty's income that suburban villa must be but a poor home. Mr. Prendergast had calculated that some fourteen thousand pounds would represent the remaining property of the family, with which it would be necessary to purchase government stock. Such being the case, Aunt Letty's income was very material to them.

"I trust you will be able to find some one there who will preach the gospel to you," said Mrs. Townsend, in a tone that showed how serious were her misgivings on the subject.

"I will search for such a one at any rate," said Aunt Letty. "You need not be afraid that I shall be a backslider."

"But they have crosses now over the communion tables in the churches in England," said Mrs. Townsend.

"I know it is very bad," said Aunt Letty. "But there will always be a remnant left. The Lord will not utterly desert us." And then she took her departure, leaving Mrs. Townsend with the conviction that the land to which her friend was going was one in which the light of the gospel no longer shone in its purity.

It was not wonderful that they should all be anxious to get away from Castle Richmond, for the house there was now not a pleasant one in which to live. Let all those who have houses and the adjuncts of houses think how considerable a part of their life's pleasures consists in their interest in the things around them. When will the sea-kale be fit to cut, and when will the crocuses

come up? will the violets be sweeter than ever? and the geranium cuttings, are they thriving? we have dug, and manured, and sown, and we look forward to the reaping, and to see our garners full. The very furniture which ministers to our daily uses is loved and petted; and in decorating our rooms we educate ourselves in design. The place in church which has been our own for years, — is not that dear to us, and the voice that has told us of God's tidings — even though the drone become more evident as it waxes in years, and though it grows feeble and indolent? And the faces of those who have lived around us, do we not love them too, the servants who have worked for us, and the children who have first toddled beneath our eyes and prattled in our ears, and now run their strong races, screaming loudly, splashing us as they pass — very unpleasantly? Do we not love them all? Do they not all contribute to the great sum of our enjoyment? All men love such things, more or less, even though they know it not. And women love them even more than men.

And the Fitzgeralds were about to leave them all. The early buds of spring were now showing themselves, but how was it possible that they should look to them? One loves the bud because one expects the flower. The sea-kale now was beyond their notice, and though they plucked the crocuses, they did so with tears upon their cheeks. After much consideration the church had been abandoned by all except Aunt Letty and Herbert. That Lady Fitzgerald should go there was impossible, and the girls were only too glad to be allowed to stay with their mother. And the schools in which they had taught since the first day in which teaching had been

possible for them, had to be abandoned with such true pangs of heartfelt sorrow.

From the time when their misery first came upon them, from the days when it first began to be understood that the world had gone wrong at Castle Richmond, this separation from the schools had commenced. The work had been dropped for a while, but the dropping had in fact been final, and there was nothing further to be done than the saddest of all leave-taking. The girls had sent word to the children, perhaps imprudently, that they would go down and say a word of adieu to their pupils. The children had of course told their mothers, and when the girls reached the two neat buildings which stood at the corner of the park, there were there to meet them, not unnaturally, a concourse of women and children.

In former prosperous days the people about Castle Richmond had, as a rule, been better to do than their neighbours. Money wages had been more plentiful, and there had been little or no subletting of land; the children had been somewhat more neatly clothed, and the women less haggard in their faces; but this difference was hardly perceptible any longer. To them, the Miss Fitzgeralds, looking at the poverty-stricken assemblage, it almost seemed as though the misfortune of their house had brought down its immediate consequences on all who had lived within their circle, but this was the work of the famine. In those days one could rarely see any member of a peasant's family bearing in his face a look of health. The yellow meal was a useful food — the most useful, doubtless, which could at that time be found; but it was not one that was gratifying either to the eye or palate.

The girls had almost regretted their offer before they had left the house. It would have been better, they said to themselves, to have had the children up in the hall, and there to have spoken their farewells, and made their little presents. The very entering those schoolrooms again would almost be too much for them; but this consideration was now too late, and when they got to the corner of the gate, they found that there was a crowd to receive them. "Mary, I must go back," said Emmeline, when she first saw them; but Aunt Letty, who was with them, stepped forward and they soon found themselves in the schoolroom.

"We have come to say good-bye to you all," said Aunt Letty, trying to begin a speech.

"May the heavens be yer bed then, the lot of yez, for ye war always good to the poor. May the Blessed Virgin guide and protect ye wherever ye be;" — a blessing against which Aunt Letty at once entered a little inward protest, perturbed though she was in spirit. "May the heavens rain glory on yer heads, for ye war always the finest family that war ever in the county Cork!"

"You know, I dare say, that we are going to leave you," continued Aunt Letty.

"We knows it, we knows it; sorrow come to them as did it all. Faix, an' there'll niver be any good in the counthry, at all at all, when you're gone, Miss Emmeline; an' what'll we do at all for the want of yez, and when shall we see the likes of yez? Eh, Miss Letty, but there'll be sore eyes weeping for ye; and for her leddyship too; may the Lord Almighty bless her, and presarve her, and carry her sowl to glory

when she dies; for av there war iver a good woman on God's 'arth, that woman is Leddy Fitzgerald."

And then Aunt Letty found that there was no necessity for her to continue her speech, and indeed no possibility of her doing so even if she were so minded. The children began to wail and cry, and the mothers also mixed loud sobbings with their loud prayers; and Emmeline and Mary, dissolved in tears, sat themselves down, drawing to them the youngest bairns and those whom they had loved the best, kissing their sallow, famine-stricken, unwholesome faces, and weeping over them with a love of which hitherto they had been hardly conscious.

There was not much more in the way of speech possible to any of them, for even Aunt Letty was far gone in tender wailing; and it was wonderful to see the liberties that were taken even with that venerable bonnet. The women had first of all taken hold of her hands to kiss them, and had kissed her feet, and her garments, and her shoulders, and then behind her back they had made crosses on her, although they knew how dreadfully she would have raged had she caught them polluting her by such doings; and they grasped her arms and embraced them, till at last, those who were more daring, reached her forehead and her face, and poor old Aunt Letty, who in her emotion could not now utter a syllable, was almost pulled to pieces among them.

Mary and Emmeline had altogether surrendered themselves, and were the centres of clusters of children who hung upon them. And the sobs now were no longer low and tearful, but they had grown into long, protracted groanings, and loud wailings, and clapping

of hands, and tearings of the hair. O, my reader, have you ever seen a railway train taking its departure from an Irish station, with a freight of Irish emigrants? if so, you know how the hair is torn, and how the hands are clapped, and how the low moanings gradually swell into notes of loud lamentation. It means nothing, I have heard men say, — men and women too. But such men and women are wrong. It means much; it means this: that those who are separated, not only love each other, but are anxious to tell each other that they so love. We have all heard of demonstrative people. A demonstrative person, I take it, is he who is desirous of speaking out what is in his heart. For myself I am inclined to think that such speaking out has its good ends. "The faculty of silence! is it not of all things the most beautiful?" That is the doctrine preached by a great latter-day philosopher; for myself, I think that the faculty of speech is much more beautiful — of speech if it be made but by howlings, and wailings, and loud clappings of the hand. What is in a man, let it come out and be known to those around him; if it be bad it will find correction; if it be good it will spread and be beneficent.

And then one woman made herself audible over the sobs of the crowding children; she was a gaunt, high-boned woman, but she would have been comely, if not handsome, had not the famine come upon her. She held a baby in her arms, and another little toddling thing had been hanging on her dress till Emeline had seen it, and plucked it away; and it was now sitting in her lap quite composed, and sucking a piece of cake that had been given to it. "An' it's a

bad day for us all," said the woman, beginning in a low voice, which became louder and louder as she went on; "it's a bad day for us all that takes away from us the only rale friends that we iver had, and the back of my hand to them that have come in the way, bringin' sorrow, an' desolation, an' misery on gentlefolks that have been in the land; rale gentlefolks, sich as there ain't no others to be found nowadays in any of these parts. O'hone, o'hone! but it's a bad day for us and for the childer; for where shall we find the dhrop to comfort us or the bit to ate when the sickness comes on us, as it's likely to come now, when the Fitzgeralds is out of the counthry. May the Lord bless them, and keep them, and presarve them, and the Holy Virgin have them in her keepin'!"

"Wh—i—s—h—h," said Aunt Letty, who could not allow such idolatry to pass by unobserved or unrebuked.

"An' shure the blessin' of a poor woman cannot haram you," continued the mother; "an' I'll tell you what, neighbours, it'll be a bad day for him that folk call the heir when he puts his foot in that house."

"Deed an' that's thrue for you, Bridget Magrath," said another voice from among the crowd of women.

"A bad day intirely," continued the woman, with the baby; "av the house stans over his head when he does the like o' that, there'll be no justice in the heavens."

"But, Mrs. Magrath," said Aunt Letty, trying to interrupt her, "you must not speak in that way; you are mistaken in supposing that Mr. Owen —"

"We'll all live to see," said the woman; "for the time's comin' quick upon us now. But it's a bad law

that kills our ould mather over our heads, an' takes away from us our ould Misthress. An' as for him they calls Mr. Owen —”

But the ladies found it impossible to listen to her any longer, so with some difficulty they extricated themselves from the crowd by which they were surrounded, and once more shaking hands with those who were nearest to them escaped into the park, and made their way back towards the house.

They had not expected so much demonstration, and were not a little disconcerted at the scene which had taken place. Aunt Letty had never been so handled in her life, and hardly knew how to make her bonnet sit comfortably on her head; and the two girls were speechless till they were half across the park.

“I am glad we have been,” said Emmeline at last, as soon as the remains of her emotion would allow her to articulate her words.

“It would have been dreadful to have gone away without seeing them,” said Mary. “Poor creatures, poor dear creatures; we shall never again have any more people to be fond of us like that!”

“There is no knowing,” said Aunt Letty; “the Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away, and blessed is the name of the Lord. You are both young, and may come back again; but for me —”

“Dear Aunt Letty, if we come back you shall come too.”

“If I only thought that my bones could lie here near my brother's. But never mind; what signifies it where our bones lie?” And then they were silent for a while, till Aunt Letty spoke again. “I mean to be quite happy over in England; I believe I shall be

happiest of you all if I can find any clergyman who is not half perverted to idolatry."

This took place some time before the ladies left Castle Richmond, — perhaps as much as three weeks; it was even before Herbert's departure, who started for London the day but one after the scene here recorded; he had gone to various places to take his last farewell; to see the Townsends at the parsonage; to call on Father Barney at Kanturk, and had even shaken hands with the Rev. Mr. Creagh, at Gortnaclough. But one farewell visit had been put off for the last. It was now arranged that he was to go over to Desmond Court and see Clara before he went. There had been some difficulty in this, for Lady Desmond had at first declared that she could not feel justified in asking him into her house; but the earl was now at home, and her ladyship had at last given her consent: he was to see the countess first, and was afterwards to see Clara — alone. He had declared that he would not go there unless he were to be allowed an interview with her in private. The countess, as I have said, at last consented, trusting that her previous eloquence might be efficacious in counteracting the ill effects of her daughter's imprudence. On the day after that interview he was to start for London; "never to return," as he said to Emmeline, "unless he came to seek his wife."

"But you will come to seek your wife," said Emmeline, stoutly; "I shall think you faint-hearted if you doubt it."

CHAPTER XII.

The Last Stage.

On the day before his departure for London, Herbert Fitzgerald once more got on his horse — the horse that was to be no longer his after that day — and rode off towards Desmond Court. He had already perceived how foolish he had been in walking thither through the mud and rain when last he went there, and how much he had lost by his sad appearance that day, and by his want of personal comfort. So he dressed himself with some care — dressing not for his love, but for the countess, — and taking his silver-mounted whip in his gloved hand, he got up on his well-groomed nag with more spirit than he had hitherto felt.

Nothing could be better than the manner in which, at this time, the servants about Castle Richmond conducted themselves. Most of them — indeed, all but three — had been told that they must go; and in so telling them, the truth had been explained. It had been “found,” Aunt Letty said to one of the elder among them, that Mr. Herbert was not the heir to the property, and therefore the family was obliged to go away. Mrs. Jones of course accompanied her mistress. Richard had been told, both by Herbert and by Aunt Letty, that he had better remain and live on a small patch of land that should be provided for him. But in answer to this he stated his intention of removing himself to London. If the London air was fit for “my leddy and Miss Letty,” it would be fit for him. “It’s no good any more talking, Mr. Herbert,” said Richard, “I

main to go." So there was no more talking, and he did go.

But all the other servants took their month's warning with tears and blessings, and strove one beyond another how they might best serve the ladies of the family to the end. "I'd lose the little fingers off me to go with you, Miss Emmeline; so I would," said one poor girl, — all in vain. If they could not keep a retinue of servants in Ireland, it was clear enough that they could not keep them in London.

The groom who held the horse for Herbert to mount, touched his hat respectfully as his young master rode off slowly down the avenue, and then went back to the stables to meditate with awe on the changes which had happened in his time, and to bethink himself whether or no he could bring himself to serve in the stables of Owen the usurper.

Herbert did not take the direct road to Desmond Court, but went round as though he were going to Gortnaclough, and then turning away from the Gortnaclough road, made his way by a cross lane towards Clady and the mountains. He hardly knew himself whether he had any object in this beyond one which he did not express even to himself, — that, namely, of not being seen on the way leading to Desmond Court. But this he did do, thereby riding out of the district with which he was most thoroughly acquainted, and passing by cabins and patches of now deserted land which were strange to him. It was a poor, bleak, damp, undrained country, lying beyond the confines of his father's property, which in good days had never been pleasant to the eye, but which now in these days — days that were so decidedly bad, was anything but pleasant.

It was one of those tracts of land which had been divided and subdivided among the cottiers till the fields had dwindled down to parts of acres, each surrounded by rude low banks, which of themselves seemed to occupy a quarter of the surface of the land. The original landmarks, the big earthen banks, — banks so large that a horse might walk on the top of them, — were still visible enough, showing to the practised eye what had once been the fields into which the land had been divided; but these had since been bisected and crossected, and intersected by family arrangements, in which brothers had been jealous of brothers, and fathers of their children, till each little lot contained but a rood or two of available surface.

This had been miserable enough to look at, even when those roods had been cropped with potatoes or oats; but now they were not cropped at all, nor was there preparation being made for cropping them. They had been let out under the con-acre system, at so much a rood, for the potato season, at rents amounting sometimes to ten or twelve pounds the acre; but nobody would take them now. There, in that electoral division, the whole proceeds of such land would hardly have paid the poor rates, and therefore the land was left uncultivated.

The winter was over, for it was now April, and had any tillage been intended, it would have been commenced — even in Ireland. It was the beginning of April, but the weather was still stormy and cold, and the east wind, which, as a rule, strikes Ireland with but a light hand, was blowing sharply. On a sudden a squall of rain came on, — one of those spring squalls which are so piercingly cold, but which are

sure to pass by rapidly, if the wayfarer will have patience to wait for them. Herbert remembering his former discomfiture, resolved that he would have such patience, and dismounting from his horse at a cabin on the road-side, entered it himself, and led his horse in after him. In England no one would think of taking his steed into a poor man's cottage, and would hardly put his beast into a cottager's shed without leave asked and granted; but people are more intimate with each other, and take greater liberties in Ireland. It is no uncommon thing on a wet hunting-day to see a cabin packed with horses, and the children moving about among them, almost as unconcernedly as though the animals were pigs. But then the Irish horses are so well mannered and good-natured.

The cabin was one abutting as it were on the road, not standing back upon the land, as is most customary; and it was built in an angle at a spot where the road made a turn, so that two sides of it stood close out in the wayside. It was small and wretched to look at, without any sort of outside shed, or even a scrap of potato-garden attached to it, — a miserable, low-roofed, damp, ragged tenement, as wretched as any that might be seen even in the county Cork.

But the nakedness of the exterior was as nothing to the nakedness of the interior. When Herbert entered, followed by his horse, his eye glanced round the dark place, and it seemed to be empty of everything. There was no fire on the hearth, though a fire on the hearth is the easiest of all luxuries for an Irishman to acquire, and the last which he is willing to lose. There was not an article of furniture in the whole place; neither chairs, nor table, nor bed, nor dresser; there was

there neither dish, nor cup, nor plate, nor even the iron pot in which all the cookery of the Irish cottiers' ménage is usually carried on. Beneath his feet was the damp earthen floor, and around him were damp, cracked walls, and over his head was the old lumpy thatch, through which the water was already dropping; but inside was to be seen none of those articles of daily use which are usually to be found in the houses even of the poorest.

But, nevertheless, the place was inhabited. Squatting in the middle of the cabin, seated on her legs crossed under her, with nothing between her and the wet earth, there crouched a woman with a child in her arms. At first, so dark was the place, Herbert hardly thought that the object before him was a human being. She did not move when he entered, or spoke to him, or in any way show sign of surprise that he should have come there. There was room for him and his horse without pushing her from her place; and, as it seemed, he might have stayed there and taken his departure without any sign having been made by her.

But as his eyes became used to the light he saw her eyes gleaming brightly through the gloom. They were very large and bright as they turned round upon him while he moved — large and bright, but with a dull, unwholesome brightness, — a brightness that had in it none of the light of life.

And then he looked at her more closely. She had on her some rag of clothing which barely sufficed to cover her nakedness, and the baby which she held in her arms was covered in some sort; but he could see, as he came to stand close over her, that these garments were but loose rags which were hardly fastened round

her body. Her rough short hair hung down upon her back, clotted with dirt, and the head and face of the child which she held was covered with dirt and sores. On no more wretched object, in its desolate solitude, did the eye of man ever fall.

In those days there was a form of face which came upon the sufferers when their state of misery was far advanced, and which was a sure sign that their last stage of misery was nearly run. The mouth would fall and seem to hang, the lips at the two ends of the mouth would be dragged down, and the lower parts of the cheeks would fall as though they had been dragged and pulled. There were no signs of acute agony when this phasis of countenance was to be seen, none of the horrid symptoms of gnawing hunger by which one generally supposes that famine is accompanied. The look is one of apathy, desolation, and death. When custom had made these signs easily legible, the poor doomed wretch was known with certainty. "It's no use in life meddling with him; he's gone," said a lady to me in the far west of the south of Ireland, while the poor boy, whose doom was thus spoken, stood by listening. Her delicacy did not equal her energy in doing good, — for she did much good; but in truth it was difficult to be delicate when the hands were so full. And then she pointed out to me the signs on the lad's face, and I found that her reading was correct.

The famine was not old enough at the time of which we are speaking for Herbert to have learned all this, or he would have known that there was no hope left in this world for the poor creature whom he saw before him. The skin of her cheek had fallen, and her mouth was dragged, and the mark of death was upon

her; but the agony of want was past. She sat there listless, indifferent, hardly capable of suffering, even for her child, waiting her doom unconsciously.

As he had entered without eliciting a word from her, so might he have departed without any outward sign of notice; but this would have been impossible on his part. "I have come in out of the rain for shelter," said he, looking down on her.

"Out o' the rain, is it?" said she, still fixing on him her glassy bright eyes. "Yer honour's welcome thin." But she did not attempt to move, nor show any of those symptoms of reverence which are habitual to the Irish when those of a higher rank enter their cabins.

"You seem to be very poorly off here," said Herbert, looking round the bare walls of the cabin. "Have you no chair, and no bed to lie on?"

"Deed no," said she.

"And no fire?" said he, for the damp and chill of the place struck through to his bones.

"Deed no," she said again; but she made no wail as to her wants, and uttered no complaint as to her misery.

"And are you living here by yourself, without furniture or utensils of any kind?"

"It's jist as yer honour sees it," answered she.

For a while Herbert stood still, looking round him, for the woman was so motionless and uncommunicative that he hardly knew how to talk to her. That she was in the lowest depth of distress was evident enough, and it behoved him to administer to her immediate wants before he left her: but what could he do for one who seemed to be so indifferent to herself? He stood

for a time looking round him till he could see through the gloom that there was a bundle of straw lying in the dark corner beyond the hearth, and that the straw was huddled up, as though there were something lying under it. Seeing this he left the bridle of his horse, and stepping across the cabin moved the straw with the handle of his whip. As he did so he turned his back from the wall in which the small window-hole had been pierced, so that a gleam of light fell upon the bundle at his feet, and he could see that the body of a child was lying there, stripped of every vestige of clothing.

For a minute or two he said nothing — hardly, indeed, knowing how to speak, and looking from the corpse-like woman back to the lifelike corpse, and then from the corpse back to the woman, as though he expected that she would say something unasked. But she did not say a word, though she so turned her head that her eyes rested on him.

He then knelt down and put his hand upon the body, and found that it was not yet stone cold. The child apparently had been about four years old, while that still living in her arms might perhaps be half that age.

"Was she your own?" asked Herbert, speaking hardly above his breath.

"Deed, yes!" said the woman. "She was my own, own little Kitty." But there was no tear in her eye or gurgling sob audible from her throat.

"And when did she die?" he asked.

"Deed, thin, and I don't jist know — not exactly;" and sinking lower down upon her haunches, she put up to her forehead the hand with which she had supported

herself on the floor — the hand which was not occupied with the baby, and pushing back with it the loose hairs from her face, tried to make an effort at thinking.

"She was alive in the night, wasn't she?" he said.

"I b'lieve thin she was, yer honour. 'Twas broad day, I'm thinking, when she giv' over moaning. She warn't that way when he went away."

"And who's he?"

"Jist Mike, thin."

"And is Mike your husband?" he asked. She was not very willing to talk; but it appeared at last that Mike was her husband, and that having become a cripple through rheumatism, he had not been able to work on the roads. In this condition he and his should of course have gone into a poor-house. It was easy enough to give such advice in such cases when one came across them, and such advice when given at that time was usually followed; but there were so many who had no advice, who could get no aid, who knew not which way to turn themselves! This wretched man had succeeded in finding some one who would give him his food — food enough to keep himself alive — for such work as he could do in spite of his rheumatism, and this work to the last he would not abandon. Even this was better to him than the poor-house. But then, as long as a man found work out of the poor-house, his wife and children would not be admitted into it. They would not be admitted if the fact of the working husband was known. The rule in itself was salutary, as without it a man could work, earning such wages as were adjudged to be needful for a family, and at the same time send his wife and children to be supported on the rates. But in some cases, such as this, it pressed

very cruelly. Exceptions were of course made in such cases, if they were known: but then it was so hard to know them!

This man Mike, the husband of that woman, and the father of those children, alive and dead, had now gone to his work, leaving his home without one morsel of food within it, and the wife of his bosom and children of his love without the hope of getting any. And then looking closely round him, Herbert could see that a small basin or bowl lay on the floor near her, capable of holding perhaps a pint; and on lifting it he saw that there still clung to it a few grains of uncooked Indian corn-flour — the yellow meal, as it was called. Her husband, she said at last, had brought home with him in his cap a handful of this flour, stolen from the place where he was working — perhaps a quarter of a pound, then worth over a farthing, and she had mixed this with water in a basin; and this was the food which had sustained her, or rather had not sustained her, since yesterday morning — her and her two children, the one that was living and the one that was dead.

Such was her story, told by her in the fewest of words. And then he asked her as to her hopes for the future. But though she cared, as it seemed, but little for the past, for the future she cared less. "Deed, thin, an' I don't jist know." She would say no more than that, and would not even raise her voice to ask for alms when he pitied her in her misery. But with her the agony of death was already over.

"And the child that you have in your arms," he said, "is it not cold?" And he stood close over her, and put out his hand and touched the baby's body. As he did so, she made some motion as though to ar-

range the clothing closer round the child's limbs, but Herbert could see that she was making an effort to hide her own nakedness. It was the only effort that she made while he stood there beside her.

"Is she not cold?" he said again, when he had turned his face away to relieve her from her embarrassment.

"Cold," she muttered, with a vacant face and wondering tone of voice, as though she did not quite understand him. "I suppose she is cold. Why wouldn't she be cold? We're cold enough, if that's all." But still she did not stir from the spot on which she sat; and the child, though it gave from time to time a low moan that was almost inaudible, lay still in her arms, with its big eyes staring into vacancy.

He felt that he was stricken with horror as he remained there in the cabin with the dying woman and the naked corpse of the poor dead child. But what was he to do? He could not go and leave them without succour. The woman had made no complaint of her suffering, and had asked for nothing; but he felt that it would be impossible to abandon her without offering her relief; nor was it possible that he should leave the body of the child in that horribly ghastly state. So he took from his pocket his silk handkerchief, and, returning to the corner of the cabin, spread it as a covering over the corpse. At first he did not like to touch the small naked dwindled remains of humanity from which life had fled; but gradually he overcame his disgust, and kneeling down, he straightened the limbs and closed the eyes, and folded the handkerchief round the slender body. The mother looked on him the while, shaking her head slowly, as though asking him with

all the voice that was left to her, whether it were not piteous; but of words she still uttered none.

And then he took from his pocket a silver coin or two, and tendered them to her. These she did take, muttering some word of thanks, but they caused in her no emotion of joy. "She was there waiting," she said, "till Mike should return," and there she would still wait, even though she should die with the silver in her hand.

"I will send some one to you," he said, as he took his departure; "some one that shall take the poor child and bury it, and who shall move you and the other one into the workhouse." She thanked him once more with some low muttered words, but the promise brought her no joy. And when the succour came it was all too late, for the mother and the two children never left the cabin till they left it together, wrapped in their workhouse shrouds.

Herbert, as he remounted his horse and rode quietly on, forgot for a while both himself and Clara Desmond. Whatever might be the extent of his own calamity, how could he think himself unhappy after what he had seen? how could he repine at aught that the world had done for him, having now witnessed to how low a state of misery a fellow human being might be brought? Could he, after that, dare to consider himself unfortunate?

Before he reached Desmond Court he did make some arrangements for the poor woman, and directed that a cart might be sent for her, so that she might be carried to the union workhouse at Kanturk. But his efforts in her service were of little avail. People then did not think much of a dying woman, and were in no special hurry to obey Herbert's behest.

"A woman to be carried to the union, is it? For Mr. Fitzgerald, eh? What Mr. Fitzgerald says must be done, in course. But sure av' it's done before dark, won't that be time enough for the likes of her?"

But had they flown to the spot on the wings of love, it would not have sufficed to prolong her life one day. Her doom had been spoken before Herbert had entered the cabin.

CHAPTER XIII.

Farewell.

HE was two hours later than he had intended as he rode up the avenue to Lady Desmond's gate, and his chief thought at the moment was how he should describe to the countess the scene he had just witnessed. Why describe it at all? That is what we should all say. He had come there to talk about other things — about other things which must be discussed, and which would require all his wits. Let him keep that poor woman on his mind, but not embarrass himself with any mention of her for the present. This, no doubt, would have been wise if only it had been possible; but out of the full heart the mouth speaks.

But Lady Desmond had not witnessed the scene which I have attempted to describe, and her heart, therefore, was not full of it, and was not inclined to be so filled. And so, in answer to Herbert's exclamation, "Oh, Lady Desmond, I have seen such a sight!" she gave him but little encouragement to describe it, and by her coldness, reserve, and dignity, soon quelled the expression of his feelings.

The earl was present and shook hands very cordially with Herbert when he entered the room; and he, being more susceptible as being younger, and not having yet become habituated to the famine as his mother was, did express some eager sympathy. He would immediately go down, or send Fahy with the car, and have her brought up and saved; but his mother had other work to do and soon put a stop to all this.

"Mr. Fitzgerald," said she, speaking with a smile upon her face, and with much high-bred dignity of demeanour, "as you and Lady Clara both wish to see each other before you leave the country, and as you have known each other so intimately, and considering all the circumstances, I have not thought it well absolutely to forbid an interview. But I do doubt its expediency; I do, indeed. And Lord Desmond, who feels for your late misfortune as we all do, perfectly agrees with me. He thinks that it would be much wiser for you both to have parted without the pain of a meeting, seeing how impossible it is that you should ever be more to each other than you are now." And then she appealed to her son, who stood by, looking not quite so wise, nor even quite so decided as his mother's words would seem to make him.

"Well, yes; upon my word I don't see how it's to be," said the young earl. "I am deuced sorry for it for one, and I wish I was well off, so that I could give Clara a pot of money, and then I should not care so much about your not being the baronet."

"I am sure you must see, Mr. Fitzgerald, and I know that you do see it because you have very properly said so, that a marriage between you and Lady

Clara is now impossible. For her such an engagement would be very bad — very bad indeed; but for you it would be utter ruin. Indeed, it would be ruin for you both. Unencumbered as you will be, and with the good connection which you will have, and with your excellent talents, it will be quite within your reach to win for yourself a high position. But with you, as with other gentlemen who have to work their way, marriage must come late in life, unless you marry an heiress. This I think is thoroughly understood by all people in our position; and I am sure that it is understood by your excellent mother, for whom I always had and still have the most unfeigned respect. As this is so undoubtedly the case, and as I cannot of course consent that Lady Clara should remain hampered by an engagement which would in all human probability hang over the ten best years of her life, I thought it wise that you should not see each other. I have, however, allowed myself to be overruled; and now I must only trust to your honour, forbearance, and prudence to protect my child from what might possibly be the ill effects of her own affectionate feelings. That she is romantic, — enthusiastic to a fault I should perhaps rather call it, I need not tell you. She thinks that your misfortune demands from her a sacrifice of herself; but you, I know, will feel that, even were such a sacrifice available to you, it would not become you to accept it. Because you have fallen, you will not wish to drag her down; more especially as you can rise again — and she could not.”

So spoke the countess, with much worldly wisdom, and with considerable tact in adjusting her words to the object which she had in view. Herbert, as he

stood before her silent during the period of her oration, did feel that it would be well for him to give up his love, and go away in utter solitude of heart to those dingy studies which Mr. Prendergast was preparing for him. His love, or rather the assurance of Clara's love, had been his great consolation. But what right had he, with all the advantages of youth, and health, and friends, and education, to require consolation? And then from moment to moment he thought of the woman whom he had left in the cabin, and confessed that he did not dare to call himself unhappy.

He had listened attentively, although he did thus think of other eloquence besides that of the countess — of the eloquence of that silent, solitary, dying woman; but when she had done he hardly knew what to say for himself. She did make him feel that it would be ungenerous in him to persist in his engagement; but then again, Clara's letters and his sister's arguments had made him feel that it was impossible to abandon it. They pleaded of heart-feelings so well that he could not resist them; and the countess — she pleaded so well as to world's prudence that he could not resist her.

"I would not willingly do anything to injure Lady Clara," he said.

"That's what we all knew," said the young earl. "You see, what is a girl to do like her? Love in a cottage is all very well, and all that; and as for riches, I don't care about them. It would be a pity if I did, for I shall be about the poorest nobleman in the three kingdoms, I suppose. But a chap when he marries should have something; shouldn't he now?"

To tell the truth the earl had been very much

divided in his opinions since he had come home, veering round a point or two this way or a point or two that, in obedience to the blast of eloquence to which he might be last subjected. But latterly the idea had grown upon him that Clara might possibly marry Owen Fitzgerald. There was about Owen a strange fascination which all felt who had once loved him. To the world he was rough and haughty, imperious in his commands, and exacting even in his fellowship; but to the few whom he absolutely loved, whom he had taken into his heart's core, no man ever was more tender or more gracious. Clara, though she had resolved to banish him from her heart, had found it impossible to do so till Herbert's misfortunes had given him a charm in her eyes which was not all his own. Clara's mother had loved him — had loved him as she never before had loved; and now she loved him still, though she had so strongly determined that her love should be that of a mother, and not that of a wife. And the young earl, now that Owen's name was again rife in his ears, remembered all the pleasantness of former days. He had never again found such a companion as Owen had been. He had met no other friend to whom he could talk of sport and a man's outward pleasures when his mind was that way given, and to whom he could also talk of soft inward things, — the heart's feelings, and aspirations, and wants. Owen would be as tender with him as a woman, allowing the young lad's arm round his body, listening to words which the outer world would have called bosh — and have derided as girlish. So at least thought the young earl to himself. And all boys long to be allowed utterance occasionally for these soft tender things; — as also do all

men, unless the devil's share in the world has become altogether uppermost with them.

And the young lad's heart hankered after his old friend. He had listened to his sister, and for a while had taken her part; but his mother had since whispered to him that Owen would now be the better suitor, the preferable brother-in-law; and that in fact Clara loved Owen the best, though she felt herself bound by honour to his kinsman. And then she reminded her son of Clara's former love for Owen — a love which he himself had witnessed; and he thought of the day when with so much regret he had told his friend that he was unsuited to wed with an earl's penniless daughter. Of the subsequent pleasantness which had come with Herbert's arrival, he had seen little or nothing. He had been told by letter that Herbert Fitzgerald, the prosperous heir of Castle Richmond, was to be his future brother-in-law, and he had been satisfied. But now, if Owen could return — how pleasant it would be!

"But a chap when he marries should have something; shouldn't he now?" So spoke the young earl, re-echoing his mother's prudence.

Herbert did not quite like this interference on the boy's part. Was he to explain to a young lad from Eton what his future intentions were with reference to his mode of living and period of marriage? "Of course," he said, addressing himself to the countess, "I shall not insist on an engagement made under such different circumstances."

"Nor will you allow her to do so through a romantic feeling of generosity," said the countess.

"You should know your own daughter, Lady Desmond, better than I do," he answered; "but I cannot

say what I may do at her instance till I shall have seen her."

"Do you mean to say that you will allow a girl of her age to talk you into a proceeding which you know to be wrong?"

"I will allow no one," he said, "to talk me into a proceeding which I know to be wrong; nor will I allow any one to talk me out of a proceeding which I believe to be right." And then, having uttered these somewhat grandiloquent words, he shut himself up as though there were no longer any need for discussing the subject.

"My poor child!" said the countess, in a low tremulous voice, as though she did not intend him to hear them. "My poor unfortunate child!" Herbert as he did hear them thought of the woman in the cabin, and of her misfortunes and of her children. "Come, Patrick," continued the countess, "it is perhaps useless for us to say anything further at present. If you will remain here, Mr. Fitzgerald, for a minute or two, I will send Lady Clara to wait upon you;" and then curtsying with great dignity she withdrew, and the young earl scuffled out after her. "Mamma," he said, as he went, "he is determined that he will have her."

"My poor child!" answered the countess.

"And if I were in his place I should be determined also. You may as well give it up. Not but that I like Owen a thousand times the best."

Herbert did wait there for some five minutes, and then the door was opened very gently, was gently closed again, and Clara Desmond was in the room. He came towards her respectfully, holding out his hand

that he might take hers; but before he had thought of how she would act she was in his arms. Hitherto, of all betrothed maidens, she had been the most retiring. Sometimes he had thought her cold when she had left the seat by his side to go and nestle closely by his sister. She had avoided the touch of his hand and the pressure of his arm, and had gone from him speechless, if not with anger then with dismay, when he had carried the warmth of his love beyond the touch of his hand or the pressure of his arm. But now she rushed into his embrace and hid her face upon his shoulder, as though she were over glad to return to the heart from which those around her had endeavoured to banish her. Was he or was he not to speak of his love? That had been the question which he had asked himself when left alone there for those five minutes, with the eloquence of the countess ringing in his ears. Now that question had in truth been answered for him.

"Herbert," she said, "Herbert! I have so sorrowed for you; but I know that you have borne it like a man."

She was thinking of what he had now half forgotten, — the position which he had lost, those hopes which had all been shipwrecked, his title surrendered to another, and his lost estates. She was thinking of them as the loss affected him; but he, he had reconciled himself to all that — unless all that were to separate him from his promised bride.

"Dearest Clara," he said, with his arm close round her waist, while neither anger nor dismay appeared to disturb the sweetness of that position, "the letter which you wrote me has been my chief comfort." Now if he

had any intention of liberating Clara from the bond of her engagement, — if he really had any feeling that it behoved him not to involve her in the worldly losses which had come upon him, — he was taking a very bad way of carrying out his views in that respect. Instead of confessing the comfort which he had received from that letter, and holding her close to his breast while he did confess it, he should have stood away from her — quite as far apart as he had done from the countess; and he should have argued with her, showing her how foolish and imprudent her letter had been, explaining that it behoved her now to repress her feelings, and teaching her that peers' daughters as well as housemaids should look out for situations which would suit them, guided by prudence and a view to the wages, — not follow the dictates of impulse and of the heart. This is what he should have done, according, I believe, to the views of most men and women. Instead of that he held her there as close as he could hold her, and left her to do the most of the speaking. I think he was right. According to my ideas woman's love should be regarded as fair prize of war, — as long as the war has been carried on with due adherence to the recognized law of nations. When it has been fairly won, let it be firmly held. I have no opinion of that theory of giving up.

"You knew that I would not abandon you! Did you not know it? say that you knew it?" said Clara, and then she insisted on having an answer.

"I could hardly dare to think that there was so much happiness left for me," said Herbert.

"Then you were a traitor to your love, sir; a false traitor." But deep as was the offence for which she

arraigned him, it was clear to see that the pardon came as quick as the conviction. "And was Emmeline so untrue to me also as to believe that?"

"Emmeline said —" and then he told her what Emmeline had said.

"Dearest, dearest Emmeline! give her a whole heart-load of love from me; now mind you do, — and to Mary, too. And remember this, sir; that I love Emmeline ten times better than I do you; twenty times —, because she knew me. Oh, if she had mistrusted me —!"

"And do you think that I mistrusted you?"

"Yes, you did; you know you did, sir. You wrote and told me so; — and now, this very day, you come here to act as though you mistrusted me still. You know you have, only you have not the courage to go on with the acting."

And then he began to defend himself, showing how ill it would have become him to have kept her bound to her engagements had she feared poverty as most girls in her position would have feared it. But on this point she would not hear much from him, lest the very fact of her hearing it should make it seem that such a line of conduct were possible to her.

"You know nothing about most girls, sir, or about any, I am afraid; not even about one. And if most girls were frightfully heartless, which they are not, what right had you to liken me to most girls? Emmeline knew better, and why could not you take her as a type of most girls? You have behaved very badly, Master Herbert, and you know it; and nothing on earth shall make me forgive you; nothing — but your promise that you will not so misjudge me any more." And

then the tears came to his eyes, and her face was again hidden on his shoulder.

It was not very probable that after such a commencement the interview would terminate in a manner favourable to the wishes of the countess. Clara swore to her lover that she had given him all that she had to give, — her heart, and will, and very self; and swore, also, that she could not and would not take back the gift. She would remain as she was now as long as he thought proper, and would come to him whenever he should tell her that his home was large enough for them both. And so that matter was settled between them.

Then she had much to say about his mother and sisters, and a word too about his poor father. And now that it was settled between them so fixedly, that come what might they were to float together in the same boat down the river of life, she had a question or two also to ask, and her approbation to give or to withhold, as to his future prospects. He was not to think, she told him, of deciding on anything without at any rate telling her. So he had to explain to her all the family plans, making her know why he had decided on the law as his own path to fortune, and asking for and obtaining her consent to all his proposed measures.

In this way her view of the matter became more and more firmly adopted as that which should be the view resolutely to be taken by them both. The countess had felt that that interview would be fatal to her; and she had been right. But how could she have prevented it? Twenty times she had resolved that she would prevent it; but twenty times she had been forced

to confess that she was powerless to do so. In these days a mother even can only exercise such power over a child as public opinion permits her to use. "Mother, it was you who brought us together, and you cannot separate us now." That had always been Clara's argument, leaving the countess helpless, except as far as she could work on Herbert's generosity. That she had tried, — and, as we have seen, been foiled there also. If only she could have taken her daughter away while the Castle Richmond family were still mersed in the bitter depth of their suffering, — at that moment when the blows were falling on them! Then, indeed, she might have done something; but she was not like other titled mothers. In such a step as this she was absolutely without the means.

Thus talking together they remained closeted for a most unconscionable time. Clara had had her purpose to carry out, and to Herbert the moments had been too precious to cause him any regret as they passed. But now at last a knock was heard at the door, and Lady Desmond, without waiting for an answer to it, entered the room. Clara immediately started from her seat, not as though she were either guilty or tremulous, but with a brave resolve to go on with her purposed plan.

"Mamma," she said, "it is fixed now; it cannot be altered now."

"What is fixed, Clara?"

"Herbert and I have renewed our engagement, and nothing must now break it, unless we die."

"Mr. Fitzgerald, if this be true your conduct to my daughter has been unmanly as well as ungenerous."

"Lady Desmond, it is true; and I think that my conduct is neither unmanly nor ungenerous."

"Your own relations are against you, sir."

"What relations?" asked Clara, sharply.

"I am not speaking to you, Clara; your absurdity and romance are so great that I cannot speak to you."

"What relations, Herbert?" again asked Clara; for she would not for the world have had Lady Fitzgerald against her.

"Lady Desmond has, I believe, seen my Aunt Letty two or three times lately; I suppose she must mean her."

"Oh," said Clara, turning away as though she were now satisfied. And then Herbert, escaping from the house as quickly as he could, rode home with a renewal of that feeling of triumph which he had once enjoyed before when returning from Desmond Court to Castle Richmond.

On the next day Herbert started for London. The parting was sad enough, and the occasion of it was such that it could hardly be otherwise. "I am quite sure of one thing," he said to his sister Emmeline, "I shall never see Castle Richmond again." And, indeed one may say that small as might be his chance of doing so, his wish to do so must be still less. There could be no possible inducement to him to come back to a place which had so nearly been his own, and the possession of which he had lost in so painful a manner. Every tree about the place, every path across the wide park, every hedge and ditch and hidden leafy corner, had had for him a special interest, — for they had all been his own. But all that was now over. They were not only not his own, but they belonged to one who was mounting into his seat of power over his head.

He had spent the long evening before his last din-

ner in going round the whole demesne alone, so that no eye should witness what he felt. None but those who have known the charms of a country-house early in life can conceive the intimacy to which a man attains with all the various trifling objects round his own locality; how he knows the bark of every tree, and the bend of every bough; how he has marked where the rich grass grows in tufts, and where the poorer soil is always dry and bare; how he watches the nests of the rooks, and the holes of the rabbits, and has learned where the thrushes build, and can show the branch on which the linnets sits. All these things had been dear to Herbert, and they all required at his hand some last farewell. Every dog too, he had to see, and to lay his hand on the neck of every horse. This making of his final adieu under such circumstances was melancholy enough.

And then, too, later in the evening, after dinner, all the servants were called into the parlour that he might shake hands with them. There was not one of them who had not hoped, as lately as three months since, that he or she would live to call Herbert Fitzgerald master. Indeed, he had already been their master — their young master. All Irish servants especially love to pay respect to the “young master;” but Herbert now was to be their master no longer, and the probability was that he would never see one of them again.

He schooled himself to go through the ordeal with a manly gait and with dry eyes, and he did it; but their eyes were not dry, not even those of the men. Mrs. Jones and a favourite girl whom the young ladies patronized were not of the number, for it had been decided that they should follow the fortunes of their

mistress; but Richard was there, standing a little apart from the others, as being now on a different footing. He was to go also, but before the scene was over he also had taken to sobbing violently.

"I wish you all well and happy," said Herbert, making his little speech, "and regret deeply that the intercourse between us should be thus suddenly severed. You have served me and mine well and truly, and it is hard upon you now, that you should be bid to go and seek another home elsewhere."

"It isn't that we mind, Mr. Herbert; it ain't that as frets us," said one of the men.

"It ain't that at all, at all," said Richard, doing chorus; "but that yer honour should be robbed of what is yer honour's own."

"But you all know that we cannot help it," continued Herbert; "a misfortune has come upon us which nobody could have foreseen, and therefore we are obliged to part with our old friends and servants."

At the word friends the maid-servants all sobbed. "And 'deed we is your frinds, and true frinds, too," wailed the cook.

"I know you are, and it grieves me to feel that I shall see you no more. But you must not be led to think by what Richard says that anybody is depriving me of that which ought to be my own. I am now leaving Castle Richmond because it is not my own, but justly belongs to another; — to another who, I must in justice tell you, is in no hurry to claim his inheritance. We none of us have any ground for displeasure against the present owner of this place, my cousin, Sir Owen Fitzgerald."

"We don't know nothing about Sir Owen," said one voice.

"And don't want," said another, convulsed with sobs.

"He's a very good sort of young gentleman — of his own kind, no doubt," said Richard.

"But you can all of you understand," continued Herbert, "that as this place is no longer our own, we are obliged to leave it; and as we shall live in a very different way in the home to which we are going, we are obliged to part with you, though we have no reason to find fault with any one among you. I am going to-morrow morning early, and my mother and sisters will follow after me in a few weeks. It will be a sad thing too for them to say good-bye to you all, as it is for me now; but it cannot be helped. God bless you all, and I hope that you will find good masters and kind mistresses, with whom you may live comfortably, as I hope you have done here."

"We can't find no other mistresses like her leddyship," sobbed out the senior housemaid.

"There ain't niver such a one in the county Cork," said the cook; "in a week of Sundays you wouldn't hear the breath out of her above her own swait nathural voice."

"I've driv' her since iver —" began Richard; but he was going to say since ever she was married, but he remembered that this allusion would be unbecoming, so he turned his face to the door-post, and began to wail bitterly.

And then Herbert shook hands with them all, and it was pretty to see how the girls wiped their hands in their aprons before they gave them to him, and how

they afterwards left the room with their aprons up to their faces. The women walked out first, and then the men, hanging down their heads, and muttering as they went, each some little prayer that fortune and prosperity might return to the house of Fitzgerald. The property might go, but according to their views Herbert was always, and always would be, the head of the house. And then, last of all, Richard went. "There ain't one of 'em, Mr. Herbert, as wouldn't guv his fist to go wid yer, and think nothing about the wages."

He was to start very early, and his packing was all completed that night. "I do so wish we were going with you," said Emmeline, sitting in his room on the top of a corded box, which was to follow him by some slower conveyance.

"And I do so wish I was staying with you," said he.

"What is the good of staying here now?" said she; "what pleasure can there be in it? I hardly dare to go outside the house door for fear I should be seen."

"But why? We have done nothing that we need be ashamed of."

"No; I know that. But, Herbert, do you not find that the pity of the people is hard to bear? It is written in their eyes, and meets one at every turn."

"We shall get rid of that very soon. In a few months we shall be clean forgotten."

"I do not know about being forgotten."

"You will be as clean forgotten, — as though you had never existed. And all these servants who are now so fond of us, in three months' time will be just as fond of Owen Fitzgerald, if he will let them stay here; it's the way of the world."

That Herbert should have indulged in a little morbid misanthropy on such an occasion was not surprising. But I take leave to think that he was wrong in his philosophy; we do make new friends when we lose our old friends, and the heart is capable of cure as is the body; were it not so, how terrible would be our fate in this world! But we are so apt to find fault with God's goodness to us in this respect, arguing, of others if not of ourselves, that the heart once widowed should remain a widow through all time. I, for one, think that the heart should receive its new spouses with what alacrity it may, and always with thankfulness.

"I suppose Lady Desmond will let us see Clara," said Emmeline.

"Of course you must see her. If you knew how much she talks about you, you would not think of leaving Ireland without seeing her."

"Dear Clara! I am sure she does not love me better than I do her. But suppose that Lady Desmond won't let us see her! and I know that it will be so. That grave old man with the bald head will come out and say that 'the Lady Clara is not at home,' and then we shall have to leave without seeing her. But it does not matter with her as it might with others, for I know that her heart will be with us."

"If you write beforehand to say that you are coming, and explain that you are doing so to say good-bye, then I think they will admit you."

"Yes; and the countess would take care to be there, so that I could not say one word to Clara about you. Oh, Herbert! I would give anything if I could have her here for one day, — only for one day." But when they talked it over they both of them decided that this

would not be practicable. Clara could not stay away from her own house without her mother's leave, and it was not probable that her mother would give her permission to stay at Castle Richmond.

CHAPTER XIV.

Herbert Fitzgerald in London.

ON the following morning the whole household was up and dressed very early. Lady Fitzgerald — the poor lady made many futile attempts to drop her title, but hitherto without any shadow of success — Lady Fitzgerald was down in the breakfast parlour at seven, as also were Aunt Letty, and Mary, and Emmeline. Herbert had begged his mother not to allow herself to be disturbed, alleging that there was no cause, seeing that they all so soon would meet in London; but she was determined that she would superintend his last meal at Castle Richmond. The servants brought in the trays with melancholy silence, and now that the absolute moment of parting had come the girls could not speak lest the tears should come and choke them. It was not that they were about to part with him; that parting would only be for a month. But he was now about to part from all that ought to have been his own. He sat down at the table in his accustomed place, with a forced smile on his face, but without a word, and his sisters put before him his cup of tea, and the slice of ham that had been cut for him, and his portion of bread. That he was making an effort they all saw. He bowed his head down over the tea to sip it and took the knife in his hand, and then he looked up at them, for he

knew that their eyes were on him; he looked up at them to show that he could still endure it. But, alas! he could not endure it. The struggle was too much for him; he pushed his plate violently from him into the middle of the table, and dropping his head upon his hands he burst forth into audible lamentations.

Oh, my friends! be not hard on him in that he was thus weeping like a woman. It was not for his lost wealth that he was wailing, nor even for the name or splendour that could be no longer his; nor was it for his father's memory, though he had truly loved his father; nor for his mother's sorrow, or the tragedy of her life's history. For none of these things were his tears flowing and his sobs coming so violently that it nearly choked him to repress them. Nor could he himself have said why he was weeping.

It was the hundred small things from which he was parting for ever that thus disturbed him. The chair on which he sat, the carpet on the floor, the table on which he leaned, the dull old picture of his great-grandfather over the fireplace, — they were all his old familiar friends, they were all part of Castle Richmond, — of that Castle Richmond which he might never be allowed to see again.

His mother and sisters came to him, hanging over him, and they joined their tears together. "Do not tell her that I was like this," said he at last.

"She will love you the better for it if she has a true woman's heart within her breast," said his mother.

"As true a heart as ever breathed," said Emmeline through her sobs.

And then they pressed him to eat, but it was in vain. He knew that the food would choke him if he

attempted it. So he gulped down the cup of tea, and with one kiss to his mother he rushed from them, refusing Aunt Letty's proffered embrace, passing through the line of servants without another word to one of them, and burying himself in the post-chaise which was to carry him the first stage on his melancholy journey.

It was a melancholy journey all through. From the time that he left the door at Castle Richmond that was no longer his own, till he reached the Euston Station in London, he spoke no word to any one more than was absolutely necessary for the purposes of his travelling. Nothing could be more sad than the prospect of his residence in London. Not that he was without friends there, for he belonged to a fashionable club to which he could still adhere if it so pleased him, and had all his old Oxford comrades to fall back upon if that were of any service to him. But how is a man to walk into his club who yesterday was known as his father's eldest son and the heir to a baronetcy and twelve thousand a year, and who to-day is known as nobody's son and the heir to nothing? Men would feel so much for him and pity him so deeply! That was the worst feature of his present position. He could hardly dare to show himself more than was absolutely necessary till the newness of his tragedy was worn off.

Mr. Prendergast had taken lodgings for him, in which he was to remain till he could settle himself in the same house with his mother. And this house, in which they were all to live, had also been taken, — up in that cheerful locality near Harrow-on-the-Hill, called St. John's Wood Road, the cab fares to which from any central part of London are so very ruinous. But that house was not yet ready, and so he went into

lodgings in Lincoln's Inn Fields. Mr. Prendergast had chosen this locality because it was near the chambers of that great Chancery barrister, Mr. Die, under whose beneficent wing Herbert Fitzgerald was destined to learn all the mysteries of the Chancery bar. The sanctuary of Mr. Die's wig was in Stone Buildings, immediately close to that milky way of vice-chancellors, whose separate courts cluster about the old chapel of Lincoln's Inn; and here was Herbert to sit, studious, for the next three years, — to sit there instead of at the various relief committees in the vicinity of Kanturk. And why could he not be as happy at the one as at the other? Would not Mr. Die be as amusing as Mr. Townsend; and the arguments of Vice-Chancellor Stuart's court quite as instructive as those heard in the committee room at Gortnaclough?

On the morning of his arrival in London he drove to his lodgings, and found a note there from Mr. Prendergast asking him to dinner on that day, and promising to take him to Mr. Die on the following morning. Mr. Prendergast kept a bachelor's house in Bloomsbury Square, not very far from Lincoln's Inn — just across Holborn, as all Londoners know; and there he would expect Herbert at seven o'clock. "I will not ask any one to meet you," he said, "because you will be tired after your journey, and perhaps more inclined to talk to me than to strangers."

Mr. Prendergast was one of those old-fashioned people who think that a spacious substantial house in Bloomsbury Square, at a rent of a hundred and twenty pounds a year, is better worth having than a narrow, lath and plaster, ill-built tenement at nearly double the price out westward of the Parks. A quite new man is

necessarily afraid of such a locality as Bloomsbury Square, for he has no chance of getting any one into his house if he do not live westward. Who would dine with Mr. Jones in Woburn Terrace, unless he had known Mr. Jones all his days, or unless Jones were known as a top sawyer in some walk of life? But Mr. Prendergast was well enough known to his old friends to be allowed to live where he pleased, and he was not very anxious to add to their number by any new fashionable allurements.

Herbert sent over to Bloomsbury Square to say that he would be there at seven o'clock, and then sat himself down in his new lodgings. It was but a dingy abode, consisting of a narrow sitting-room looking out into the big square from over a covered archway, and a narrower bedroom looking backwards into a dull, dirty-looking, crooked street. Nothing, he thought, could be more melancholy than such a home. But then what did it signify? His days would be passed in Mr. Die's chambers, and his evenings would be spent over his law books with closed windows and copious burnings of the midnight oil. For Herbert had wisely resolved that hard work, and hard work alone, could mitigate the misery of his present position.

But he had no work for the present day. He could not at once unpack his portmanteau and begin his law studies on the moment. It was about noon when he had completed the former preparation, and eaten such breakfast as his new London landlady had gotten for him. And the breakfast had not of itself been bad, for Mrs. Whereas had been a daughter of Themis all her life, waiting upon scions of the law since first she had been able to run for a penn'orth of milk. She had

been laundress on a stairs for ten years, having married a law stationer's apprentice, and now she owned the dingy house over the covered way, and let her own lodgings with her own furniture; nor was she often without friends who would recommend her zeal and honesty, and make excuse for the imperiousness of her ways and the too great fluency of her by no means servile tongue.

"Oh, Mrs. —," said Herbert. "I beg your pardon, but might I ask your name?"

"No offence, sir; none in life. My name's Whereas. Martha Whereas, and 'as been now for five-and-twenty year. There be'ant many of the gen'lemen about the courts here as don't know some'at of me. And I knew some'at of them too, before they carried their wigs so grandly. My husband, that's Whereas, — you'll all'ays find him at the little stationer's shop outside the gate in Carey Street. You'll know him some of these days, I'll go bail, if you're going to Mr. Die; anyways you'll know his handwriting. Tea to your liking, sir? I all'ays gets cream for gentlemen, sir, unless they tells me not. Milk a 'alfpenny, sir; cream tuppence; tree 'alfpence difference; hain't it, sir? So now you can do as you pleases, and if you like bacon and heggs to your breakfastesses you've only to say the words. But then the heggs hain't heggs, that's the truth; and they hain't chickens, but some'at betwixt the two."

And so she went on during the whole time that he was eating, moving about from place to place, and putting back into the places which she had chosen for them anything which he had chanced to move; now dusting a bit of furniture with her apron, and then leaning on the back of a chair while she asked him

some question as to his habits and future mode of living. She also wore a bonnet, apparently as a customary part of her house costume, and Herbert could not help thinking that she looked very like his Aunt Letty.

But when she had gone and taken the breakfast things with her, then began the tedium of the day. It seemed to him as though he had no means of commencing his life in London until he had been with Mr. Prendergast or Mr. Die. And so new did it all feel to him, so strange and wonderful, that he hardly dared to go out of the house by himself and wander about the premises of the Inn. He was not absolutely a stranger in London, for he had been elected at a club before he had left Oxford, and had been up in town twice, staying on each occasion some few weeks. Had he therefore been asked about the metropolis some four months since at Castle Richmond, he would have professed that he knew it well. Starting from Pall Mall he could have gone to any of the central theatres, or to the Parks, or to the houses of Parliament, or to the picture galleries in June. But now in that dingy big square he felt himself to be absolutely a stranger; and when he did venture out he watched the corners, in order that he might find his way back without asking questions.

And then he roamed round the squares and about the little courts, and found out where were Stone Buildings, — so called because they are so dull and dead and stony-hearted: and as his courage increased he made his way into one of the courts, and stood up for a while on an uncomfortable narrow step, so that he might watch the proceedings as they went on, and

it all seemed to him to be dull and deadly. There was no life and amusement such as he had seen at the Assize Court in county Cork, when he was sworn in as one of the Grand Jury. There the gentlemen in wigs — for on the Munster circuit they do wear wigs, or at any rate did then — laughed and winked and talked together joyously; and when a Roman Catholic fisherman from Berehaven was put into the dock for destroying the boat and nets of a Protestant fisherman from Dingle in county Kerry, who had chanced to come that way, “not fishing at all, at all, yer honour, but just souping,” as the Papist prisoner averred with great emphasis, the gentlemen of the robe had gone to the fight with all the animation and courage of Matadors and Picadors in a bull-ring. It was delightful to see the way in which Roman Catholic skill combated Protestant fury, with a substratum below of Irish fun which showed to everybody that it was not all quite in earnest; — that the great O’Fagan and the great Fitzberesford could sit down together afterwards with all the pleasure in life over their modicum of claret in the barristers’ room at the Imperial hotel. And then the judge had added to the life of the meeting, helping to bamboozle and make miserable a wretch of a witness who had been caught in the act of seeing the boat smashed with a fragment of rock, and was now, in consequence, being impaled alive by his lordship’s assistance.

“What do you say your name is?” demanded his lordship, angrily.

“Rowland Houghton,” said the miserable stray Saxon tourist who had so unfortunately strayed that way on the occasion.

"What?" repeated the judge, whose ears were sharper to such sounds as O'Shaughnessy, Macgillycuddy, and O'Callaghan.

"Rowland Houghton," said the offender, in his distress; quicker, louder, and perhaps not more distinctly than before.

"What does the man say?" said the judge, turning his head down towards a satellite who sat on a bench beneath his cushion.

The gentleman appealed to pronounced the name for the judge's hearing with a full rolling Irish brogue, that gave great delight through all the court; "R-rowland Hough-h-ton, me lor-r-d."

Whereupon his lordship threw up his hands in dismay. "Oulan Outan!" said he. "Oulan Outan! I never heard such a name in my life!" And then having thoroughly impaled the wicked witness, and added materially to the amusement of the day, the judge wrote down the name in his book; and there it is to this day, no doubt, Oulan Outan. And when one thinks of it, it was monstrous that an English witness should go into an Irish law court with such a name as Rowland Houghton.

But here, in the dark dingy court to, which Herbert had penetrated in Lincoln's Inn, there was no such life as this. Here, whatever skill there might be, was of a dark subterranean nature, quite unintelligible to any minds but those of experts; and as for fury or fun, there was no spark either of one or of the other. The judge sat back in his seat, a tall, handsome, speechless man, not asleep, for his eye from time to time moved slowly from the dingy barrister who was on his legs to another dingy barrister who was sitting with his hands

in his pockets, and with his eyes fixed upon the ceiling. The gentleman who was in the act of pleading had a huge open paper in his hand, from which he droned forth certain legal quiddities of the dullest and most uninteresting nature. He was in earnest, for there was a perpetual energy in his drone, as a droning bee might drone who was known to drone louder than other drones. But it was a continuous energy supported by perseverance, and not by impulse; and seemed to come of a fixed determination to continue the reading of that paper till all the world should be asleep. A great part of the world around was asleep; but the judge's eye was still open, and one might say that the barrister was resolved to go on till that eye should have become closed in token of his success.

Herbert remained there for an hour, thinking that he might learn something that would be serviceable to him in his coming legal career; but at the end of the hour the same thing was going on, — the judge's eye was still open, and the lawyer's drone was still sounding; and so he came away, having found himself absolutely dozing in the uncomfortable position in which he was standing.

At last the day wore away, and at seven o'clock he found himself in Mr. Prendergast's hall in Bloomsbury Square; and his hat and umbrella were taken away from him by an old servant looking very much like Mr. Prendergast himself; — having about him the same look of the stiffness of years, and the same look also of excellent preservation and care.

"Mr. Prendergast is in the library, sir, if you please," said the old servant; and so saying he ushered Herbert into the back down-stairs room. It was a spacious, lofty

apartment, well fitted up for a library, and furnished for that purpose with exceeding care; — such a room as one does not find in the flashy new houses in the west, where the dining-room and drawing-room occupy all of the house that is visible. But then, how few of those who live in flashy new houses in the west require to have libraries in London!

As he entered the room Mr. Prendergast came forward to meet him, and seemed heartily glad to see him. There was a cordiality about him which Herbert had never recognized at Castle Richmond, and an appearance of enjoyment which had seemed to be almost foreign to the lawyer's nature. Herbert perhaps had not calculated, as he should have done, that Mr. Prendergast's mission in Ireland had not admitted of much enjoyment. Mr. Prendergast had gone there to do a job of work, and that he had done, very thoroughly; but he certainly had not enjoyed himself.

There was time for only few words before the old man again entered the room, announcing dinner; and those few words had no reference whatever to the Castle Richmond sorrow. He had spoken of Herbert's lodging, and of his journey, and a word or two of Mr. Die, and then they went in to dinner. And at dinner too the conversation wholly turned upon indifferent matters, upon reform at Oxford, the state of parties, and of the peculiar idiosyncrasies of the Irish Low Church clergymen, on all of which subjects Herbert found that Mr. Prendergast had a tolerably strong opinion of his own. The dinner was very good, though by no means showy, — as might have been expected in a house in Bloomsbury Square — and the wine ex-

cellent, as might have been expected in any house inhabited by Mr. Prendergast.

And then, when the dinner was over, and the old servant had slowly removed his last tray, when they had each got into an arm-chair, and were seated at properly comfortable distances from the fire, Mr. Prendergast began to talk freely; not that he at once plunged into the middle of the old history, or began with lugubrious force to recapitulate the horrors that were now partly over; but gradually he veered round to those points as to which he thought it good that he should speak before setting Herbert at work on his new London life.

"You drink claret, I suppose?" said Mr. Prendergast, as he adjusted a portion of the table for their evening symposium.

"Oh yes," said Herbert, not caring very much at that moment what the wine was.

"You'll find that pretty good; a good deal better than what you'll get in most houses in London now-a-days. But you know a man always likes his own wine, and especially an old man."

Herbert said something about it being very good, but did not give that attention to the matter which Mr. Prendergast thought that it deserved. Indeed, he was thinking more about Mr. Die and Stone Buildings than about the wine.

"And how do you find my old friend Mrs. Whereas?" asked the lawyer.

"She seems to be a very attentive sort of woman."

"Yes; rather too much so sometimes. People do say that she never knows how to hold her tongue. But she won't rob you, nor yet poison you; and in these

days that is saying a very great deal for a woman in London." And then there was a pause, as Mr. Prendergast sipped his wine with slow complacency. "And we are to go to Mr. Die to-morrow, I suppose?" he said, beginning again. To which Herbert replied that he would be ready at any time in the morning that might be suitable.

"The sooner you get into harness the better. It is not only that you have much to learn, but you have much to forget also."

"Yes," said Herbert, "I have much to forget indeed; more than I can forget, I'm afraid, Mr. Prendergast."

"There is, I fancy, no sorrow which a man cannot forget; that is, as far as the memory of it is likely to be painful to him. You will not absolutely cease to remember Castle Richmond and all its circumstances; you will still think of the place and all the people whom you knew there; but you will learn to do so without the pain which of course you now suffer. That is what I mean by forgetting."

"Oh, I don't complain, sir."

"No, I know you don't; and that is the reason why I am so anxious to see you happy. You have borne the whole matter so well that I am quite sure that you will be able to live happily in this new life. That is what I mean when I say that you will forget Castle Richmond."

Herbert bethought himself of Clara Desmond, and of the woman whom he had seen in the cabin, and reflected that even at present he had no right to be unhappy.

"I suppose you have no thought of going back to Ireland?" said Mr. Prendergast.

"Oh, none in the least."

"On the whole I think you are right. No doubt a family connection is a great assistance to a barrister, and there would be reasons which would make attorneys in Ireland throw business into your hands at an early period of your life. Your history would give you an *éclat* there, if you know what I mean."

"Oh, yes, perfectly; but I don't want that."

"No. It is a kind of assistance which in my opinion a man should not desire. In the first place, it does not last. A man so buoyed up is apt to trust to such support, instead of his own steady exertions; and the firmest of friends won't stick to a lawyer long if he can get better law for his money elsewhere."

"There should be no friendship in such matters, I think."

"Well, I won't say that. But the friendship should come of the service, not the service of the friendship. Good, hard, steady, and enduring work, — work that does not demand immediate acknowledgment and reward, but that can afford to look forward for its results, — it is that, and that only which in my opinion will insure to a man permanent success."

"It is hard though for a poor man to work so many years without an income," said Herbert, thinking of Lady Clara Desmond.

"Not hard if you get the price of your work at last. But you can have your choice. A moderate fixed income can now be had by any barrister early in life, — by any barrister of fair parts and sound acquirements.

There are more barristers now filling salaried places than practising in the courts."

"But those places are given by favour."

"No; not so generally, — or if by favour, by that sort of favour which is as likely to come to you as to another. Such places are not given to incompetent young men because their fathers and mothers ask for them. But won't you fill your glass?"

"I am doing very well, thank you."

"You'll do better if you'll fill your glass, and let me have the bottle back. But you are thinking of the good old historical days when you talk of barristers having to wait for their incomes. There has been a great change in that respect, — for the better, as you of course will think. Now-a-days a man is taken away from his boat-racing and his skittle-ground to be made a judge. A little law and a great fund of physical strength — that is the extent of the demand." And Mr. Prendergast plainly showed by the tone of his voice that he did not admire the wisdom of this new policy of which he spoke.

"But I suppose a man must work five years before he can earn anything," said Herbert, still despondingly; for five years is a long time to an expectant lover.

"Fifteen years of unpaid labour used not to be thought too great a price to pay for ultimate success," said Mr. Prendergast, almost sighing at the degeneracy of the age. "But men in those days were ambitious and patient."

"And now they are ambitious and impatient," suggested Herbert.

"Covetous and impatient might perhaps be the truer epithets," said Mr. Prendergast with grim sarcasm.

It is sad for a man to feel, when he knows that he is fast going down the hill of life, that the experience of old age is to be no longer valued nor its wisdom appreciated. The elderly man of this day thinks that he has been robbed of his chance in life. When he was in his full physical vigour he was not old enough for mental success. He was still winning his spurs at forty. But at fifty — so does the world change — he learns that he is past his work. By some unconscious and unlucky leap he has passed from the unripeness of youth to the decay of age, without even knowing what it was to be in his prime. A man should always seize his opportunity; but the changes of the times in which he has lived have never allowed him to have one. There has been no period of flood in his tide which might lead him on to fortune. While he has been waiting patiently for high water the ebb has come upon him. Mr. Prendergast himself had been a successful man, and his regrets, therefore, were philosophical rather than practical. As for Herbert, he did not look upon the question at all in the same light as his elderly friend, and on the whole was rather exhilarated by the tone of Mr. Prendergast's sarcasm. Perhaps Mr. Prendergast had intended that such should be its effect.

The long evening passed away cosily enough, leaving on Herbert's mind an impression that in choosing to be a barrister he had certainly chosen the noblest walk of life in which a man could earn his bread. Mr. Prendergast did not promise him either fame or fortune, nor did he speak by any means in high enthusiastic language; he said much of the necessity of long hours, of tedious work, of *Amaryllis* left by herself in the shade, and of *Neera's* locks unheeded; but

nevertheless he spoke in a manner to arouse the ambition and satisfy the longings of the young man who listened to him. There were much wisdom in what he did, and much benevolence also.

And then at about eleven o'clock, Herbert having sat out the second bottle of claret, betook himself to his bed at the lodgings over the covered way.

CHAPTER XV.

How the Earl was Won.

IT was not quite at first that the countess could explain to her son how she now wished that Owen Fitzgerald might become her son-in-law. She had been so steadfast in her opposition to Owen when the earl had last spoken of the matter, and had said so much of the wickedly dissipated life which Owen was leading, that she feared to shock the boy. But by degrees she brought the matter round, speaking of Owen's great good fortune, pointing out how much better he was suited for riches than for poverty, insisting warmly on all his good qualities and high feelings, and then saying at last, as it were without thought, "Poor Clara! She has been unfortunate, for at one time she loved Owen Fitzgerald much better than she will ever love his cousin Herbert."

"Do you think so, mother?"

"I am sure of it. The truth is, Patrick, you do not understand your sister; and indeed it is hard to do so. I have also always had an inward fear that she had now engaged herself to a man whom she did not love. Of course as things were then it was impossible

that she should marry Owen; and I was glad to break her off from that feeling. But she never loved Herbert Fitzgerald."

"Why, she is determined to have him, even now."

"Ah, yes! That is where you do not understand her. Now, at this special moment, her heart is touched by his misfortune, and she thinks herself bound by her engagement to sacrifice herself with him. But that is not love. She has never loved any one but Owen, — and who can wonder at it? for he is a man made for a woman to love."

The earl said nothing for a while, but sat balancing himself on the back legs of his chair. And then, as though a new idea had struck him, he exclaimed, "If I thought that, mother, I would find out what Owen thinks of it himself."

"Poor Owen!" said the countess. "There is no doubt as to what he thinks;" and then she left the room, not wishing to carry the conversation any further.

Two days after this, and without any further hint from his mother, he betook himself along the banks of the river to Hap House. In his course thither he never let his horse put a foot upon the road, but kept low down upon the water meadows, leaping over all the fences, as he had so often done with the man whom he was now going to see. It was here, among these banks, that he had received his earliest lessons in horsemanship, and they had all been given by Owen Fitzgerald. It had been a thousand pities, he had thought, that Owen had been so poor as to make it necessary for them all to discourage that love affair with

Clara. He would have been so delighted to welcome Owen as his brother-in-law. And as he strode along over the ground, and landed himself knowingly over the crabbed fences, he began to think how much pleasanter the country would be for him if he had a downright good fellow and crack sportsman as his fast friend at Castle Richmond. Sir Owen Fitzgerald of Castle Richmond! He would be the man to whom he would be delighted to give his sister Clara.

And then he hopped in from one of Owen's fields into a small paddock at the back of Owen's house, and seeing one of the stable-boys about the place, asked him if his master was at home.

"Shurè an' he's here thin, yer honour;" and Lord Desmond could hear the boy whispering, "It's the young lord hisself." In a moment Owen Fitzgerald was standing by his horse's side. It was the first time that Owen had seen one of the family since the news had been spread abroad concerning his right to the inheritance of Castle Richmond.

"Desmond," said he, taking the lad's hand with one of his, and putting the other on the animal's neck. "This is very good of you. I am delighted to see you. I had heard that you were in the country."

"Yes; I have been home for this week past. But things are all so at sixes and sevens among us all that a fellow can't go and do just what he would like."

Owen well understood what he meant. "Indeed they are at sixes and sevens; you may well say that. But get off your horse, old fellow, and come into the house. Why, what a lather of heat the mare's in."

"Isn't she? it's quite dreadful. That chap of ours has no more idea of condition than I have of — of — of — of an archbishop. I've just trotted along the fields, and put her over a ditch or two, and you see the state she's in. It's a beastly shame."

"I know of old what your trotings are, Desmond; and what a ditch or two means. You've been at every bank between this and Banteer as though you were going for a steeplechase plate."

"Upon my honour, Owen —"

"Look here, Patsey. Walk that mare up and down here, between this gate and that post, till the big sweat has all dried on her; and then stick to her with a whip of straw till she's as soft as silk. Do you hear?"

Patsey said that he did hear; and then Owen, throwing his arm over the earl's shoulder, walked slowly towards the house.

"I can't tell you how glad I am to see you, old boy," said Owen, pressing his young friend with something almost like an embrace. "You will hardly believe how long it is since I have seen a face that I cared to look at."

"Haven't you?" said the young lord, wondering. He knew that Fitzgerald had now become heir to a very large fortune, or rather the possessor of that fortune, and he could not understand why a man who had been so popular while he was poor should be deserted now that he was rich.

"No, indeed, have I not. Things are all at sixes and sevens as you say. Let me see. Donnellan was here when you last saw me; and I was soon tired of him when things became serious."

"I don't wonder you were tired of him."

"But, Desmond, how's your mother?"

"Oh, she's very well. These are bad times for poor people like us, you know."

"And your sister?"

"She's pretty well too, thank you." And then there was a pause. "You've had a great change in your fortune since I saw you, have you not?" said the earl, after a minute or two. And there it occurred to him for the first time, that, having refused his sister to this man when he was poor, he had now come to offer her to him when he was rich. "Not that that was the reason," he said to himself. "But it was impossible then, and now it would be so pleasant."

"It is a sad history, is it not?" said Owen.

"Very sad," said the earl, remembering, however, that he had ridden over there with his heart full of joy, — of joy occasioned by that very catastrophe which now, following his friend's words like a parrot, he declared to be so very sad.

And now they were in the dining-room in which Owen usually lived, and were both standing on the rug, as two men always do stand when they first get into a room together. And it was clear to see that neither of them knew how to break at once into the sort of loving, genial talk which each was longing to have with the other. It is so easy to speak when one has little or nothing to say; but often so difficult when there is much that must be said; and the same paradox is equally true of writing.

Then Owen walked away to the window, looking out among the shrubs into which Aby Mollett had been precipitated, as though he could collect his thoughts

there; and in a moment or two the earl followed him, and looked out also among the shrubs. "They killed a fox exactly there the other day; didn't they?" asked the earl, indicating the spot by a nod of his head.

"Yes, they did." And then there was another pause. "I'll tell you what it is, Desmond," Owen said at last, going back to the rug and speaking with an effort. "As the people say, 'a sight of you is good for sore eyes.' There is a positive joy to me in seeing you. It is like a cup of cold water when a man is thirsty. But I cannot put the drink to my lips till I know on what terms we are to meet. When last we saw each other, we were speaking of your sister; and now that we meet again, we must again speak of her. Desmond, all my thoughts are of her; I dream of her at night, and find myself talking to her spirit when I wake in the morning. I have much else that I ought to think of; but I go about thinking of nothing but of her. I am told that she is engaged to my cousin Herbert. Nay, she has told me so herself, and I know that it is so. But if she becomes his wife — any man's wife but mine — I cannot live in this country."

He had not said one word of that state of things in his life's history of which the country side was so full. He had spoken of Herbert, but he had not alluded to Herbert's fall. He had spoken of such hope as he still might have with reference to Clara Desmond; but he did not make the slightest reference to that change in his fortunes — in his fortunes, and in those of his rival — which might have so strong a bias on those hopes, and which ought so to have in the minds of all worldly, prudent people. It was to speak of this spe-

cially that Lord Desmond had come thither; and then, if opportunity should offer, to lead away the subject to that other one; but now Owen had begun at the wrong end. If called upon to speak about his sister at once, what could the brother say, except that she was engaged to Herbert Fitzgerald?

"Tell me this, Desmond, whom does your sister love?" said Owen, speaking almost fiercely in his earnestness. "I know so much of you, at any rate, that whatever may be your feelings you will not lie to me," — thereby communicating to the young lord an accusation, which he very well understood, against the truth of the countess, his mother.

"When I have spoken to her about this she declares that she is engaged to Herbert Fitzgerald."

"Engaged to him! yes, I know that; I do not doubt that. It has been dinned into my ears now for the last six months till it is impossible to doubt it. And she will marry him too, if no one interferes to prevent it. I do not doubt that either. But, Desmond, that is not the question that I have asked. She did love me; and then she was ordered by her mother to abandon that love, and to give her heart to another. That in words she has been obedient, I know well; but what I doubt is this, — that she has in truth been able so to chuck her heart about like a shuttlecock. I can only say that I am not able to do it."

How was the earl to answer him? The very line of argument which Owen's mind was taking was exactly that which the young lord himself desired to promote. He too was desirous that Clara should go back to her first love. He himself thought strongly that Owen was a man more fitted than Herbert for the

worshipful adoration of such a girl as his sister Clara. But then he, Desmond, had opposed the match while Owen was poor, and how was he to frame words by which he might encourage it now that Owen was rich?

"I have been so little with her, that I hardly know," he said. "But, Owen —"

"Well?"

"It is so difficult for me to talk to you about all this."

"Is it?"

"Why, yes. You know that I have always liked you — always. No chap was ever such a friend to me as you have been;" and he squeezed Owen's arm with strong boyish love.

"I know all about it," said Owen.

"Well; then all that happened about Clara. I was young then, you know," — he was now sixteen — "and had not thought anything about it. The idea of you and Clara falling in love had never occurred to me. Boys are so blind, you know. But when it did happen — you remember that day, old fellow, when you and I met down at the gate?"

"Remember it!" said Owen. He would remember it, as he thought, when half an eternity should have passed over his head.

"And I told you then what I thought. I don't think I am a particular fellow myself about money and rank and that sort of thing. I am as poor as a church mouse, and so I shall always remain; and for myself I don't care about it. But for one's sister, Owen — you never had a sister, had you?"

"Never," said Owen, hardly thinking of the question.

"One is obliged to think of such things for her. We should all go to rack and ruin, the whole family of us, box and dice, — as indeed we have pretty well already — if some of us did not begin to look about us. I don't suppose I shall ever marry and have a family. I couldn't afford it, you know. And in that case Clara's son would be Earl of Desmond; or if I died she would be Countess of Desmond in her own right." And the young lord looked the personification of family prudence.

"I know all that," said Owen; "but you do not suppose that I was thinking of it?"

"What; as regards yourself. No; I am sure you never did. But, looking to all that, it would never have done for her to marry a man as poor as you were. It is not a comfortable thing to be a very poor nobleman, I can tell you."

Owen again remained silent. He wanted to talk the earl over into favouring his views, but he wanted to do so as Owen of Hap House, not as Owen of Castle Richmond. He perceived at once from the tone of the boy's voice, and even from his words, that there was no longer anything to be feared from the brother's opposition; and perceiving this, he thought that the mother's opposition might now perhaps also be removed. But it was quite manifest that this had come from what was supposed to be his altered position. "A man as poor as you were," Lord Desmond had said, urging that though now the marriage might be well enough, in those former days it would have been madness. The line of argument was very clear; but as Owen was as poor as ever, and intended to remain so, there was nothing in it to comfort him.

"I cannot say that I, myself, have so much worldly wisdom as you have," said he at last, with something like a sneer.

"Ah, that is just what I knew you would say. You think that I am coming to you now, and offering to make up matters between you and Clara because you are rich!"

"But can you make up matters between me and Clara?" said Owen, eagerly.

"Well, I do not know. The countess seems to think it might be so."

And then again Owen was silent, walking about the room with his hands behind his back. Then after all the one thing of this world which his eye regarded as desirable was within his reach. He had then been right in supposing that that face which had once looked up to his so full of love had been a true reflex of the girl's heart, — that it had indicated to him love which was not changeable. It was true that Clara, having accepted a suitor at her mother's order, might now be allowed to come back to him! As he thought of this, he wondered at the endurance and obedience of a woman's heart which could thus give up all that it held as sacred at the instance of another. But even this, though it was but little flattering to Clara, by no means lessened the transport which he felt. He had had that pride in himself, that he had never ceased to believe that she loved him. Full of that thought, of which he had not dared to speak, he had gone about, gloomily miserable since the news of her engagement with Herbert had reached him, and now he learned, as he thought with certainty, that his belief had been

well grounded. Through all that had passed Clara Desmond did love him still!

But as to this overture of reconciliation that was now made to him; how was he to accept it or reject it? It was made to him because he was believed to be Sir Owen Fitzgerald of Castle Richmond, a baronet of twelve thousand a year, instead of a poor squire, whose wife would have to look narrowly to the kitchen, in order that food in sufficiency might be forthcoming for the parlour. That he would become Sir Owen he thought probable; but that he would be Sir Owen of Hap House and not of Castle Richmond he had firmly resolved. He had thought of this for long hours and hours together, and felt that he could never again be happy were he to put his foot into that house as its owner. Every tenant would scorn him, every servant would hate him, every neighbour would condemn him; but this would be as nothing to his hatred of himself, to his own scorn and his own condemnation. And yet how great was the temptation to him now! If he would consent to call himself master of Castle Richmond, Clara's hand might still be his.

So he thought; but those who know Clara Desmond better than he did will know how false were his hopes. She was hardly the girl to have gone back to a lover when he was rich, whom she had rejected when he was poor.

"Desmond," said he, "come here and sit down;" and both sat leaning on the table together, with their arms touching. "I understand it all now I think; and remember this, my boy, that whomever I may blame, I do not blame you; that you are true and honest I am sure; and, indeed, there is only one person whom

I do blame." He did not say that this one person was the countess, but the earl knew just as well as though he had been told.

"I understand all this now," he repeated, "and before we go any further, I must tell you one thing; I shall never be owner of Castle Richmond."

"Why, I thought it was all settled!" said the earl, looking up with surprise.

"Nothing at all is settled. To every bargain there must be two parties, and I have never yet become a party to the bargain which shall make me owner of Castle Richmond."

"But is it not yours of right?"

"I do not know what you call right."

"Right of inheritance," said the earl, who, having succeeded to his own rank by the strength of the same right enduring through many ages, looked upon it as the one substantial palladium of the country.

"Look here, old fellow, and I'll tell you my views about this. Sir Thomas Fitzgerald, when he married that poor lady who is still staying at Castle Richmond, did so in the face of the world with the full assurance that he made her his legal wife. Whether such a case as this ever occurred before I don't know, but I am sure of this that in the eye of God she is his widow. Herbert Fitzgerald was brought up as the heir to all that estate, and I cannot see that he can fairly be robbed of that right because another man has been a villain. The title he cannot have, I suppose, because the law won't give it him; but the property can be made over to him, and as far as I am concerned it shall be made over. No earthly consideration shall in-

duce me to put my hand upon it, for in doing so I should look upon myself as a thief and a scoundrel."

"And you mean then that Herbert will have it all, just the same as it was before?"

"Just the same as regards the estate."

"Then why has he gone away?"

"I cannot answer for him. I can only tell you what I shall do. I dare say it may take months before it is all settled. But now, Desmond, you know how I stand; I am Owen Fitzgerald of Hap House, now as I have ever been, that and nothing more, — for as to the handle to my name it is not worth talking about."

They were still sitting at the table, and now they both sat silent, not looking at each other, but with their eyes fixed on the wood. Owen had in his hand a pen, which he had taken from the mantelpiece, and unconsciously began to trace signs on the polished surface before him. The earl sat with his forehead leaning on his two hands, thinking what he was to say next. He felt that he himself loved the man better than ever; but when his mother should come to hear all this, what would she say?

"You know it all now, my boy," said Owen, looking up at last; and as he did so there was an expression about his face to which the young earl thought that he had never seen the like. There was a gleam in his eye which, though not of joy, was so bright; and a smile round his mouth which was so sweet, though full of sadness! "How can she not love him?" said he to himself, thinking of his sister. "And now, Desmond, go back to your mother and tell her all. She has sent you here."

"No, she did not send me," said the boy, stoutly,

— almost angrily; “she does not even know that I have come.”

“Go back then to your sister.”

“Nor does she know it.”

“Nevertheless, go back to them, and tell them both what I have told you; and tell them this also, that I, Owen Fitzgerald of Hap House, still love her better than all that the world else can give me; indeed, there is nothing else that I do love, — except you, Desmond. But tell them also that I am Owen of Hap House still — that and nothing more.”

“Owen,” said the lad, looking up at him; and Fitzgerald as he glanced into the boy’s face could see that there was that arising within his breast which almost prevented him from speaking.

“And look, Desmond,” continued Fitzgerald; “do not think that I shall blame you because you turn from me, or call you mercenary. Do you do what you think right. What you said just now of your sister’s —, well, of the possibility of our marriage, you said under the idea that I was a rich man. You now find that I am a poor man; and you may consider that the words were never spoken.”

“Owen!” said the boy again; and now that which was before rising in his breast had risen to his brow and cheeks, and was telling its tale plainly in his eyes. And then he rose from his chair, turning away his face, and walking towards the window; but before he had gone two steps he turned again, and throwing himself on Fitzgerald’s breast, he burst out into a passion of tears.

“Come, old fellow, what is this? This will never

do," said Owen. But his own eyes were full of tears also, and he too was nearly past speaking.

"I know you will think — I am a boy and a — fool," say the earl, through his sobs, as soon as he could speak; "but I can't — help it."

"I think you are the dearest, finest, best fellow that ever lived," said Fitzgerald, pressing him with his arm.

"And I'll tell you what, Owen, you should have her to-morrow if it were in my power, for, by heaven! there is not another man so worthy of a girl in all the world; and I'll tell her so; and I don't care what the countess says. And, Owen, come what come may, you shall always have my word;" and then he stood apart, and rubbing his eyes with his arm tried to look like a man who was giving this pledge from his judgment, not from his impulse.

"It all depends on this, Desmond; whom does she love? See her alone, Desmond, and talk softly to her, and find out that." This he said thoughtfully, for in his mind "love should still be lord of all."

"By heavens! if I were her, I know whom I should love," said the brother.

"I would not have her as a gift if she did not love me" said Owen, proudly; "but if she do, I have a right to claim her as my own."

And then they parted, and the earl rode back home with a quieter pace than that which had brought him there, and in a different mood. He had pledged himself now to Owen, — not to Owen of Castle Richmond, but to Owen of Hap House — and he intended to redeem his pledge if it were possible. He had been so conquered by the nobleness of his friend, that he had forgotten his solicitude for his family and his sister.

CHAPTER XVI.

A Tale of a Turbot.

IT would have been Owen Fitzgerald's desire to disclaim the inheritance which chance had put in his way in absolute silence, had such a course been possible to him. And, indeed, not being very well conversant with matters of business, he had thought for a while that this might be done — or any rate something not far different from this. To those who had hitherto spoken to him upon the subject, to Mr. Prendergast, Mr. Somers, and his cousin, he had disclaimed the inheritance, and that he had thought would have sufficed. That Sir Thomas should die so quickly after the discovery had not of course been expected by anybody; and much, therefore, had not been thought at the moment of these disclaimers; — neither at the moment, nor indeed afterwards, when Sir Thomas did die.

Even Mr. Somers was prepared to admit that as the game had been given up, — as his branch of the Fitzgeralds, acting under the advice of their friend and lawyer, admitted that the property must go from them — even he, much as he contested within his own breast the propriety of Mr. Prendergast's decisions, was fain to admit now that it was Owen's business to walk in upon the property. Any words which he may have spoken on the impulse of the moment were empty words. When a man becomes heir to twelve thousand a year, he does not give it up in a freak of benevolence. And, therefore, when Sir Thomas had been dead some four or five weeks, and when Herbert

had gone away from the scene which was no longer one of interest to him, it was necessary that something should be done.

During the last two or three days of his life Sir Thomas had executed a new will, in which he admitted that his son was not the heir to his estates, and so disposed of such moneys as it was in his power to leave as he would have done had Herbert been a younger son. Early in his life he himself had added something to the property, some two or three hundred a year, and this, also, he left of course to his own family. Such having been done, there would have been no opposition made to Owen had he immediately claimed the inheritance; but as he made no claim, and took no step whatever, — as he appeared neither by himself, nor by letter, nor by lawyer, nor by agent, — as no rumour ever got about as to what he intended to do, Mr. Somers found it necessary to write to him. This he did on the day of Herbert's departure, merely asking him, perhaps with scant courtesy, who was his man of business, in order that he, Mr. Somers, as agent to the late proprietor, might confer with him. With but scant courtesy, — for Mr. Somers had made one visit to Hap House since the news had been known, with some intention of ingratiating himself with the future heir; but his tenders had not been graciously received. Mr. Somers was a proud man, and though his position in life depended on the income he received from the Castle Richmond estate, he would not make any further overture. So his letter was somewhat of the shortest, and merely contained the request above named.

Owen's reply was sharp, immediate, and equally

short, and was carried back by the messenger from Castle Richmond who had brought the letter, to which it was an answer. It was as follows: —

“Hap House, Thursday morning, two o'clock.”

(There was no other date; and Owen probably was unaware that his letter being written at two P. M. was not written on Thursday morning.)

“Dear Sir,

“I have got no lawyer, and no man of business; nor do I mean to employ any if I can help it. I intend to make no claim to Mr. Herbert Fitzgerald's property of Castle Richmond; and if it be necessary that I should sign any legal document making over to him any claim that I may have, I am prepared to do so at any moment. As he has got a lawyer, he can get this arranged, and I suppose Mr. Prendergast had better do it.

“I am, dear sir,

“Your faithful servant,

“OWEN FITZGERALD of Hap House.”

And with those four or five lines he thought it would be practicable for him to close the whole affair.

This happened on the day of Herbert's departure, and on the day preceding Lord Desmond's visit to Hap House; so that on the occasion of that visit, Owen looked upon the deed as fully done. He had put it quite beyond his own power to recede now, even had he so wished. And then came the tidings to him, — true tidings as he thought, — that Clara was still within his reach if only he were master of Castle Rich-

mond. That this view of his position did for a moment shake him I will not deny; but it was only for a moment: and then it was that he had looked up at Clara's brother, and bade him go back to his mother and sister, and tell them that Owen of Hap House was Owen of Hap House still; — that and nothing more. Clara Desmond might be bought at a price which would be too costly even for such a prize as her. It was well for him that he so resolved, for at no price could she have been bought.

Mr. Somers, when he received that letter, was much inclined to doubt whether or no it might not be well to take Owen at his word. After all, what just right had he to the estate? According to the eternal and unalterable laws of right and wrong ought it not to belong to Herbert Fitzgerald? Mr. Somers allowed his wish on this occasion to be father to many thoughts much at variance from that line of thinking which was customary to him as a man of business. In his ordinary moods, law with him was law, and a legal claim a legal claim. Had he been all his life agent to the Hap House property instead of to that of Castle Richmond, a thought so romantic would never have entered his head. He would have scouted a man as nearly a maniac who should suggest to him that his client ought to surrender an undoubted inheritance of twelve thousand a year on a point of feeling. He would have rejected it as a proposed crime, and talked much of the indefeasible rights of the coming heirs of the new heir. He would have been as firm as a rock, and as trenchant as a sword in defence of his patron's claims. But now, having in his hands that short, pithy letter from Owen Fitzgerald, he could not but look at the

matter in a more Christian light. After all was not justice, immutable justice, better than law? And would not the property be enough for both of them? Might not law and justice make a compromise? Let Owen be the baronet, and take a slice of four or five thousand, and add that to Hap House; and then if these things were well arranged, might not Mr. Somers still be agent to them both?

Meditating all this in his newly tuned romantic frame of mind Mr. Somers sat down and wrote a long letter to Mr. Prendergast, enclosing the short letter from Owen, and saying all that he, as a man of business with a new dash of romance, could say on such a subject. This letter, not having slept on the road as Herbert did in Dublin, and having been conveyed with that lightning rapidity for which the British Post-office has ever been remarkable — and especially that portion of it which has reference to the sister island, — was in Mr. Prendergast's pocket when Herbert dined with him. That letter, and another to which we shall have to refer more specially. But so much at variance were Mr. Prendergast's ideas from those entertained by Mr. Somers, that he would not even speak to Herbert on the subject. Perhaps, also, that other more important letter, which, if we live, we shall read at length, might also have had some effect in keeping him silent.

But in truth Mr. Somers' mind, and that of Mr. Prendergast, did not work in harmony on this subject. Judging of the two men together by their usual deeds and ascertained character, we may say that there was much more romance about Mr. Prendergast than there was about Mr. Somers. But then it was a general romance, and not one with an individual object. Or

perhaps we may say, without injury to Mr. Somers, that it was a true feeling, and not a false one. Mr. Prendergast, also, was much more anxious for the welfare of Herbert Fitzgerald than that of his cousin; but then he could feel on behalf of the man for whom he was interested that it did not behove him to take a present of an estate from the hand of the true owner.

For more than a week Mr. Somers waited, but got no reply to his letter, and heard nothing from Mr. Prendergast; and during this time he was really puzzled as to what he should do. As regarded himself, he did not know at what moment his income might end, or how long he and his family might be allowed to inhabit the house which he now held: and then he could take no steps as to the tenants; could neither receive money nor pay it away, and was altogether at his wits' ends. Lady Fitzgerald looked to him for counsel in everything, and he did not know how to counsel her. Arrangements were to be made for an auction in the house as soon as she should be able to move; but would it not be a thousand pities to sell all the furniture if there was a prospect of the family returning? And so he waited for Mr. Prendergast's letter with an uneasy heart and vexation of spirit.

But still he attended the relief committees, and worked at the soup-kitchens attached to the estate, as though he were still the agent to Castle Richmond; and still debated warmly with Father Barney on one side, and Mr. Townsend on the other, on that vexatious question of out-door relief. And now the famine was in full swing; and, strange to say, men had ceased to be uncomfortable about it; — such men, that is, as Mr. Somers and Mr. Townsend. The cutting off of maimed

limbs, and wrenching out from their sockets of smashed bones, is by no means shocking to the skilled practitioner. And dying paupers, with "the drag" in their face — that certain sign of coming death of which I have spoken — no longer struck men to the heart. Like the skilled surgeon, they worked hard enough at what good they could do, and worked the better in that they could treat the cases without express compassion for the individuals that met their eyes. In administering relief one may rob five unseen sufferers of what would keep them in life if one is moved to bestow all that is comfortable on one sufferer that is seen. Was it wise to spend money in alleviating the last hours of those whose doom was already spoken, which money, if duly used, might save the lives of others not yet so far gone in misery? And so in one sense those who were the best in the county, who worked the hardest for the poor and spent their time most completely among them, became the hardest of heart, and most obdurate in their denials. It was strange to see devoted women neglecting the wants of the dying, so that they might husband their strength and time and means for the wants of those who might still be kept among the living.

At this time there came over to the parish of Drumbarrow a young English clergyman who might be said to be in many respects the very opposite to Mr. Townsend. Two men could hardly be found in the same profession more opposite in their ideas, lives, purposes and pursuits! — with this similarity, however that each was a sincere, and on the whole an honest man. The Rev. Mr. Carter was much the junior, being at that time under thirty. He had now visited Ireland with

the sole object of working among the poor, and distributing according to his own judgment certain funds which had been collected for this purpose in England.

And indeed there did often exist in England at this time a misapprehension as to Irish wants, which led to some misuses of the funds which England so liberally sent. It came at that time to be the duty of a certain public officer to inquire into a charge made against a seemingly respectable man in the far west of Ireland, purporting that he had appropriated to his own use a sum of twelve pounds sent to him for the relief of the poor of his parish. It had been sent by three English maiden ladies to the relieving officer of the parish of Kilcouthmorrow, and had come to his hands, he then filling that position. He, so the charge said, — and unfortunately said so with only too much truth, — had put the twelve pounds into his own private pocket. The officer's duty in the matter took him to the chairman of the Relief Committee, a stanch old Roman Catholic gentleman nearly eighty years of age, with a hoary head and white beard, and a Milesian name that had come down to him through centuries of Catholic ancestors; — a man urbane in his manner, of the old school, an Irishman such as one does meet still here and there through the country, but now not often — one who above all things was true to the old religion.

Then the officer of the government told his story to the old Irish gentleman — with many words, for there were all manner of small collateral proofs, to all of which the old Irish gentleman listened with a courtesy and patience which were admirable. And when the officer of the government had done, the old Irish gentleman thus replied: —

"My neighbour Hobbs," — such was the culprit's name — "has undoubtedly done this thing. He has certainly spent upon his own uses the generous offering made to our poor parish by those noble-minded ladies, the three Miss Walkers. But he has acted with perfect honesty in the matter."

"What!" said the government officer, "robbing the poor, and at such a time as this!"

"No robbery at all, dear sir," said the good old Irish gentleman, with the blandest of all possible smiles; "the excellent Miss Walkers sent their money for the Protestant poor of the parish of Kilcouthmorrow, and Mr. Hobbs is the only Protestant within it." And from the twinkle in the old man's eye, it was clear to see that his triumph consisted in this, — that not only he had but one Protestant in the parish, but that that Protestant should have learned so little from his religion.

But this is an episode. And nowadays no episodes are allowed.

And now Mr. Carter had come over to see that if possible certain English funds were distributed according to the wishes of the generous English hearts by whom they had been sent. For as some English, such as the three Miss Walkers, feared on the one hand that the Babylonish woman so rampant in Ireland might swallow up their money for Babylonish purposes; so, on the other hand, did others dread that the too stanch Protestantism of the church militant in that country might expend the funds collected for undoubted bodily wants in administering to the supposed wants of the soul. No such faults did, in truth, at that time prevail. The indomitable force of the famine had absolutely knocked down all that; but there had been things done

in Ireland, before the famine came upon them, which gave reasonable suspicion for such fears.

Mr. Townsend among others had been very active in soliciting aid from England, and hence had arisen a correspondence between him and Mr. Carter; and now Mr. Carter had arrived at Drumbarrow with a respectable sum to his credit at the provincial bank, and an intense desire to make himself useful in this time of sore need. Mr. Carter was a tall, thin, austere-looking man; one, seemingly, who had macerated himself inwardly and outwardly by hard living. He had a high, narrow forehead, a sparse amount of animal development, thin lips, and a piercing, sharp, gray eye. He was a man, too, of few words, and would have been altogether harsh in his appearance had there not been that in the twinkle of his eye which seemed to say that, in spite of all that his gait said to the contrary, the cockles of his heart might yet be reached by some play of wit — if only the wit were to his taste.

Mr. Carter was a man of personal means, so that he not only was not dependent on his profession, but was able — as he also was willing — to aid that profession by his liberality. In one thing only was he personally expensive. As to his eating and drinking it was, or might have been for any solicitude of his own, little more than bread and water. As for the comforts of home, he had none, for since his ordination his missions had ever been migrating. But he always dressed with care, and consequently with expense, for careful dressing is ever expensive. He always wore new black gloves, and a very long black coat which never degenerated to rust, black cloth trousers, a high black silk waist-coat, and a new black hat. Everything

about him was black except his neck, and that was always scrupulously white.

Mr. Carter was a good man — one may say a very good man — for he gave up himself and his money to carry out high views of charity and religion, in which he was sincere with the sincerity of his whole heart, and from which he looked for no reward save such as the godly ever seek. But yet there was about him too much of the Pharisee. He was greatly inclined to condemn other men, and to think none righteous who differed from him. And now he had come to Ireland with a certain conviction that the clergy of his own church there were men not to be trusted; that they were Irish, and little better in their habits and doctrines than under-bred dissenters. He had been elsewhere in the country before he visited Drumbarrow, and had shown this too plainly; but then Mr. Carter was a very young man, and it is not perhaps fair to expect zeal and discretion also from those who are very young.

Mrs. Townsend had heard of him, and was in dismay when she found that he was to stay with them at Drumbarrow parsonage for three days. If Mr. Carter did not like clerical characters of her stamp, neither did she like them of the stamp of Mr. Carter. She had heard of him, of his austerity, of his look, of his habits, and in her heart she believed him to be a Jesuit. Had she possessed full sway herself in the parish of Drumbarrow, no bodies should have been saved at such terrible peril to the souls of the whole parish. But this Mr. Carter came with such recommendation — with such assurances of money given and to be given, of service done and to be done, — that there was no re-

fusing him. And so the husband, more worldly wise than his wife, had invited the Jesuit to his parsonage.

"You'll find, Æneas, he'll have mass in his room in the morning instead of coming to family prayers," said the wife.

"But what on earth shall we give him for dinner?" said the husband, whose soul at the present moment was among the flesh-pots; and indeed Mrs. Townsend had also turned over that question in her prudent mind.

"He'll not eat meat in Lent, you may be sure," said Mrs. Townsend, remembering that that was the present period of the year.

"And if he would there is none for him to eat," said Mr. Townsend, calling to mind the way in which the larder had of late been emptied.

Protestant clergymen in Ireland in those days had very frequently other reasons for fasting than those prescribed by ecclesiastical canons. A well-nurtured lady, the wife of a parish rector in the county Cork, showed me her larder one day about that time. It contained two large loaves of bread, and a pan full of stuff which I should have called paste, but which she called porridge. It was all that she had for herself, her husband, her children, and her charity. Her servants had left her before she came to that pass. And she was a well-nurtured, handsome, educated woman, born to such comforts as you and I enjoy every day, — oh, my reader! perhaps without much giving of thanks for them. Poor lady! the struggle was too much for her, and she died under it.

Mr. Townsend was, as I have said, the very opposite to Mr. Carter, but he also was a man who could

do without the comforts of life, if the comforts of life did not come readily in his way. He liked his glass of whisky punch dearly, and had an idea that it was good for him. Not caring much about personal debts, he would go in debt for whisky. But if the whisky and credit were at an end, the loss did not make him miserable. He was a man with a large appetite, and who took great advantage of a good dinner when it was before him; nay, he would go a long distance to insure a good dinner; but, nevertheless, he would leave himself without the means of getting a mutton chop, and then not be unhappy. Now Mr. Carter would have been very unhappy had he been left without his super-fine long black coat.

In tendering his invitation to Mr. Carter, Mr. Townsend had explained that with him the *res angusta domi*, which was always a prevailing disease, had been heightened by the circumstances of the time; but that of such crust and cup as he had, his brother English clergyman would be made most welcome to partake. In answer to this, Mr. Carter had explained that in these days good men thought but little of crusts and cups, and that as regarded himself, nature had so made him that he had but few concupiscences of that sort. And then, all this having been so far explained and settled, Mr. Carter came.

The first day the two clergymen spent together at Berryhill, and found plenty to employ them. They were now like enough to be in want of funds at that Berryhill soup-kitchen, seeing that the great fount of supplies, the house, namely, of Castle Richmond, would soon have stopped running altogether. And Mr. Carter was ready to provide funds to some moderate extent if

all his questions were answered satisfactorily. "There was to be no making of Protestants," he said, "by giving away of soup purchased with his money." Mr. Townsend thought that this might have been spared him. "I regret to say," replied he, with some touch of sarcasm, "that we have no time for that now." "And so better," said Mr. Carter, with a sarcasm of a blunter sort. "So better. Let us not clog our alms with impossible conditions which will only create falsehood." "Any conditions are out of the question when one has to feed a whole parish," answered Mr. Townsend.

And then Mr. Carter would teach them how to boil their yellow meal, on which subject he had a theory totally opposite to the practice of the woman employed at the soup-kitchen. "Av we war to hocus it that, yer riverence," said Mrs. Daly, turning to Mr. Townsend, "the crathurs couldn't ate a bit of it; it wouldn't bile at all, at all, not like that."

"Try it, woman," said Mr. Carter, when he had uttered his receipt oracularly for the third time.

"Deed an' I won't," said Mrs. Daly, whose presence there was pretty nearly a labour of love, and who was therefore independent. "It'd be a sin an' a shame to spile Christian vittels in them times, an' I won't do it." And then there was some hard work that day; and though Mr. Townsend kept his temper with his visitor, seeing that he had much to get and nothing to give, he did not on this occasion learn to alter his general opinion of his brethren of the English high church.

And then, when they got home, very hungry after their toil, Mr. Townsend made another apology for the

poorness of his table. "I am almost ashamed," said he, "to ask an English gentleman to sit down to such a dinner as Mrs. Townsend will put before you."

"And indeed then it isn't much," said Mrs. Townsend; "just a bit of fish I found going the road."

"My dear madam, anything will suffice," said Mr. Carter, somewhat pretentiously. And anything would have sufficed. Had they put before him a mess of that paste of which I have spoken he would have ate it and said nothing, — ate enough of it at least to sustain him till the morrow.

But things had not come to so bad a pass as this at Drumbarrow parsonage; and, indeed, that day fortune had been propitious; — fortune which ever favours the daring. Mrs. Townsend, knowing that she had really nothing in the house, had sent Jerry to waylay the Lent fishmonger, who twice a week was known to make his way from Kanturk to Mallow with a donkey and panniers; and Jerry had returned with a prize.

And now they sat down to dinner, and lo and behold, to the great surprise of Mr. Carter, and perhaps also to the surprise of the host, a magnificent turbot smoked upon the board. The fins no doubt had been cut off to render possible the insertion of the animal into the largest of the Drumbarrow parsonage kitchen-pots, — an injury against which Mr. Townsend immediately exclaimed angrily. "My goodness, they have cut off the fins!" said he, holding up both hands in deep dismay. According to his philosophy, if he did have a turbot, why should he not have it with all its perfections about it — fins and all?

"My dear Æneas!" said Mrs. Townsend, looking

at him with that agony of domestic distress which all wives so well know how to assume.

Mr. Carter said nothing. He said not a word, but he thought much. This then was their pretended poorness of living! with all their mock humility, these false Irishmen could not resist the opportunity of showing off before the English stranger, and of putting on their table before him a dish which an English dean could afford only on gala days. And then this clergyman, who was so loudly anxious for the poor, could not repress the sorrow of his heart because the rich delicacy was somewhat marred in the cooking. "It was too bad," thought Mr. Carter to himself, "too bad."

"None, thank you," said he, drawing himself up with gloomy reprobation of countenance. "I will not take any fish, I am much obliged to you."

Then the face of Mrs. Townsend was one on which neither Christian nor heathen could have looked without horror and grief. What, the man whom in her heart she believed to be a Jesuit, and for whom nevertheless, Jesuit though he was, she had condescended to cater with all her woman's wit! — this man, I say, would not eat fish in Lent! And it was horrible to her warm Irish heart to think that after that fish now upon the table there was nothing to come but two or three square inches of cold bacon. Not eat turbot in Lent! Had he been one of her own sort she might have given him credit for true antagonism to popery; but every inch of his coat gave the lie to such a supposition as that.

"Do take a bit," said Mr. Townsend, hospitably. "The fins should not have been cut off, otherwise I never saw a finer fish in my life."

"None, I am very much obliged to you," said Mr. Carter, with sternest reprobation of feature.

It was too much for Mrs. Townsend. "Oh, Æneas," said she, "what are we to do?" Mr. Townsend merely shrugged his shoulders, while he helped himself. His feelings were less acute, perhaps, than those of his wife, and he, no doubt, was much more hungry. Mr. Carter the while sat by, saying nothing, but looking daggers. He also was hungry, but under such circumstances he would rather starve than eat.

"Don't you ever eat fish, Mr. Carter?" said Mr. Townsend, proceeding to help himself for a second time, and poking about round the edges of the delicate creature before him for some relics of the glutinous morsels which he loved so well. He was not, however, enjoying it as he should have done, for seeing that his guest ate none, and that his wife's appetite was thoroughly marred, he was alone in his occupation. No one but a glutton could have feasted well under such circumstances, and Mr. Townsend was not a glutton.

"Thank you, I will eat none to-day," said Mr. Carter, sitting bolt upright, and fixing his keen gray eyes on the wall opposite.

"Then you may take away, Biddy; I've done with it. But it's a thousand pities such a fish should have been so wasted."

The female heart of Mrs. Townsend could stand these wrongs no longer, and with a tear in one corner of her eye, and a gleam of anger in the other, she at length thus spoke out. "I am sure then I don't know what you will eat, Mr. Carter, and I did think that all you English clergymen always ate fish in Lent, — and

"and a magistrate who is in the hall;" and he put his hand towards the handle of the bell.

"Well, as the old gen'leman's hill, I'll go now and come again. But look you here, Sir Thomas, you have got my proposals, and if I don't get an answer to them in three days' time, — why you'll hear from me in another way, that's all. And so will her ladyship." And with this threat Mr. Abraham Mollett allowed himself to be conducted through the passage into the hall, and from thence to his gig.

"See that he drives away; see that he goes," said Herbert to Mr. Somers, who was still staying about the place.

"Oh, I'll drive away fast enough," said Aby, as he stepped into the gig, "and come back fast enough too," he muttered to himself. In the mean time Herbert had run back to his father's room.

"Has he gone?" murmured Sir Thomas.

"Yes, he has gone. There you can hear the wheels of his gig on the gravel."

"Oh, my boy, my poor boy!"

"What is it, father? Why do you not tell me? Why do you allow such men as that to come and harass you, when a word would keep them from you? Father, good cannot come of it."

"No, Herbert, no; good will not come of it. There is no good to come at all."

"Then why will you not tell us?"

"You will know it all soon enough. But Herbert, do not say a word to your mother. Not a word as you value my love. Let us save her while we can. You promise me that."

Herbert gave him the required promise.

"Look here," and he took up the letter which he had before crumpled in his hand. "Mr. Prendergast will be here next week. I shall tell everything to him."

Soon afterwards Sir Thomas went to his bed, and there by his bedside his wife sat for the rest of the evening. But he said no word to her of his sorrow.

"Mr. Prendergast is coming here," said Herbert to Mr. Somers.

"I am glad of it, though I do not know him," said Mr. Somers. "For, my dear boy, it is necessary that there should be some one here."

CHAPTER XVI.

The Path beneath the Elms.

IT will be remembered that in the last chapter but one Owen Fitzgerald left Lady Desmond in the drawing-room at Desmond Court somewhat abruptly, having absolutely refused to make peace with the Desmond faction by giving his consent to the marriage between Clara and his cousin Herbert. And it will perhaps be remembered also, that Lady Desmond had asked for this consent in a manner that was almost humble. She had shown herself most anxious to keep on friendly terms with the rake of Hap House, — rake and roué, gambler and spendthrift, as he was reputed to be, — if only he would abandon his insane claim to the hand of Clara Desmond. But this feeling she had shown when they two were alone together, after Clara had left them. As long as her daughter had been present, Lady Desmond had maintained her tone of indignation

"And what does it signify after all?" he said to himself, as he rode along. "We shall all be poor together, and then we sha'n't mind it so much; and if I don't marry, Hap House itself will be something to add to the property;" and then he made up his mind that he could be happy enough, living at Desmond Court all his life, so long as he could have Owen Fitzgerald near him to make life palatable.

That night he spoke to no one on the subject, at least to no one of his own accord. When they were alone his mother asked him where he had been; and when she learned that he had been at Hap House, she questioned him much as to what had passed between him and Owen; but he would tell her nothing, merely saying that Owen had spoken of Clara with his usual ecstasy of love, but declining to go into the subject at any length. The countess, however, gathered from him that he and Owen were on kindly terms together, and so far she felt satisfied.

On the following morning he made up his mind "to have it out," as he called it, with Clara; but when the hour came his courage failed him: it was a difficult task — that which he was now to undertake — of explaining to her his wish that she should go back to her old lover, not because he was no longer poor, but, as it were in spite of his poverty, and as a reward to him for consenting to remain poor. As he had thought about it while riding home, it had seemed feasible enough. He would tell her how nobly Owen was going to behave to Herbert, and would put it to her whether, as he intended willingly to abandon the estate, he ought not to be put into possession of the wife. There was a romantic justice about this which he thought would

touch Clara's heart. But on the following morning when he came to think what words he would use for making his little proposition, the picture did not seem to him to be so beautiful. If Clara really loved Herbert — and she had declared that she did twenty times over — it would be absurd to expect her to give him up merely because he was not a ruined man. But then, which did she love? His mother declared that she loved Owen. "That's the real question," said the earl to himself, as on the second morning he made up his mind that he would "have it out" with Clara without any further delay. He must be true to Owen; that was his first great duty at the present moment.

"Clara, I want to talk to you," he said, breaking suddenly into the room where she usually sat alone on mornings. "I was at Hap House the day before yesterday with Owen Fitzgerald, and to tell you the truth at once, we were talking about you the whole time we were there. And now what I want is, that something should be settled, so that we may all understand one another."

These words he spoke to her quite abruptly. When he first said that he wished to speak to her, she had got up from her chair to welcome him, for she dearly loved to have him there. There was nothing she liked better than having him to herself when he was in a soft brotherly humour; and then she would interest herself about his horse, and his dogs, and his gun, and predict his life for him, sending him up as a peer to Parliament, and giving him a noble wife, and promising him that he should be such a Desmond as would redeem all the family from their distresses. But now as he rapidly

brought out his words, she found that on this day her prophecies must regard herself chiefly.

"Surely, Patrick, it is easy enough to understand me," she said.

"Well, I don't know; I don't in the least mean to find fault with you."

"I am glad of that, dearest," she said, laying her hand upon his arm.

"But my mother says one thing, and you another, and Owen another; and I myself, I hardly know what to say."

"Look here, Patrick, it is simply this: I became engaged to Herbert with my mother's sanction and yours; and now —"

"Stop a moment," said the impetuous boy, "and do not pledge yourself to anything till you have heard me. I know that you are cut to the heart about Herbert Fitzgerald losing his property."

"No, indeed; not at all cut to the heart; that is as regards myself."

"I don't mean as regards yourself; I mean as regards him. I have heard you say over and over again that it is a piteous thing that he should be so treated. Have I not?"

"Yes, I have said that, and I think so."

"And I think that most of your great — great — great love for him, if you will, comes from that sort of feeling."

"But Patrick, it came long before."

"Dear Clara, do listen to me, will you? You may at any rate do as much as that for me." And then Clara stood perfectly mute, looking into his handsome face as he continued to rattle out his words at her.

"Now if you please, Clara, you may have the means of giving back to him all his property, every shilling that he ever had, or expected to have. Owen Fitzgerald, — who certainly is the finest fellow that ever I came across in all my life, or ever shall, if I live to five hundred, — says that he will make over every acre of Castle Richmond back to his cousin Herbert if —" Oh, my lord, my lord, what a scheme is this you are concocting to entrap your sister! Owen Fitzgerald inserted no "if," as you are well aware! "If," he continued, with some little qualm of conscience, "if you will consent to be his wife."

"Patrick!"

"Listen, now listen. He thinks, and, Clara, by the heavens above me! I think also that you did love him better than you ever loved Herbert Fitzgerald." Clara as she heard these words blushed ruby red up to her very hair, but she said never a word. "And I think, and he thinks, that you are bound now to Herbert by his misfortunes — that you feel that you cannot desert him because he has fallen so low. By George, Clara, I am proud of you for sticking to him through thick and thin, now that he is down! But the matter will be very difficult if you have the means of giving back to him all that he has lost, as you have. Owen will be poor, but he is a prince among men. By heaven, Clara, if you will only say that he is your choice, Herbert shall have back all Castle Richmond! and I — I shall never marry, and you may give to the man that I love as my brother all that there is left to us of Desmond."

There was something grand about the lad's eager tone of voice as he made his wild proposal, and some-

thing grand also about his heart. He meant what he said, foolish as he was either to mean or to say it. Clara burst into tears, and threw herself into his arms. "You don't understand," she said, through her sobs, "my own, own brother; you do not understand."

"But, by Jove! I think I do understand. As sure as you are a living girl he will give back Castle Richmond to Herbert Fitzgerald."

She recovered herself, and leaving her brother's arms, walked away to the window, and from thence looked down to that path beneath the elms which was the spot in the world which she thought of the oftenest; but as she gazed, there was no lack of loyalty in her heart to the man to whom she was betrothed. It seemed to her as though those childish days had been in another life; as though Owen had been her lover in another world, — a sweet, childish, innocent, happy world which she remembered well, but which was now dissevered from her by an impassable gulf. She thought of his few words of love, — so few that she remembered every word that he had then spoken, and thought of them with a singular mixture of pain and pleasure. And now she heard of his noble self-denial with a thrill which was in no degree enhanced by the fact that she, or even Herbert, was to be the gainer by it. She rejoiced at his nobility, merely because it was a joy to her to know that he was so noble. And yet all through this she was true to Herbert. Another work-a-day world had come upon her in her womanhood, and as that came she had learned to love a man of another stamp, with a love that was quieter, more subdued, and perhaps, as she thought, more enduring.

Whatever might be Herbert's lot in life, that lot she would share. Her love for Owen should never be more to her than a dream.

"Did he send you to me?" she said at last, without turning her face away from the window.

"Yes, then, he did; he did send me to you, and he told me to say that as Owen of Hap House he loved you still. And I, I promised to do his bidding; and I promised, moreover, that as far as my good word could go with you, he should have it. And now you know it all; if you care for my pleasure in the matter you will take Owen, and let Herbert have his property. By Jove! if he is treated in that way he cannot complain."

"Patrick," said she, returning to him and again laying her hand on him. "You must now take my message also. You must go to him and bid him come here that I may see him."

"Who? Owen?"

"Yes, Owen Fitzgerald."

"Very well, I have no objection in life." And the earl thought that the difficulty was really about to be overcome. "And about my mother?"

"I will tell mamma."

"And what shall I say to Owen?"

"Say nothing to him, but bid him come here. But wait, Patrick; yes; he must not misunderstand me; I can never, never, never marry him."

"Clara!"

"Never, never; it is impossible. Dear Patrick, I am so sorry to make you unhappy, and I love you so very dearly, — better than ever, I think, for speaking as you do now. But that can never be. Let

him come here, however, and I myself will tell him all." At last, disgusted and unhappy though he was, the earl did accept the commission, and again on that afternoon rode across the fields to Hap House.

"I will tell him nothing but that he is to come," said the earl to himself as he went thither. And he did tell Owen nothing else. Fitzgerald questioned him much, but learned but little from him. "By heavens, Owen," he said, "you must settle the matter between you, for I don't understand it. She has bid me ask you to come to her; and now you must fight your own battle." Fitzgerald of course said that he would obey, and so Lord Desmond left him.

In the evening Clara told her mother. "Owen Fitzgerald is to be here to-morrow," she said.

"Owen Fitzgerald; is he?" said the countess. She hardly knew how to bear herself, or how to interfere so as to assist her own object; or how not to interfere, lest she should mar it.

"Yes, mamma. Patrick saw him the other day, and I think it is better that I should see him also."

"Very well, my dear. But you must be aware, Clara, that you have been so very — I don't wish to say headstrong exactly — so very *entêtée* about your own affairs, that I hardly know how to speak of them. If your brother is in your confidence I shall be satisfied."

"He is in my confidence; and so may you be also, mamma, if you please."

But the countess thought it better not to have any conversation forced upon her at that moment; and so she asked her daughter for no further show of confi-

dence then. It would probably be as well that Owen should come and plead his own cause.

And Owen did come. All that night and on the next morning the poor girl remained alone in a state of terrible doubt. She had sent for her old lover, thinking at the moment that no one could explain to him in language so clear as her own what was her fixed resolve. And she had too been so moved by the splendour of his offer, that she longed to tell him what she thought of it. The grandeur of that offer was enhanced tenfold in her mind by the fact that it had been so framed as to include her in this comparative poverty with which Owen himself was prepared to rest contented. He had known that she was not to be bought by wealth, and had given her credit for a nobility that was akin to his own.

But yet, now that the moment was coming, how was she to talk to him? How was she to speak the words which would rob him of his hope, and tell him that he did not, could not, never could possess that one treasure which he desired more than houses and lands, or station and rank? Alas, alas! If it could have been otherwise! If it could have been otherwise! She also was in love with poverty; — but at any rate, no one could accuse her now of sacrificing a poor lover for a rich one. Herbert Fitzgerald would be poor enough.

And then he came. They had hitherto met but once since that afternoon, now so long ago — that afternoon to which she looked back as to another former world — and that meeting had been in the very room in which she was now prepared to receive him. But her feelings towards him had been very

different then. Then he had almost forced himself upon her, and for months previously she had heard nothing of him but what was evil. He had come complaining loudly, and her heart had been somewhat hardened against him. Now he was there at her bidding, and her heart and very soul were full of tenderness. She rose rapidly, and sat down again, and then again rose as she heard his footsteps; but when he entered the room she was standing in the middle of it.

"Clara," he said, taking the hand which she mechanically held out, "I have come here now at your brother's request."

Her name sounded so sweet upon his lips. No idea occurred to her that she ought to be angry with him for using it. Angry with him! Could it be possible that she should ever be angry with him — that she ever had been so?

"Yes," she said. "Patrick said something to me which made me think that it would be better we should meet."

"Well, yes; it is better. If people are honest they had always better say to each other's faces that which they have to say."

"I mean to be honest, Mr. Fitzgerald."

"Yes, I am sure you do; and so do I also. And if this is so, why cannot we say each to the other that which we have to say? My tale will be a very short one; but it will be true if it is short."

"But, Mr. Fitzgerald —"

"Well, Clara?"

"Will you not sit down?" And she herself sat upon the sofa; and he drew a chair for himself near to her; but he was too impetuous to remain seated on it

long. During the interview between them he was sometimes standing, and sometimes walking quickly about the room; and then for a moment he would sit down, or lean down over her on the sofa arm.

"But, Mr. Fitzgerald, it is my tale that I wish you to hear."

"Well; I will listen to it." But he did not listen; for before she had spoken a dozen words he had interrupted her, and poured out upon her his own wild plans and generous schemes. She, poor girl, had thought to tell him that she loved Herbert, and Herbert only — as a lover. But that if she could love him, him Owen, as a brother and a friend, that love she would so willingly give him. And then she would have gone on to say how impossible it would have been for Herbert, under any circumstances, to have availed himself of such generosity as that which had been offered. But her eloquence was all cut short in the bud. How could she speak with such a storm of impulse raging before her as that which was now strong within Owen Fitzgerald's bosom?

He interrupted her before she had spoken a dozen words, in order that he might exhibit before her eyes the project with which his bosom was filled. This he did, standing for the most part before her, looking down upon her as she sat beneath him, with her eyes fixed upon the floor, while his were riveted on her down-turned face. She knew it all before — all this that he had to say to her, or she would hardly have understood it from his words, they were so rapid and vehement. And yet they were tender, too; spoken in a loving tone, and containing ever and anon assurances of respect, and a resolve to be guided now and for

ever by her wishes, — even though those wishes should be utterly subversive of his happiness.

“And now you know it all,” he said, at last. “And as for my cousin’s property, that is safe enough, No earthly consideration would induce me to put a hand upon that, seeing that by all justice it is his.” But in this she hardly yet quite understood him. “Let him have what luck he may in other respects, he shall still be master of Castle Richmond. If it were that that you wanted — as I know it is not — that I cannot give you. I cannot tell you with what scorn I should regard myself if I were to take advantage of such an accident as this to rob any man of his estate.”

Her brother had been right, so Clara felt, when he declared that Owen Fitzgerald was the finest fellow that ever he had come across. She made another such declaration within her own heart, only with words that were more natural to her. He was the noblest gentleman of whom she had ever heard, or read, or thought.

“But,” continued Owen, “as I will not interfere with him in that which should be his, neither should he interfere with me in that which should be mine. Clara, the only estate that I claim is your heart.”

And that estate she could not give him. On that at any rate she was fixed. She could not barter herself about from one to the other either as a make-weight or a counterpoise. All his pleading was in vain; all his generosity would fail in securing to him this one reward that he desired. And now she had to tell him so.

“Your brother seems to think,” he continued, “that you still ——;” but now it was her turn to interrupt him.

"Patrick is mistaken," she said, with her eyes still fixed upon the ground.

"What. You will tell me, then, that I am utterly indifferent to you?"

"No, no, no; I did not say so." And now she got up and took hold of his arm, and looked into his face imploringly. "I did not say so. But, oh, Mr. Fitzgerald, be kind to me, be forbearing with me, be good to me," and she almost embraced his arm as she appealed to him, with her eyes all swimming with tears.

"Good to you!" he said. And a strong passion came upon him, urging him to throw his arm round her slender body, and press her to his bosom. Good to her! would he not protect her with his life's blood against all the world if she would only come to him? "Good to you, Clara! Can you not trust me that I will be good to you if you will let me?"

"But not so, Owen." It was the first time she had ever called him by his name, and she blushed again as she remembered that it was so. "Not good, as you mean, for now I must trust to another for that goodness. Herbert must be my husband, Owen; but will not you be our friend?"

"Herbert must be your husband!"

"Yes, yes, yes. It is so. Do not look at me in that way, pray do not; what would you have me do? You would not have me false to my troth, and false to my own heart, because you are generous. Be generous to me — to me also."

He turned away from her, and walked the whole length of the long room; away and back, before he answered her, and even then, when he had returned to

her, he stood looking at her before he spoke. And she now looked full into his face, hoping, but yet fearing; hoping that he might yield to her; and fearing his terrible displeasure should he not yield.

"Clara," he said; and he spoke solemnly, slowly, and in a mood unlike his own, — "I cannot as yet read your heart clearly; nor do I know whether you can quite so read it yourself."

"I can, I can," she answered quickly; "and you shall know it all — all, if you wish."

"I want to know but one thing. Whom is it that you love? And, Clara —," and this he said interrupting her as she was about to speak. "I do not ask you to whom you are engaged. You have engaged yourself both to him and to me."

"Oh, Mr. Fitzgerald!"

"I do not blame you; not in the least. But is it not so? as to that I will ask no question, and say nothing; only this, that so far we are equal. But now ask of your own heart, and then answer me. Whom is it then you love?"

"Herbert Fitzgerald," she said. The words hardly formed themselves into a whisper, but nevertheless they were audible enough to him.

"Then I have no further business here," he said, and turned about as though to leave the room.

But she ran forward and stopped him, standing between him and the door. "Oh, Mr. Fitzgerald, do not leave me like that. Say one word of kindness to me before you go. Tell me that you forgive me for the injury I have done you."

"Yes, I forgive you."

"And is that all? Oh, I will love you so, if you

will let me; — as your friend, as your sister; you shall be our dearest, best, and nearest friend. You do not know how good he is. Owen, will you not tell me that you will love me as a brother loves?"

"No!" and the sternness of his face was such that it was dreadful to look on it. "I will tell you nothing that is false."

"And would that be false?"

"Yes, false as hell! What, sit by at his hearthstone and see you leaning on his bosom! Sleep under his roof while you were in his arms! No, Lady Clara, that would not be possible. That virtue, if it be virtue, I cannot possess."

"And you must go from me in anger? If you knew what I am suffering you would not speak to me so cruelly."

"Cruel! I would not wish to be cruel to you; certainly not now, for we shall not meet again; if ever, not for many years. I do not think that I have been cruel to you."

"Then say one word of kindness before you go!"

"A word of kindness! Well; what shall I say? Every night, as I have lain in my bed, I have said words of kindness to you, since — since — since longer than you will remember; since I first knew you as a child. Do you ever think of the day when you walked with me round by the bridge?"

"It is bootless thinking of that now."

"Bootless! yes, and words of kindness are bootless. Between you and me, such words should be full of love, or they would have no meaning. What can I say to you that shall be both kind and true?"

"Bid God bless me before you leave me."

occurred between him and Clara, and of course you will understand that my duty at that time was plain. Clara behaved admirably, and if only he would not be so foolish, the whole matter might be forgotten. As far as you and I are concerned I think it may be forgotten."

"But then his coming here?"

"That will not be repeated. I thought it better to show him that we were not afraid of him, and therefore I permitted it. Had I conceived that you would have objected —"

"Oh, no!" said Herbert.

"Well, there was not much for you to be afraid of, certainly," said the countess. And so he was appeased, and left the house promising that he, at any rate, would do nothing that might lead to a quarrel with his cousin Owen.

Clara, who had still kept on her bonnet, again walked down with him to the lodge, and encountered his first earnest supplication that an early day should be named for their marriage. She had many reasons, excellent good reasons, to allege why this should not be the case. When was a girl of seventeen without such reasons? And it is so reasonable that she should have such reasons. That period of having love made to her must be by far the brightest in her life. Is it not always a pity that it should be abridged?

"But your father's illness, Herbert, you know."

Herbert acknowledged that, to a certain extent, his father's illness was a reason — only to a certain extent. It would be worse than useless to think of waiting till his father's health should be altogether strong. Just for the present, till Mr. Prendergast should have gone,

and perhaps for a fortnight longer, it might be well to wait. But after that — and then he pressed very closely the hand which rested on his arm. And so the matter was discussed between them with language and arguments which were by no means original.

At the gate, just as Herbert was about to remount his horse, they were encountered by a sight which for years past had not been uncommon in the south of Ireland, but which had become frightfully common during the last two or three months. A woman was standing there, of whom you could hardly say that she was clothed, though she was involved in a mass of rags which covered her nakedness. Her head was all uncovered, and her wild black hair was streaming round her face. Behind her back hung two children enveloped among the rags in some mysterious way; and round about her on the road stood three others, of whom the two younger were almost absolutely naked. The eldest of the five was not above seven. They all had the same wild black eyes, and wild elfish straggling locks; but neither the mother nor the children were comely. She was short and broad in the shoulders, though wretchedly thin; her bare legs seemed to be of nearly the same thickness up to the knee, and the naked limbs of the children were like yellow sticks. It is strange how various are the kinds of physical development among the Celtic peasantry in Ireland. In many places they are singularly beautiful, especially as children; and even after labour and sickness shall have told on them as labour and sickness will tell, they still retain a certain softness and grace which is very nearly akin to beauty. But then again in a neighbouring district they will be found to be squat,

crossing one leg over the other as he sat in his easy chair, he took it from his pocket and read it for the third time. The signature at the end of it was very plain and legible, being that of a scholar no less accomplished than Mr. Abraham Mollett. This letter we will have entire, though it was not perhaps as short as it might have been. It ran as follows: —

45 Tabernacle row London
April — 1847.

“Respectit Sir —

“In hall them doings about the Fitsjerrals at Carsal Richmon I halways felt the most profound respect for you because you wanted to do the thing as was rite wich was what I halways wanted to myself only coodent becace of the guvnor. ‘Let the right un win, guvnor,’ said I, hover hand hover again; but no, he woodent. And what cood the likes of me do then seeing as ow I was obligated by the forth comanment to honor my father and mother, wich however if it wasent that she was ded leving me a horphand there woodent av been none of this trobbel. If she ad livd Mr. Pindargrasp Ide av been brot hup honest, and thats what I weps for. But she dide and my guvnor why hes been a gitten the rong side of the post hever sins that hunfortunate day. Praps you knows Mr. Pindargrasp what it is to lose a mother in your herly infantsey. But I was at the guvnor hovers and hovers agin, but hall of no yuse. ‘He as stumpt hoff with my missus and now he shall stump hup the reddy.’ Them was my guvnors hown words halways. Well, Mr. Pindargrasp; what does I do. It warnt no good my talking to him he was for going so confoundedly the rong side of the post. But I new as how Appy ouse Fits-

jerral was the orse as ort to win. Leestways I thawt I new it, and so you thawt too Mr. Pindargrasp only we was both running the rong cent. But whad did I do when I was so confoundedly disgusted by my guvnor ankring after the baronnites money wich it wasnt rite nor yet onest. Why I went meself to Appy ouse as you noes Mr. Pindargrasp, and was the first to tel the Appy ouse gent hall about it. But wat dos he do. Hoh, Mr. Pindargrasp, I shal never forgit that faitel day and only he got me hunewairs by the scruf of the nek Im has good a man as he hevery day of the week. But you was ther Mr. Pindargrasp and noes wat I got for befrindin the Appy ouse side wich was agin the guvnor and he as brot me to the loest pich of distress in the way of rino seein the guvnor as cut of my halowence becace I wint agin his hinterest.

“And now Mr. Pindargrasp I ave a terrible secret to hunraffel wich will put the sadel on the rite orse at last and as I does hall this agin my own guvnor wich of corse I love derely I do hope Mr. Pindargrasp you wont see me haltogether left in the lerch. A litel something to go on with at furst wood be very agrebbel for indeed Mr. Pindargrasp its uncommon low water with your umbel servant at this presant moment. And now wat I has to say is this — Lady F ts warnt niver my guvnors wife hat all becace why hed a wife alivin has I can pruv and will and shes alivin now number 7 Spinny lane Centbotollfs intheeast. Now I do call that noos worse a Jews high Mr. Pindargrasp and I opes youll see me honestly delt with sein as how I coms forward and tels it hall without any haskin and cood keep it all to miself and no one coodent be the wiser only I chews to do the thing as is rite.

You may fine out hall about it hall at number 7 Spinny lane and I advises you to go there immejat. Missus Mary Swan thats what she calls herself but her richeous name his Mollett — and why not sein who is er usban. So no more at presence but will com foward hany day to pruv hall this agin my guvnor because he arnt doing the thing as is rite and I looks to you Mr. Pindargrasp to see as I gits someat ansum sein as ow I coms forward agin the Appy ouse gent and for the hother party oos side you is a bakkin.

“I ham respectit Sir

“Your umbel servant to command,

“ABM. MOLLETT.”

I cannot say that Mr. Prendergast believed much of this terribly long epistle when he first received it or felt himself imbued with any great hope that his old friend's wife might be restored to her name and rank, and his old friend's son to his estate and fortune. But nevertheless he knew that it was worth inquiry. That Aby Mollett had been kicked out of Hap House in a manner that must have been mortifying to his feelings, Mr. Prendergast had himself seen; and that he would, therefore, do anything in his power to injure Owen Fitzgerald, Mr. Prendergast was quite sure. That he was a viler wretch even than his father, Mr. Prendergast suspected, — having been led to think so by words which had fallen from Sir Thomas, and being further confirmed in that opinion by the letter now in his hand. He was not, therefore, led into any strong opinion that these new tidings were of value. And, indeed, he was prone to disbelieve them, because they ran counter to a conviction which had already been

made in his own heart, and had been extensively acted on by him. Nevertheless he resolved that even Aby's letter deserved attention, and that it should receive that attention early on the following morning.

And thus he had sat for the three hours after dinner, chatting comfortably with his young friend, and holding this letter in his pocket. Had he shown it to Herbert, or spoken of it, he would have utterly disturbed the equilibrium of the embryo law student, and rendered his entrance in Mr. Die's chambers absolutely futile. "Ten will not be too early for you," he had said. "Mr. Die is always in his room by that hour." Herbert had of course declared that ten would not be at all too early for him; and Mr. Prendergast had observed that after leaving Mr. Die's chambers, he himself would go on to the City. He might have said beyond the City, for his intended expedition was to Spinny Lane, at St. Botolph's in the East.

When Herbert was gone he sat musing over his fire with Aby's letter still in his hand. A lawyer has always a sort of affection for a scoundrel, — such affection as a hunting man has for a fox. He loves to watch the skill and dodges of the animal, to study the wiles by which he lives, and to circumvent them by wiles of his own, still more wily. It is his glory to run the beast down; but then he would not for worlds run him down, except in conformity with certain laws, fixed by old custom for the guidance of men in such sports. And the two-legged vermin is adapted for pursuit as is the fox with four legs. He is an unclean animal, leaving a scent upon his trail, which the nose of your acute law hound can pick up over almost any ground. And the more wily the beast is, the longer

he can run, the more trouble he can give in the pursuit, the longer he can stand up before a pack of legal hounds, the better does the forensic sportsman love and value him. There are foxes of so excellent a nature, so keen in their dodges, so perfect in their cunning, so skilful in evasion, that a sportsman cannot find it in his heart to push them to their destruction unless the field be very large so that many eyes are looking on. And the feeling is I think the same with lawyers.

Mr. Prendergast had always felt a tenderness towards the Molletts, father and son, — a tenderness which would by no means have prevented him from sending them both the halter had that been necessary, and had they put themselves so far in his power. Much as the sportsman loves the fox, it is a moment to him of keen enjoyment when he puts his heavy boot on the beast's body, — the expectant dogs standing round demanding their prey — and there both beheads and betails him. "A grand old dog," he says to those around him. "I know him well. It was he who took us that day from Poulnarer, through Castlecor, and right away to Drum-collogher." And then he throws the heavy carcass to the hungry hounds. And so could Mr. Prendergast have delivered up either of the Molletts to be devoured by the dogs of the law; but he did not the less love them tenderly while they were yet running.

And so he sat with the letter in his hand, smiling to think that the father and son had come to grief among themselves; smiling also at the dodge by which, as he thought most probable, Aby Mollett was striving to injure the man who had kicked him, and raise a little money for his own private needs. There was too much earnestness in that prayer for cash to leave Mr.

Prendergast in any doubt as to Aby's trust that money would be forthcoming. There must be something in the dodge, or Aby would not have had such trust.

And the lawyer felt that he might, perhaps, be inclined to give some little assistance to poor Aby in the soreness of his needs. Foxes will not do well in any country which is not provided with their natural food. Rats they eat, and if rats be plentiful it is so far good. But one should not begrudge them occasional geese and turkeys, or even break one's heart if they like a lamb in season. A fox will always run well when he has come far from home seeking his breakfast.

Poor Aby, when he had been so cruelly treated by the "gent of Appy ouse," whose side in the family dispute he had latterly been so anxious to take, had remained crouching for some hour or two in Owen's kitchen, absolutely mute. The servants there for a while felt sure that he was dying; but in their master's present mood they did not dare to go near him with any such tidings. And then when the hounds were gone, and the place was again quiet, Aby gradually roused himself, allowed them to wash the blood from his hands and face, to restore him to life by whisky and scraps of food, and gradually got himself into his car, and so back to the Kanturk Hotel, in South Main Street, Cork.

But, alas, his state there was more wretched by far than it had been in the Hap House kitchen. That his father had fled was no more than he expected. Each had known that the other would now play some separate secret game. But not the less did he complain loudly when he heard that "his guvnor" had not paid the bill, and had left neither money nor message for

him. How Fanny had scorned and upbraided him, and ordered Tom to turn him out of the house "neck and crop;" how he had squared at Tom, and ultimately had been turned out of the house "neck and crop," — whatever that may mean — by Fanny's father, needs not here to be particularly narrated. With much suffering and many privations — such as foxes in their solitary wanderings so often know — he did find his way to London; and did, moreover, by means of such wiles as foxes have, find out something as to his "guvnor's" whereabouts, and some secrets also as to his "guvnor" which his "guvnor" would fain have kept to himself had it been possible. And then, also, he again found for himself a sort of home — or hole rather — in his old original gorse covert of London; somewhere among the Jews we may surmise, from the name of the row from which he dated; and here, setting to work once more with his usual cunning industry, — for your fox is very industrious, — he once more attempted to build up a slender fortune by means of the "Fitsjerral" family. The grand days in which he could look for the hand of the fair Emmeline were all gone by; but still the property had been too good not to leave something for which he might grasp. Properly worked, by himself alone, as he said to himself, it might still yield him some comfortable returns, especially as he should be able to throw over that "confounded old guvnor of his."

He remained at home the whole of the day after his letter was written, indeed for the next three days, thinking that Mr. Prendergast would come to him, or send for him; but Mr. Prendergast did neither the one nor the other. Mr. Prendergast took his advice instead,

and putting himself into a Hansom cab, had himself driven to "Centbotollfs intheeast."

Spinny Lane, St. Botolph's in the East, when at last it was found, was not exactly the sort of place that Mr. Prendergast had expected. It must be known that he did not allow the cabman to drive him up to the very door indicated, nor even to the lane itself; but contented himself with leaving the cab at St. Botolph's church. The huntsman in looking after his game is as wily as the fox himself. Men do not talk at the covert side — or at any rate they ought not. And they should stand together discreetly at the non-running side. All manner of wiles and silences and discretions are necessary, though too often broken through by the uninstructed, — much to their own discomfort. And so in hunting his fox, Mr. Prendergast did not dash up loudly into the covert, but discreetly left his cab at the church of St. Botolph's.

Spinny Lane, when at last found by intelligence given to him at the baker's, — never in such unknown regions ask a lad in the street, for he invariably will accompany you, talking of your whereabouts very loudly, so that people stare at you, and ask each other what can possibly be your business in those parts. Spinny Lane, I say, was not the sort of locality that he had expected. He knew the look of the half-protected, half-condemned Alsatias of the present-day rascals, and Spinny Lane did not at all bear their character. It was a street of small new tenements, built, as yet, only on one side of the way, with the pavement only one third finished and the stones in the road as yet unbroken and untrodden. Of such streets there are thousands now round London. They are to

be found in every suburb, creating wonder in all thoughtful minds as to who can be their tens of thousands of occupants. The houses are a little too good for artisans, too small and too silent to be the abode of various lodgers, and too mean for clerks who live on salaries. They are as dull-looking as Lethe itself, dull and silent, dingy and repulsive. But they are not discreditable in appearance, and never have that Mohawk look which by some unknown sympathy in bricks and mortar attachès itself to the residences of professional ruffians.

Number seven he found to be as quiet and decent a house as any in the row, and having inspected it from a little distance he walked up briskly to the door, and rang the bell. He walked up briskly in order that his advance might not be seen; unless, indeed, as he began to think not impossible, Aby's statement was altogether a hoax.

"Does a woman named Mrs. Mary Swan live here?" he asked of a decent-looking young woman of some seven or eight and twenty, who opened the door for him. She was decent looking, but poverty stricken and wan with work and care, and with that heaviness about her which perpetual sorrow always gives. Otherwise she would not have been ill featured; and even as it was she was feminine and soft in her gait and manner. "Does Mrs. Mary Swan live here?" asked Mr. Prendergast in a mild voice.

She at once said Mrs. Mary Swan did live there; but she stood with the door in her hand by no means fully opened, as though she did not wish to ask him to enter; and yet there was nothing in her tone to repel him. Mr. Prendergast at once felt that he was on the right scent, and that it behoved him at any rate to

make his way into that house; for if ever a modest-looking daughter was like an immodest-looking father, that young woman was like Mr. Mollett senior.

"Then I will see her, if you please," said Mr. Prendergast, entering the passage without her invitation. Not that he pushed in with roughness; but she receded before the authority of his tone, and obeyed the command which she read in his eye. The poor young woman hesitated as though it had been her intention to declare that Mrs. Swan was not within; but if so, she had not strength to carry out her purpose, for in the next moment Mr. Prendergast found himself in the presence of the woman he had come to seek.

"Mrs. Mary Swan?" said Mr. Prendergast, asking a question as to her identity.

"Yes, sir, that is my name," said a sickly-looking elderly woman, rising from her chair.

The room in which the two had been sitting was very poor; but nevertheless it was neat, and arranged with some attention to appearance. It was not carpeted, but there was a piece of drugget some three yards long spread before the fireplace. The wall had been papered from time to time with scraps of different coloured paper, as opportunity offered. The table on which the work of the two women was lying was very old and somewhat rickety, but it was of mahogany; and Mrs. Mary Swan herself was accommodated with a high-backed arm-chair, which gave some appearance of comfort to her position. It was now spring; but they had a small, very small fire in the small grate, on which a pot had been placed in hopes that it might be induced to boil. All these things did the eye of Mr. Prendergast take in; but the fact which his eye took in

with its keenest glance was this, — that on the other side of the fire to that on which sat Mrs. Mary Swan, there was a second arm-chair standing close over the fender, an ordinary old mahogany chair, in which it was evident that the younger woman had not been sitting. Her place had been close to the table-side, where her needles and thread were still lying. But the arm-chair was placed idly away from any accommodation for work, and had, as Mr. Prendergast thought, been recently filled by some idle person.

The woman who rose from her chair as she declared herself to be Mary Swan was old and sickly looking, but nevertheless there was that about her which was prepossessing. Her face was thin and delicate and pale, and not hard and coarse; her voice was low, as a woman's should be, and her hands were white and small. Her clothes, though very poor, were neat, and worn as a poor lady might have worn them. Though there was in her face an aspect almost of terror as she owned to her name in the stranger's presence, yet there was also about her a certain amount of female dignity, which made Mr. Prendergast feel that it behoved him to treat her not only with gentleness, but also with respect.

"I want to say a few words to you," said he, "in consequence of a letter I have received; perhaps you will allow me to sit down for a minute or two."

"Certainly, sir, certainly. This is my daughter, Mary Swan; do you wish that she should leave the room, sir?" And Mary Swan, as her mother spoke, got up and prepared to depart quietly.

"By no means, by no means," said Mr. Prendergast, putting his hand out so as to detain her. "I would

much rather that she should remain, as it may be very likely that she may assist me in my inquiries. You will know who I am, no doubt, when I mention my name; Mr. Mollett will have mentioned me to you — I am Mr. Prendergast."

"No, sir, he never did," said Mrs. Swan.

"Oh!" said Mr. Prendergast, having ascertained that Mr. Mollett was at any rate well known at No. 7 Spinny Lane. "I thought that he might probably have done so. He is at home at present, I believe?"

"Sir?" said Mary Swan senior.

"Your father is at home, I believe?" said Mr. Prendergast, turning to the younger woman.

"Sir?" said Mary Swan junior. It was clear at any rate that the women were not practised liars, for they could not bring themselves on the spur of the moment to deny that he was in the house.

Mr. Prendergast did not wish to be confronted at present with Matthew Mollett. Such a step might or might not be desirable before the termination of the interview; but at the present moment he thought that he might probably learn more from the two women as they were than he would do if Mollett were with them.

It had been acknowledged to him that Mollett was living in that house, that he was now at home, and also that the younger woman present before him was the child of Mollett and of Mary Swan the elder. That the young woman was older than Herbert Fitzgerald, and that therefore the connection between Mollett and her mother must have been prior to that marriage down in Dorsetshire, he was sure; but then it might still be possible that there had been no marriage between Mollett

and Mary Swan. If he could show that they had been man and wife when that child was born, then would his old friend Mr. Die lose his new pupil.

"I have a letter in my pocket, Mrs. Swan, from Abraham Mollett —" Mr. Prendergast commenced, pulling out the letter in question.

"He is nothing to me, sir," said the woman, almost in a tone of anger. "I know nothing whatever about him."

"So I should have supposed from the respectability of your appearance, if I may be allowed to say so."

"Nothing at all, sir; and as for that, we do try to keep ourselves respectable. But this is a very hard world for some people to live in. It has been very hard to me and this poor girl here."

"It is a hard world to some people, and to some honest people, too, — which is harder still."

"We've always tried to be honest," said Mary Swan the elder.

"I am sure you have; and permit me to say, madam, that you will find it at the last to be the best policy; — at the last, even as far as this world is concerned. But about this letter — I can assure you that I have never thought of identifying you with Abraham Mollett."

"His mother was dead, sir, before ever I set eyes on him or his father; and though I tried to do my —" and then she stopped herself suddenly. Honesty might be the best policy, but, nevertheless, was it necessary that she should tell everything to this stranger?

"Ah, yes; Abraham's mother was dead before you were married," said Mr. Prendergast, hunting his fox ever so craftily, — his fox whom he knew to be lying in ambush up stairs. It was of course possible that

old Mollett should slip away out of the back door and over a wall. If foxes did not do those sort of things they would not be worth half the attention that is paid to them. But Mr. Prendergast was well on the scent; all that a sportsman wants is good scent. He would rather not have a view till the run comes to its close. "But," continued Mr. Prendergast, "it is necessary that I should say a few words to you about this letter. Abraham's mother was, I suppose, not exactly an— an educated woman?"

"I never saw her, sir."

"She died when he was very young?"

"Four years old, sir."

"And her son hardly seems to have had much education?"

"It was his own fault, sir; I sent him to school when he came to me, though, goodness knows, sir, I was short enough of means of doing so. He had better opportunities than my own daughter there; and though I say it myself, who ought not to say it, she is a good scholar."

"I'm sure she is, — and a very good young woman too, if I can judge by her appearance. But about this letter. I am afraid your husband has not been so particular in his way of living as he should have been."

"What could I do, sir? a poor weak woman!"

"Nothing; what you could do, I'm sure you did do."

"I've always kept a house over my head, though it's very humble, as you see, sir. And he has had a morsel to eat and a cup to drink of when he has come here. It is not often that he has troubled me this many years past."

"Mother," said Mary Swan the younger, "the gentle-

man won't care to know about, about all that between you and father."

"Ah, but it is just what I do care to know."

"But, sir, father perhaps mightn't choose it."

The obedience of women to men — to those men to whom they are legally bound — is, I think, the most remarkable trait in human nature. Nothing equals it but the instinctive loyalty of a dog. Of course we hear of gray mares, and of garments worn by the wrong persons. Xanthippe doubtless did live, and the character from time to time is repeated; but the rule, I think, is as I have said.

"Mrs. Swan," said Mr. Prendergast, "I should think myself dishonest were I to worm your secrets out of you, seeing that you are yourself so truthful and so respectable." Perhaps it may be thought that Mr. Prendergast was a little late in looking at the matter in this light. "But it behoves me to learn much of the early history of your husband, who is now living with you here, and whose name, as I take it, is not Swan, but Mollett. Your maiden name probably was Swan?"

"But I was honestly married, sir, in the parish church at Putney, and that young woman was honestly born."

"I am quite sure of it. I have never doubted it. But as I was saying, I have come here for information about your husband, and I do not like to ask you questions off your guard," — oh, Mr. Prendergast! — "and therefore I think it right to tell you, that neither I nor those for whom I am concerned have any wish to bear more heavily than we can help upon your husband, if he will only come forward with willingness to

do that which we can make him do either willingly or unwillingly."

"But what was it about Abraham's letter, sir?"

"Well, it does not so much signify now."

"It was he sent you here, was it, sir? How has he learned where we are, Mary?" and the poor woman turned to her daughter. "The truth is, sir, he has never known anything of us for these twenty years; nor we of him. I have not set eyes on him for more than twenty years, — not that I know of. And he never knew me by any other name than Swan, and when he was a child he took me for his aunt."

"He hasn't known then that you and his father were husband and wife?"

"I have always thought he didn't, sir. But how —"

Then after all the young fox had not been so full of craft as the elder one, thought Mr. Prendergast to himself. But nevertheless, he still liked the old fox best. There are foxes that run so uncommonly short that you can never get a burst after them.

"I suppose, Mrs. Swan," continued Mr. Prendergast, "that you have heard the name of Fitzgerald?"

The poor woman sat silent and amazed, but after a moment the daughter answered him. "My mother, sir, would rather that you should ask her no questions."

"But, my good girl, your mother, I suppose, would wish to protect your father, and she would not wish to answer these questions in a court of law."

"Heaven forbid!" said the poor woman.

"Your father has behaved very badly to an unfortunate lady whose friend I am, and on her behalf I must learn the truth."

"He has behaved badly, sir, to a great many ladies," said Mrs. Swan, or Mrs. Mollett as we may now call her.

"You are aware, are you not, that he went through a form of marriage with this lady many years ago?" said Mr. Prendergast, almost severely.

"Let him answer for himself," said the true wife. "Mary, go up stairs, and ask your father to come down."

CHAPTER XIX.

The Fox in his Earth.

MARY SWAN the younger hesitated a moment before she executed her mother's order, not saying anything, but looking doubtfully up into her mother's face. "Go, my dear," said the old woman, "and ask your father to come down. It is no use denying him."

"None in the least," said Mr. Prendergast; and then the daughter went.

For ten minutes the lawyer and the old woman sat alone, during which time the ear of the former was keenly alive to any steps that might be heard on the stairs or above head. Not that he would himself have taken any active measures to prevent Mr. Mollett's escape, had such an attempt been made. The woman could be a better witness for him than the man, and there would be no fear of her running. Nevertheless, he was anxious that Mollett should, of his own accord, come into his presence.

"I am sorry to keep you so long waiting, sir," said Mrs. Swan.

"It does not signify. I can easily understand that

your husband should wish to reflect a little before he speaks to me. I can forgive that."

"And, sir —"

"Well, Mrs. Mollett?"

"Are you going to do anything to punish him, sir? If a poor woman may venture to speak a word, I would beg you on my bended knees to be merciful to him. If you would forgive him now I think he would live honest, and be sorry for what he has done."

"He has worked terrible evil," said Mr. Prendergast solemnly. "Do you know that he has harassed a poor gentleman into his grave?"

"Heaven be merciful to him!" said the poor woman. "But, sir, was not that his son? Was it not Abraham Mollett who did that? Oh, sir, if you will let a poor wife speak, it is he that has been worse than his father."

Before Mr. Prendergast had made up his mind how he would answer her, he heard the sound of footsteps slowly descending upon the stairs. They were those of a person who stepped heavily and feebly, and it was still a minute before the door was opened.

"Sir," said the woman. "Sir," and as she spoke she looked eagerly into his face — "'Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us.' We should all remember that, sir."

"True, Mrs. Mollett, quite true;" and Mr. Prendergast rose from his chair as the door opened.

It will be remembered that Mr. Prendergast and Matthew Mollett had met once before, in the room usually occupied by Sir Thomas Fitzgerald. On that occasion Mr. Mollett had at any rate entered the chamber with some of the prestige of power about him.

He had come to Castle Richmond as the man having the whip hand; and though his courage had certainly fallen somewhat before he left it, nevertheless he had not been so beaten down but what he was able to say a word or two for himself. He had been well in health and decent in appearance, and even as he left the room had hardly realized the absolute ruin which had fallen upon him.

But now he looked as though he had realized it with sufficient clearness. He was lean and sick and pale, and seemed to be ten years older than when Mr. Prendergast had last seen him. He was wrapped in an old dressing-gown, and had a night cap on his head, and coughed violently before he got himself into his chair. It is hard for any tame domestic animal to know through what fire and water a poor fox is driven as it is hunted from hole to hole and covert to covert. It is a wonderful fact, but no less a fact, that no men work so hard and work for so little pay as scoundrels who strive to live without any work at all, and to feed on the sweat of other men's brows. Poor Matthew Mollett had suffered dire misfortune, had encountered very hard lines, betwixt that day on which he stole away from the Kanturk Hotel in South Main Street, Cork, and that other day on which he presented himself, cold and hungry and almost sick to death, at the door of his wife's house in Spinny Lane, St. Botolph's in the East.

He never showed himself there unless when hard pressed indeed, and then he would skulk in, seeking for shelter and food, and pleading with bated voice his husband right to assistance and comfort. Nor was his plea ever denied him.

On this occasion he had arrived in very bad plight indeed: he had brought away from Cork nothing but what he could carry on his body, and had been forced to pawn what he could pawn in order that he might subsist. And then he had been taken with ague, and with the fit strong on him had crawled away to Spinny Lane, and had there been nursed by the mother and daughter whom he had ill used, deserted, and betrayed. "When the devil was sick the devil a monk would be;" and now his wife, credulous as all women are in such matters, believed the devil's protestations. A time may perhaps come when even — — But stop! — or I may chance to tread on the corns of orthodoxy. What I mean to insinuate is this; that it was on the cards that Mr. Mollett would now at last turn over a new leaf.

"How do you do, Mr. Mollett?" said Mr. Prendergast. "I am sorry to see you looking so poorly."

"Yes, sir. I am poorly enough certainly. I have been very ill since I last had the pleasure of seeing you, sir."

"Ah, yes, that was at Castle Richmond; was it not? Well, you have done the best thing that a man can do; you have come home to your wife and family now that you are ill and require their attendance."

Mr. Mollett looked up at him with a countenance full of unutterable woe and weakness. What was he to say on such a subject in such a company? There sat his wife and daughter, his veritable wife and true-born daughter, on whom he was now dependent, and in whose hands he lay, as a sick man does lie in the hands of women: could he deny them? And there sat the awful Mr. Prendergast, the representative of all

that Fitzgerald interest which he had so wronged, and who up to this morning had at any rate believed the story with which he, Mollett, had pushed his fortunes in county Cork. Could he in his presence acknowledge that Lady Fitzgerald had never been his wife? It must be confessed that he was in a sore plight. And then remember his ague!

"You feel yourself tolerably comfortable, I suppose, now that you are with your wife and daughter," continued Mr. Prendergast, most inhumanly.

Mr. Mollett continued to look at him so piteously from beneath his nightcap. "I am better than I was, thank you, sir," said he.

"There is nothing like the bosom of one's family for restoring one to health; is there, Mrs. Mollett; — or for keeping one in health?"

"I wish you gentlemen would think so," said she, drily.

"As for me, I never was blessed with a wife. When I am sick I have to trust to hired attendance. In that respect I am not so fortunate as your husband; I am only an old bachelor."

"Oh, ain't you, sir?" said Mrs. Mollett; "and perhaps it's best so. It ain't all married people that are the happiest."

The daughter during this time was sitting intent on her work, not lifting her face from the shirt she was sewing. But an observer might have seen from her forehead and eye that she was not only listening to what was said, but thinking and meditating on the scene before her.

"Well, Mr. Mollett," said Mr. Prendergast, "you at any rate are not an old bachelor." Mr. Mollett still

looked piteously at him, but said nothing. It may be thought that in all this Mr. Prendergast was more cruel than necessary, but it must be remembered that it was incumbent on him to bring the poor wretch before him down absolutely on his marrow-bones. Mollett must be made to confess his sin, and own that this woman before him was his real wife; and the time for mercy had not commenced till that had been done.

And then his daughter spoke, seeing how things were going with him. "Father," said she, "this gentleman has called because he has had a letter from Abraham Mollett; and he was speaking about what Abraham has been doing in Ireland."

"Oh dear, oh dear!" said poor Mollett. "The unfortunate young man; that wretched, unfortunate, young man! He will bring me to the grave at last — to the grave at last."

"Come, Mr. Mollett," said Mr. Prendergast, now getting up and standing with his back to the fire, "I do not know that you and I need beat about the bush much longer. I suppose I may speak openly before these ladies as to what has been taking place in county Cork."

"Sir!" said Mr. Mollett, with a look of deprecation about his mouth that ought to have moved the lawyer's heart.

"I know nothing about it," said Mrs. Mollett, very stiffly.

"Yes, mother, we do know something about it; and the gentleman may speak out if it so pleases him. It will be better, father, for you that he should do so."

"Very well, my dear," said Mr. Mollett, in the

lowest possible voice; "whatever the gentleman likes — only I do hope —" and he uttered a deep sigh, and gave no further expression to his hopes or wishes.

"I presume, in the first place," began Mr. Prendergast, "that this lady here is your legal wife, and this younger lady your legitimate daughter? There is no doubt I take it as to that?"

"Not — any — doubt — in the world, sir," said the Mrs. Mollett, who claimed to be so de jure. "I have got my marriage lines to show, sir. Abraham's mother was dead just six months before we came together; and then we were married just six months after that."

"Well, Mr. Mollett; I suppose you do not wish to contradict that?"

"He can't, sir, whether he wish it or not," said Mrs. Mollett.

"Could you show me that — that marriage certificate?" asked Mr. Prendergast.

Mrs. Mollett looked rather doubtful as to this. It may be, that much as she trusted in her husband's reform, she did not wish to let him know where she kept this important palladium of her rights.

"It can be forthcoming, sir, whenever it may be wanted," said Mary Mollett the younger; and then Mr. Prendergast, seeing what was passing through the minds of the two women, did not press that matter any further.

"But I should be glad to hear from your own lips, Mr. Mollett, that you acknowledge the marriage, which took place at — at Fulham, I think you said, ma'am?"

"At Putney, sir; at Putney parish church, in the year of our Lord eighteen hundred and fourteen."

"Ah, that was the year before Mr. Mollett went into Dorsetshire."

"Yes, sir. He didn't stay with me long, not at that time. He went away and left me; and then all that happened, that you know of — down in Dorsetshire, as they told me. And afterwards when he went away on his keeping, leaving Aby behind, I took the child, and said that I was his aunt. There were reasons then; and I feared — — But never mind about that, sir; for anything that I was wrong enough to say then to the contrary, I am his lawful wedded wife, and before my face he won't deny it. And then when he was sore pressed and in trouble he came back to me, and after that Mary here was born; and one other, a boy, who, God rest him, has gone from these troubles. And since that it is not often that he has been with me. But now, now that he is here, you should have pity on us, and give him another chance."

But still Mr. Mollett had said nothing himself. He sat during all this time, wearily moving his head to and fro, as though the conversation were anything but comfortable to him. And, indeed, it cannot be presumed to have been very pleasant. He moved his head slowly and wearily to and fro; every now and then lifting up one hand weakly, as though deprecating any recurrence to circumstances so decidedly unpleasant. But Mr. Prendergast was determined that he should speak.

"Mr. Mollett," said he, "I must beg you to say in so many words, whether the statement of this lady is

correct or is incorrect. Do you acknowledge her for your lawful wife?"

"He daren't deny me, sir," said the woman, who was, perhaps, a little too eager in the matter.

"Father, why don't you behave like a man and speak?" said his daughter, now turning upon him. "You have done ill to all of us; — to so many; but now —"

"And are you going to turn against me, Mary?" he whined out, almost crying.

"Turn against you! no, I have never done that. But look at mother. Would you let that gentleman think that she is — what I won't name before him? Will you say that I am not your honest-born child? You have done very wickedly, and you must now make what amends is in your power. If you do not answer him here he will make you answer in some worse place than this."

"What is it I am to say, sir?" he whined out again.

"Is this lady here your legal wife?"

"Yes, sir," said the poor man, whimpering.

"And that marriage ceremony which you went through in Dorsetshire with Miss Wainwright was not a legal marriage?"

"I suppose not, sir."

"You were well aware at the time that you were committing bigamy?"

"Sir!"

"You knew, I say, that you were committing bigamy; that the child whom you were professing to marry would not become your wife through that ceremony. I say that you knew all this at the time?"

Come, Mr. Mollett, answer me, if you do not wish me to have you dragged out of this by a policeman and taken at once before a magistrate."

"Oh, sir! be merciful to us; pray be merciful to us," said Mrs. Mollett, holding up her apron to her eyes.

"Father, why don't you speak out plainly to the gentleman? He will forgive you, if you do that."

"Am I to criminate myself, sir?" said Mr. Mollett, still in the humblest voice in the world, and hardly above his breath.

After all, this fox had still some running left in him, Mr. Prendergast thought to himself. He was not even yet so thoroughly beaten but what he had a dodge or two remaining at his service. "Am I to criminate myself, sir?" he asked, as innocently as a child might ask whether or no she were to stand longer in the corner.

"You may do as you like about that, Mr. Mollett," said the lawyer; "I am neither a magistrate nor a policeman; and at the present moment I am not acting even as a lawyer. I am the friend of a family whom you have misused and defrauded most outrageously. You have killed the father of that family —"

"Oh, gracious!" said Mrs. Mollett.

"Yes, madam, he has done so; and nearly broken the heart of that poor lady, and driven her son from the house which is his own. You have done all this in order that you might swindle them out of money for your vile indulgences, while you left your own wife and your own child to starve at home. In the whole course of my life I never came across so mean a scoundrel; and now you chaffer with me as to whether

or no you shall criminate yourself! Scoundrel and villain as you are — a double-dyed scoundrel, still there are reasons why I shall not wish to have you gibbeted, as you deserve.”

“Oh, sir, he has done nothing that would come to that!” said the poor wife.

“You had better let the gentleman finish,” said the daughter. “He doesn’t mean that father will be hung.”

“It would be too good for him,” said Mr. Prendergast, who was now absolutely almost out of temper. “But I do not wish to be his executioner. For the peace of that family which you have so brutally plundered and ill used, I shall remain quiet, — if I can attain my object without a public prosecution. But, remember, that I guarantee nothing to you. For aught I know you may be in gaol before the night is come. All I have to tell you is this, that if by obtaining a confession from you I am able to restore my friends to their property without a prosecution, I shall do so. Now you may answer me or not, as you like.”

“Trust him, father,” said the daughter. “It will be best for you.”

“But I have told him everything,” said Mollett. “What more does he want of me?”

“I want you to give your written acknowledgment that when you went through that ceremony of marriage with Miss Wainwright in Dorsetshire, you committed bigamy, and that you knew at that time that you were doing so.”

Mr. Mollett, as a matter of course, gave him the written document, and then Mr. Prendergast took his leave, bowing graciously to the two women, and not

deigning to cast his eyes again on the abject wretch who crouched by the fire.

"Don't be hard on a poor creature who has fallen so low," said Mrs. Mollett as he left the room. But Mary Mollett junior followed him to the door and opened it for him. "Sir," she said addressing him with some hesitation as he was preparing to depart.

"Well, Miss Mollett; if I could do anything for you it would gratify me, for I sincerely feel for you, — both for you and for your mother."

"Thank you, sir; I don't know that there is anything you can do for us — except to spare him. The thief on the cross was forgiven, sir."

"But the thief on the cross repented."

"And who shall say that he does not repent? You cannot tell of his heart by scripture word, as you can of that other one. But our Lord has taught us that it is good to forgive the worst of sinners. Tell that poor lady to think of this when she remembers him in her prayers."

"I will, Miss Mollett; indeed, indeed I will;" and then as he left her he gave her his hand in token of respect. And so he walked away out of Spinny Lane.

CHAPTER XX.

The Lobby of the House of Commons.

MR. PRENDERGAST as he walked out of Spinny Lane, and back to St. Botolph's church, and as he returned thence again to Bloomsbury Square in his cab, had a good deal of which to think. In the first place it must be explained that he was not altogether self-

satisfied with the manner in which things had gone. That he would have made almost any sacrifice to recover the property for Herbert Fitzgerald, is certainly true; and it is as true that he would have omitted no possible effort to discover all that which he had now discovered, almost without necessity for any effort. But nevertheless he was not altogether pleased; he had made up his mind a month or two ago that Lady Fitzgerald was not the lawful wife of her husband; and had come to this conclusion on, as he still thought, sufficient evidence. But now he was proved to have been wrong; his character for shrewdness and discernment would be damaged, and his great ally and chum Mr. Die, the Chancery barrister, would be down on him with unmitigated sarcasm. A man who has been right so frequently as Mr. Prendergast, does not like to find that he is ever in the wrong. And then, had his decision not been so sudden, might not the life of that old baronet have been saved?

Mr. Prendergast could not help feeling this in some degree as he drove away to Bloomsbury Square; but nevertheless he had also the feeling of having achieved a great triumph. It was with him as with a man who has made a fortune when he has declared to his friends that he should infallibly be ruined. It piques him to think how wrong he has been in his prophecy; but still it is very pleasant to have made one's fortune.

When he found himself at the top of Chancery Lane in Holborn, he stopped his cab and got out of it. He had by that time made up his mind as to what he would do; so he walked briskly down to Stone Buildings, and nodding to the old clerk, with whom he was very intimate, asked if he could see Mr. Die. It was

his second visit to those chambers that morning, seeing that he had been there early in the day, introducing Herbert to his new Gamaliel. "Yes, Mr. Die is in," said the clerk, smiling; and so Mr. Prendergast passed on into the well-known dingy temple of the Chancery god himself.

There he remained for full an hour, a message in the meanwhile having been sent out to Herbert Fitzgerald, begging him not to leave the chambers till he should have seen Mr. Die; "and your friend Mr. Prendergast is with him," said the clerk. "A very nice gentleman is Mr. Prendergast, uncommon clever too; but it seems to me that he never can hold his own when he comes across our Mr. Die."

At the end of the hour Herbert was summoned into the sanctum, and there he found Mr. Die sitting in his accustomed chair, with his body much bent, nursing the calf of his leg, which was always enveloped in a black, well-fitting close pantaloon, and smiling very blandly. Mr. Prendergast had in his countenance not quite so sweet an aspect. Mr. Die had repeated to him, perhaps once too often, a very well-known motto of his; one by the aid of which he professed to have steered himself safely through the shoals of life — himself and perhaps some others. It was a motto which he would have loved to see inscribed over the great gates of the noble inn to which he belonged; and which, indeed, a few years since might have been inscribed there with much justice. "Festinâ lentè," Mr. Die would say to all those who came to him in any sort of hurry. And then when men accused him of being dilatory by premeditation, he would say no, he had always recommended despatch. "Festinâ," he would

say; "festinâ' by all means; but "festinâ lentè." The doctrine had at any rate thriven with the teacher, for Mr. Die had amassed a large fortune.

Herbert at once saw that Mr. Prendergast was a little fluttered. Judging from what he had seen of the lawyer in Ireland, he would have said that it was impossible to flutter Mr. Prendergast; but in truth greatness is great only till it encounters greater greatness. Mars and Apollo are terrible and magnificent gods till one is enabled to see them seated at the foot of Jove's great throne. That Apollo, Mr. Prendergast, though greatly in favour with the old Chancery Jupiter, had now been reminded that he had also on this occasion driven his team too fast, and been nearly as indiscreet in his own rash offering.

"We are very sorry to keep you waiting here, Mr. Fitzgerald," said Mr. Die, giving his hand to the young man without, however, rising from his chair; "especially sorry, seeing that it is your first day in harness. But your friend Mr. Prendergast thinks it as well that we should talk over together a piece of business which does not seem as yet to be quite settled."

Herbert of course declared that he had been in no hurry to go away; he was, he said, quite ready to talk over anything; but to his mind at that moment nothing occurred more momentous than the nature of the agreement between himself and Mr. Die. There was an honorarium which it was presumed Mr. Die would expect, and which Herbert Fitzgerald had ready for the occasion.

"I hardly know how to describe what has taken place this morning since I saw you," said Mr. Prendergast, whose features told plainly that something

more important than the honorarium was now on the tapis.

"What has taken place?" said Herbert, whose mind now flew off to Castle Richmond.

"Gently, gently," said Mr. Die; "in the whole course of my legal experience, — and that now has been a very long experience, — I have never come across so, — so singular a family history as this of yours, Mr. Fitzgerald. When our friend Mr. Prendergast here, on his return from Ireland, first told me the whole of it, I was inclined to think that he had formed a right and just decision —"

"There can be no doubt about that," said Herbert.

"Stop a moment, my dear sir; wait half a moment — a just decision, I say — regarding the evidence of the facts as conclusive. But I was not quite so certain that he might not have been a little — premature perhaps may be too strong a word — a little too assured in taking those facts as proved."

"But they were proved," said Herbert.

"I shall always maintain that there was ample ground to induce me to recommend your poor father so to regard them," said Mr. Prendergast, stoutly. "You must remember that those men would instantly have been at work on the other side; indeed, one of them did attempt it."

"Without any signal success, I believe," said Mr. Die.

"My father thought you were quite right, Mr. Prendergast," said Herbert, with a tear forming in his eye; "and though it may be possible that the affair hurried him to his death, there was no alternative but that he should know the whole." At this Mr. Prendergast seemed to wince as he sat in his chair. "And I

am sure of this," continued Herbert, "that had he been left to the villanies of those two men, his last days would have been much less comfortable than they were. My mother feels that quite as strongly as I do." And then Mr. Prendergast looked as though he were somewhat reassured.

"It was a difficult crisis in which to act," said Mr. Prendergast, "and I can only say that I did so to the best of my poor judgment."

"It was a difficult crisis in which to act," said Mr. Die, assenting.

"But why is all this brought up now?" asked Herbert.

"Festinâ lentè," said Mr. Die; "lentè, lentè, lentè; always lentè. The more haste we make in trying to understand each other, with the less speed shall we arrive at that object."

"What is it, Mr. Prendergast?" again demanded Herbert, who was now too greatly excited to care much for the Chancery wisdom of the great barrister. "Has anything new turned up about — about those Molletts?"

"Yes, Herbert, something has turned up —"

"Remember, Prendergast, that your evidence is again incomplete."

"Upon my word, sir, I do not think it is: it would be sufficient for any intellectual jury in a Common Law court," said Mr. Prendergast, who sometimes, behind his back, gave to Mr. Die the surname of Cunctator.

"But juries in Common Law courts are not always intelligent. And you may be sure, Prendergast, that any gentleman taking up the case on the other side

would have as much to say for his client as your counsel would have for yours. Remember, you have not even been to Putney yet."

"Been to Putney!" said Herbert, who was becoming uneasy.

"The onus probandi would lie with them," said Mr. Prendergast. "We take possession of that which is our own till it is proved to belong to others."

"You have already abandoned the possession."

"No; we have done nothing already: we have taken no legal step; when we believed —"

"Having by your own act put yourself in your present position, I think you ought to be very careful before you take up another."

"Certainly we ought to be careful. But I do maintain that we may be too punctilious. As a matter of course I shall go to Putney."

"To Putney!" said Herbert Fitzgerald.

"Yes, Herbert, and now, if Mr. Die will permit, I will tell you what has happened. On yesterday afternoon, before you came to dine with me, I received that letter. No, that is from your cousin, Owen Fitzgerald. You must see that also by-and-by. It was this one, — from the younger Mollett, the man whom you saw that day in your poor father's room."

Herbert anxiously put out his hand for the letter, but he was again interrupted by Mr. Die. "I beg your pardon, Mr. Fitzgerald, for a moment. Prendergast, let me see that letter again, will you? And taking hold of it, he proceeded to read it very carefully, still nursing his leg with his left hand, while he held the letter with his right.

"What's it all about?" said Herbert, appealing to Prendergast almost in a whisper.

"Lentè, lentè, lentè, my dear Mr. Fitzgerald," said Mr. Die, while his eyes were still intent upon the paper. "If you will take advantage of the experience of gray hairs, and bald heads," — his own was as bald all round as a big white stone — "you must put up with some of the disadvantages of a momentary delay. Suppose now, Prendergast, that he is acting in concert with those people in — what do you call the street?"

"In Spinny Lane."

"Yes; with his father and the two women there."

"What could they gain by that?"

"Share with him whatever he might be able to get out of you."

"The man would never accuse himself of bigamy for that. Besides, you should have seen the women, Die."

"Seen the women! Tsh — tsh — tsh; I have seen enough of them, young and old, to know that a clean apron and a humble tone and a down-turned eye don't always go with a true tongue and an honest heart. Women are now the most successful swindlers of the age! That profession at any rate is not closed against them."

"You will not find these women to be swindlers; at least I think not."

"Ah! but we want to be sure, Prendergast;" and then Mr. Die finished the letter, very leisurely, as Herbert thought.

When he had finished it, he folded it up and gave it back to Mr. Prendergast. "I don't think but what

you've a strong *primâ facie* case; so strong that perhaps you are right to explain the whole matter to our young friend here, who is so deeply concerned in it. But at the same time I should caution him that the matter is still enveloped in doubt."

Herbert eagerly put out his hand for the letter. "You may trust me with it," said he: "I am not of a sanguine temperament, nor easily excited; and you may be sure that I will not take it for more than it is worth." So saying, he at last got hold of the letter, and managed to read it through much more quickly than Mr. Die had done. As he did so he became very red in the face, and too plainly showed that he had made a false boast in speaking of the coolness of his temperament. Indeed, the stakes were so high that it was difficult for a young man to be cool while he was playing the game: he had made up his mind to lose, and to that he had been reconciled; but now again every pulse of his heart and every nerve of his body was disturbed. "Was never his wife," he said out loud when he got to that part of the letter. "His real wife living now in Spinny Lane! Do you believe that Mr. Prendergast?"

"Yes, I do," said the attorney.

"Lentè, lentè, lentè," said the barrister, quite oppressed by his friend's unprofessional abruptness.

"But I do believe it," said Mr. Prendergast: "you must always understand, Herbert, that this new story may possibly not be true —"

"Quite possible," said Mr. Die, with something almost approaching to a slight laugh.

"But the evidence is so strong," continued the other, "that I do believe it heartily. I have been to

that house, and seen the man, old Mollett, and the woman whom I believe to be his wife, and a daughter who lives with them. As far as my poor judgment goes," and he made a bow of deference towards the barrister, whose face, however, seemed to say, that in his opinion the judgment of his friend Mr. Prendergast did not always go very far — "As far as my poor judgment goes, the women are honest and respectable. The man is as great a villain as there is unhung — unless his son be a greater one; but he is now so driven into a corner, that the truth may be more serviceable to him than a lie."

"People of that sort are never driven into a corner," said Mr. Die; "they may sometimes be crushed to death."

"Well, I believe the matter is as I tell you. There at any rate is Mollett's assurance that it is so. The woman has been residing in the same place for years, and will come forward at any time to prove that she was married to this man before he ever saw — before he went to Dorsetshire: she has her marriage certificate; and as far as I can learn there is no one able or willing to raise the question against you. Your cousin Owen certainly will not do so."

"It will hardly do to depend upon that," said Mr. Die, with another sneer. "Twelve thousand a year is great provocative to litigation."

"If he does we must fight him; that's all. Of course steps will be taken at once to get together in the proper legal form all evidence of every description which may bear on the subject, so that should the question ever be raised again, the whole matter may be in a nutshell."

"You'll find it a nutshell very difficult to crack in five-and-twenty years' time," said Mr. Die.

"And what would you advise me to do?" asked Herbert.

That after all was now the main question, and it was discussed between them for a long time, till the shades of evening came upon them, and the dull dingy chambers became almost dark as they sat there. Mr. Die at first conceived that it would be well that Herbert should still stick to the law. What indeed could be more conducive to salutary equanimity in the mind of a young man so singularly circumstanced, than the study of Blackstone, of Coke, and of Chitty? as long as he remained there, at work in those chambers, amusing himself occasionally with the eloquence of the neighbouring courts, there might be reasonable hope that he would be able to keep his mind equally poised, so that neither success nor failure as regarded his Irish inheritance should affect him injuriously. Thus at least argued Mr. Die. But at this point Herbert seemed to have views of his own: he said that in the first place he must be with his mother; and then, in the next place, as it was now clear that he was not to throw up Castle Richmond — as it would not now behove him to allow any one else to call himself master there, — it would be his duty to reassume the place of master. "The onus probandi will now rest with them," he said, repeating Mr. Prendergast's words; and then he was ultimately successful in persuading even Mr. Die to agree that it would be better for him to go to Ireland than to remain in London, sipping the delicious honey of Chancery buttercups.

"And you will assume the title, I suppose?" said Mr. Die.

"Not at any rate till I get to Castle Richmond," he said, blushing. He had so completely abandoned all thought of being Sir Herbert Fitzgerald, that he had now almost felt ashamed of saying that he should so far presume as to call himself by that name.

And then he and Mr. Prendergast went away and dined together, leaving Mr. Die to complete his legal work for the day. At this he would often sit till nine or ten, or even eleven in the evening, without any apparent ill results from such effects, and then go home to his dinner and port wine. He was already nearly seventy, and work seemed to have no effect on him. In what Medea's caldron is it that the great lawyers so cook themselves, that they are able to achieve half an immortality, even while the body still clings to the soul? Mr. Die, though he would talk of his bald head, had no idea of giving way to time. Superannuated! The men who think of superannuation at sixty are those whose lives have been idle, not they who have really buckled themselves to work. It is my opinion that nothing seasons the mind for endurance like hard work. Port wine should perhaps be added.

It was not till Herbert once more found himself alone that he fully realized this new change in his position. He had dined with Mr. Prendergast at that gentleman's club, and had been specially called upon to enjoy himself, drinking as it were to his own restoration in large glasses of some special claret, which Mr. Prendergast assured him was very extraordinary.

"You may be as satisfied as that you are sitting

there that that's 34," said he; "and I hardly know anywhere else that you'll get it."

This assertion Herbert was not in the least inclined to dispute. In the first place, he was not quite clear what 34 meant, and then any other number, 32 or 36, would have suited his palate as well. But he drank the 34, and tried to look as though he appreciated it.

"Our wines here are wonderfully cheap," said Mr. Prendergast, becoming confidential; "but nevertheless we have raised the price of that to twelve shillings. We'll have another bottle."

During all this Herbert could hardly think of his own fate and fortune, though, indeed, he could hardly think of anything else. He was eager to be alone, that he might think, and was nearly broken-hearted when the second bottle of 34 made its appearance. Something, however, was arranged in those intercalary moments between the raising of the glasses. Mr. Prendergast said that he would write both to Owen Fitzgerald and to Mr. Somers; and it was agreed that Herbert should immediately return to Castle Richmond, merely giving his mother time to have notice of his coming.

And then at last he got away, and started by himself for a night walk through the streets of London. It seemed to him now to be a month since he had arrived there; but in truth it was only on the yesterday that he had got out of the train at the Euston Station. He had come up, looking forward to live in London all his life, and now his London life was over, — unless, indeed, those other hopes should come back to him, unless he should appear again, not as a student

in Mr. Die's chamber, but as one of the council of the legislature assembled to make laws for the governance of Mr. Die and of others. It was singular how greatly this episode in his life had humbled him in his own esteem. Six months ago he had thought himself almost too good for Castle Richmond, and had regarded a seat in Parliament as the only place which he could fitly fill without violation to his nature. But now he felt as though he should hardly dare to show himself within the walls of that assembly. He had been so knocked about by circumstances, so rudely toppled from his high place, — he had found it necessary to put himself so completely into the hands of other people, that his self-pride had all left him. That it would in fact return might be held as certain, but the lesson which he had learned would not altogether be thrown away upon him.

At this moment, as I was saying, he felt himself to be completely humbled. A lie spoken by one of the meanest of God's creatures had turned him away from all his pursuits, and broken all his hopes; and now another word from this man was to restore him, — if only that other word should not appear to be the greater lie! and then that there should be such question as to his mother's name and fame — as to the very name by which she should now be called! that it should depend on the amount of infamy of which that wretch had been guilty, whether or no the woman whom in the world he most honoured was entitled to any share of respect from the world around her! That she was entitled to the respect of all good men, let the truth in these matters be where it might, Herbert knew, and all who heard the story would acknowledge. But

respect is of two sorts, and the outer respect of the world cannot be parted with conveniently.

He did acknowledge himself to be a humbled man, — more so than he had ever yet done, or had been like to do, while conscious of the loss which had fallen on him. It was at this moment when he began to perceive that his fortune would return to him, when he became aware that he was knocked about like a shuttlecock from a battledore, that his pride came by its first fall. Mollett was in truth the great man, — the Warwick who was to make and unmake the kings of Castle Richmond. A month ago, and it had pleased Earl Mollett to say that Owen Fitzgerald should reign; but there had been a turn upon the cards, and now he, King Herbert, was to be again installed.

He walked down all alone through St. James's Street, and by Pall Mall and Charing Cross, feeling rather than thinking of all this. Those doubts of Mr. Die did not trouble him much. He fully believed that he should regain his title and property; or rather that he should never lose them. But he thought that he could never show himself about the country again as he had done before all this was known. In spite of his good fortune he was sad at heart, little conscious of the good that all this would do him.

He went on by the Horse Guards and Treasury Chambers into Parliament Street, and so up to the new Houses of Parliament, and sauntered into Westminster Hall; and there, at the privileged door between the lamps on his left hand, he saw busy men going in and out, some slow and dignified, others hot, hasty, and anxious, and he felt as though the regions to and from which they passed must be far out of his reach. Could

he aspire to pass those august lamp-posts, he whose very name depended on what in truth might have been the early doings of a low scoundrel who was now skulking from the law?

And then he went on, and mounting by the public stairs and anterooms found his way to the lobby of the house. There he stood with his back to the ginger-beer stall, moody and melancholy, looking on as men in the crowd pushed forward to speak to members whom they knew; or, as it sometimes appeared, to members whom they did not know. There was somewhat of interest going on in the house, for the throng was thick, and ordinary men sometimes jostled themselves on into the middle of the hall — with impious steps; for on those centre stones none but legislators should presume to stand.

“Stand back, gentlemen, stand back; back a little, if you please, sir,” said a very courteous but peremptory policeman, so moving the throng that Herbert, who had been behind, in no way anxious for a forward place, or for distinguishing nods from passing members, found himself suddenly in the front rank, in the immediate neighbourhood of a cluster of young senators who were cooling themselves in the lobby after the ardour of the debate.

“It was as pretty a thing as ever I saw in my life,” said one, “and beautifully ridden.” Surely it must have been the Spring Meeting and not the debate that they were discussing.

“I don’t know much about that,” said another, and the voice sounded on Herbert’s ears as it might almost be the voice of a brother. “I know I lost the odds. But I’ll have a bottle of soda-water. Hallo, Fitzgerald!

Why —;" and then the young member stopped himself, for Herbert Fitzgerald's story was rife about London at this time.

"How do you do, Moulsey?" said Herbert, very glumly, for he did not at all like being recognized. This was Lord Moulsey, the eldest son of the Earl of Hampton Court, who was now member for the River Regions, and had been one of Herbert's most intimate friends at Oxford.

"I did not exactly expect to see you here," said Lord Moulsey, drawing him apart. "And upon my soul I was never so cut up in my life as when I heard all that. Is it true?"

"True! why no; — it was true, but I don't think it is. That is to say — upon my word I don't know. It's all unsettled — Good evening to you." And again nodding his head at his old friend in a very sombre manner, he skulked off and made his way out of Westminster Hall.

"Do you know who that was?" said Lord Moulsey going back to his ally. "That was young Fitzgerald, the poor fellow who has been done out of his title and all his property. You have heard about his mother, haven't you?"

"Was that young Fitzgerald?" said the other senator, apparently more interested in this subject than he had even been about the pretty riding. "I wish I'd looked at him. Poor fellow! How does he bear it?"

"Upon my word then, I never saw a fellow so changed in my life. He and I were like brothers, but he would hardly speak to me. Perhaps I ought to have written to him. But he says it's not settled."

"Oh, that's all gammon. It's settled enough. Why

they've given up the place. I heard all about it the other day from Sullivan O'Leary. They are not even making any fight. Sullivan O'Leary says they are the greatest fools in the world."

"Upon my word I think young Fitzgerald was mad just now. His manner was so very odd."

"I shouldn't wonder. I know I should go mad if my mother turned out to be somebody else's wife." And then they both sauntered away.

Herbert was doubly angry with himself as he made his way down into the noble old hall, — angry that he had gone where there was a possibility of his being recognized, and angry also that he had behaved himself with so little presence of mind when he was recognized. He felt that he had been taken aback, that he had been beside himself, and unable to maintain his own dignity; he had run away from his old intimate friend because he had been unable to bear being looked on as the hero of a family tragedy. "He would go back to Ireland," he said to himself, "and he would never leave it again. Perhaps he might teach himself there to endure the eyes and voices of men around him. Nothing at any rate should induce him to come again to London." And so he went home to bed in a mood by no means so happy as might have been expected from the result of the day's doings. And yet he had been cheerful enough when he went to Mr. Die's chambers in the morning.

CHAPTER XXI.

Another Journey.

ON the following day he did go back to Ireland, stopping a night in Dublin on the road, so that his mother might receive his letter, and that his cousin and Somers might receive those written by Mr. Prendergast. He spent one night in Dublin, and then went on, so that he might arrive at Castle Richmond after dark. In his present mood he dreaded to be seen returning, even by his own people about the place.

At Buttevant he was met by his own car and by Richard, as he had desired; but he found that he was utterly frustrated as to that method of seating himself in his vehicle which he had promised to himself. He was still glum and gloomy enough when the coach stopped, for he had been all alone, thinking over many things — thinking of his father's death and his mother's early life — of all that he had suffered and might yet have to suffer, and above all things dreading the consciousness that men were talking of him and staring at him. In this mood he was preparing to leave the coach when he found himself approaching near to that Buttevant stage; but he had more to go through at present than he expected.

"There's his honour — Hurrah! God bless his sweet face that's come among us agin this day! Hurrah for Sir Herbert, boys! hurrah! The rail ould Fitzgerald 'll be back agin among us, glory be to God and the Blessed Virgin! Hurrah for Sir Herbert!" and then there was a shout that seemed to be repeated all down the street of Buttevant.

But that was nothing to what was coming. Herbert, when he first heard this, retreated for a moment back into the coach. But there was little use in that. It was necessary that he should descend, and had he not done so he would have been dragged out. He put his foot on the steps, and then found himself seized in the arms of a man outside, and pressed and embraced as though he had been a baby.

"Ugh, ugh, ugh!" exclaimed a voice, the owner of which intended to send forth notes of joy; but so overcome was he by the intensity of his own feelings that he was in nowise able to moderate his voice either for joy or sorrow. "Ugh, ugh, ugh! Eh! Sir Herbert! but it's I that am proud to see yer honour this day, — wid yer own name, wid yer own name. Glory be to God; oh dear! oh dear! And I knew the Lord 'd niver forgit us that way, and let the world go intirely wrong like that. For av you weren't the masther, Sir Herbert, as you are, the Lord presarve you to us, divil a masther 'd iver be able to hould a foot in Castle Richmond, and that's God's own thruth."

"And that's thrue for you, Richard," said another, whom Herbert in the confusion could not recognize, though his voice was familiar to him. "'Deed and the boys had it all made out. But what matthers now Sir Herbert's back?"

"And God bless the day and the hour that he came to us!" And then leaving his master's arm and coat to which he had still stuck, he began to busy himself loudly about the travelling gear. "Coachman, where's Sir Herbert's portmantel? Yes; that's Sir Herbert's hat-box. 'Deed, an' I ought to know it well. And the black bag; yes, that'll be Sir Herbert's, to be sure," and so on.

Nor was this all. The name seemed to run like wildfire through all the Buttevantians there assembled; and no sound seemed to reach our hero's name but that of Sir Herbert, Sir Herbert. Everybody took hold of him, and kissed his hand, and pulled his skirts, and stroked his face. His hat was knocked off, and put on again amid thousands of blessings. It was nearly dark, and his eyes were dazed by the coach lanterns which were carried about, so that he could hardly see his friends; but the one sound which was dinned into his ears was that of Sir Herbert, Sir Herbert.

Had he thought about it when starting from Dublin early that morning he would have said that it would have killed him to have heard himself so greeted in the public street, but as it was he found that he got over it very easily. Before he was well seated on his car it may be questioned whether he was not so used to his name, that he would have been startled to hear himself designated as Mr. Fitzgerald. For half a minute he had been wretched, and had felt a disgust at poor Richard which he thought at the moment would be insuperable; but when he was on the car, and the poor fellow came round to tuck the apron in under his feet, he could not help giving him his hand, and fraternizing with him.

“And how is my mother, Richard?”

“’Deed then, Sir Herbert, me lady is surprising — very quiet-like; but her leddyship was always that, and as sweet to them as comes nigh her as flowers in May; but sure that’s nathural to her leddyship.”

“And, Richard —”

“Yes, Sir Herbert.”

"Was Mr. Owen over at Castle Richmond since I left?"

"Sorrow a foot, Sir Herbert. Nor no one ain't heard on him, nor seen him. And I will say this on him —"

"Don't say anything against him, Richard."

"No, surely not, seeing he is yer honour's far-away cousin, Sir Herbert. But what I war going to say warn't agin Mr. Owen at all, at all. For they do say that cart-ropes wouldn't have dragged him to Castle Richmond; and that only yer honour has come back to yer own, — and why not? there wouldn't have been any mather in Castle Richmond at all, at all. That's what they do say."

"There's no knowing how it will go yet, Richard."

"Deed, an' I know how it 'll go very well, Sir Herbert, and so does Mr. Somers, God bless him! 'Twas only this morning he tould me. An', faix, it's he has the right to be glad."

"He is a very old friend."

"So is we all ould frinds, an' we're all glad — out of our skins wid gladness, Sir Herbert. 'Deed an' I thought the eend of the world had come when I heerd it, for my head went round and round and round as I stood in the stable, and only for the fork I had a hould of, I'd have been down among the crathur's legs."

And then it struck Herbert that as they were going on he heard the footsteps of some one running after the car, always at an equal distance behind them. "Who's that running, Richard?"

"Sure an' that's just Larry Carson, yer honour's own boy, that minds yer honour's own nag, Sir Herbert. But, faix, I suppose ye'll be having a dozen of 'em now."

"Stop and take him up; you've room there."

"Room enough, Sir Herbert, an' yer honour's so good. Here, Larry, yer born fool, Sir Herbert says ye're to get up. He would come over, Sir Herbert, just to say he'd been the first to see yer honour."

"God — bless — yer honour — Sir Herbert," exclaimed the poor fellow, out of breath, as he took his seat. It was his voice that Sir Herbert had recognized among the crowd, angry enough at that moment. But in future days it was remembered in Larry Carson's favour, that he had come over to Castle Richmond to see his master, contented to run the whole road back to Castle Richmond behind the car. A better fate, however, was his, for he made one in the triumphal entry up the avenue.

When they got to the lodge it was quite dark — so dark that even Richard, who was experienced in night-driving, declared that a cat could not see. However, they turned in at the great gates without any accident, the accustomed woman coming out to open them.

"An' is his honour there thin?" said the woman; "and may God bless you, Sir Herbert, and ye're welcome back to yer own; so ye are!"

And then a warm large hand was laid upon his leg, and a warm voice sounded greeting in his ear. "Herbert, my boy, how are you? This is well, is it not?" It was Mr. Somers who had been waiting there for him at the lodge gate.

Upon the whole he could not but acknowledge to himself that it was well. Mr. Somers got up beside him on the car, so that by this time it was well laden. "And how does my mother take it?" Herbert asked.

"Very quietly. Your Aunt Letty told me that she had spent most of her time in prayer since she heard it. But Miss Letty seems to think that on your account she is very full of joy."

"And the girls?"

"Oh! the girls — what girls? Well, they must answer for themselves; I left them about half an hour ago, and now you hear their voices in the porch."

He did hear the voices in the porch plainly, though he could not distinguish them, as the horse's feet and the car wheels rattled over the gravel. But as the car stopped at the door with somewhat of a crash, he heard Emmeline say, "There's Herbert," and then as he got down they all retreated in among the lights in the hall.

"God bless your honour, Sir Herbert. An' it's you that are welcome back this blessed night to Castle Richmond." Such and such like were the greetings which met him from twenty different voices as he essayed to enter the house. Every servant and groom about the place was there, and some few of the nearest tenants, — of those who had lived near enough to hear the glad tidings since the morning. A dozen, at any rate, took his hands as he strove to make his way through them, and though he was never quite sure about it, he believed that one or two had kissed him in the dark. At last he found himself in the hall, and even then the first person who got hold of him was Mrs. Jones.

"And so you've come back to us after all, Mr. Herbert — Sir Herbert I should say, begging your pardon, sir; and it's all right about my lady. I never thought to be so happy again, never — never — never."

And then she retreated with her apron up to her eyes, leaving him in the arms of Aunt Letty.

"The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away. Blessed be the name of the Lord. Oh! Herbert, my darling boy. I hope this may be a lesson and a warning to you, so that you may flee from the wrath to come." Aunt Letty, had time been allowed to her, would certainly have shown that the evil had all come from tampering with papistical abominations; and that the returning prosperity of the house of Castle Richmond was due to Protestant energy and truth. But much time was not allowed to Aunt Letty, as Herbert hurried on after his sisters.

As he had advanced they had retreated, and now he heard them in the drawing-room. He began to be conscious that they were not alone, — that they had some visitor with them, and began to be conscious also who that visitor was. And when he got himself at last into the room, sure enough there were three girls there, two running forward to meet him from the fireplace to which they had retreated, and the other lingering a little in their rear.

"Oh, Herbert!" and "oh, Herbert!" and then their arms were thrown about his neck, and their warm kisses were on his cheeks — kisses not unmixed with tears; for of course they began to cry immediately that he was with them, though their eyes had been dry enough for the two or three hours before. Their arms were about his neck, and their kisses on his cheeks, I have said, — meaning thereby the arms and kisses of his sisters, for the third young lady still lingered a little in the rear.

"Was it not lucky Clara was here when the news came to us this morning?" said Mary.

"Such difficulty as we have had to get her," said Emmeline. "It was to have been her farewell visit to us; but we will have no more farewells now; will we, Clara?"

And now at last he had his arm round her waist, or as near to that position as he was destined to get it on the present occasion. She gave him her hand, and let him hold that fast, and smiled on him through her soft tears, and was gracious to him with her sweet words and pleasant looks; but she would not come forward and kiss him boldly as she had done when last they had met at Desmond Court. He attempted it now; but he could get his lips no nearer to hers than her forehead; and when he tried to hold her she slipped away from him, and he continually found himself in the embraces of his sisters, — which was not the same thing at all. "Never mind," he said to himself; "his day would soon come round."

"You did not expect to find Clara here, did you?" asked Emmeline.

"I hardly know what I have expected, or not expected; for the last two days. No, certainly, I had no hope of seeing her to-night."

"I trust I am not in the way," said Clara.

Whereupon he made another attempt with his arm, but when he thought he had caught his prize, Emmeline was again within his grasp.

"And my mother?" he then said. It must be remembered that he had only yet been in the room for three minutes, though his little efforts have taken longer than that in the telling.

"She is up stairs, and you are to go to her. But I told her that we should keep you for a quarter of an hour, and you have not been here half that time yet."

"And how has she borne all this?"

"Why, well on the whole. When first she heard it this morning, which she did before any of us, you know —"

"Oh, yes, I wrote to her."

"But your letter told her nothing. Mr. Somers came down almost as soon as your letter was here. He had heard also — from Mr. Prendergast, I think it was, and Mr. Prendergast said a great deal more than you did."

"Well?"

"We thought she was going to be ill at first, for she became so very pale, — flushing up sometimes for half a minute or so; but after an hour or two she became quite calm. She has seen nobody since but us and Aunt Letty."

"She saw me," said Clara.

"Oh, yes, you; you are one of us now, — just the same as ourselves, isn't she, Herbert?"

Not exactly the same, Herbert thought. And then he went up stairs to his mother.

This interview I will not attempt to describe. Lady Fitzgerald had become a stricken woman from the first moment that she had heard that that man had returned to life, who in her early girlhood had come to her as a suitor. Nay, this had been so from the first moment that she had expected his return. And these misfortunes had come upon her so quickly that, though they

had not shattered her in body and mind as they had shattered her husband, nevertheless they had told terribly on her heart. The coming of those men, the agony of Sir Thomas, the telling of the story as it had been told to her by Mr. Prendergast, the resolve to abandon everything — even a name by which she might be called, as far as she herself was concerned, the death of her husband, and then the departure of her ruined son, had, one may say, been enough to destroy the spirit of any woman. Her spirit they had not utterly destroyed. Her powers of endurance were great, — and she had endured, still hoping. But as the uttermost malice of adversity had not been able altogether to depress her, so neither did returning prosperity exalt her, — as far as she herself was concerned. She rejoiced for her children greatly, thanking God that she had not entailed on them an existence without a name. But for herself, as she now told Herbert, outside life was all over. Her children and the poor she might still have with her, but beyond, nothing in this world; — to them would be confined all her wishes on this side the grave.

But nevertheless she could be warm in her greetings to her son. She could understand that though she were dead to the world he need not be so, — nor indeed ought to be so. Things that were now all ending with her were but beginning with him. She had no feeling that taught her to think that it was bad for him to be a man of rank and fortune, the head of his family, and the privileged one of his race. It had been perhaps her greatest misery that she, by her doing, had placed him in the terrible position which he had lately been called upon to fill.

"Dearest mother, it did not make me unhappy," he said, caressing her.

"You bore it like a man, Herbert, as I shall ever remember. But it did make me unhappy, — more unhappy than it should have done, when we remember how very short is our time here below."

He remained with his mother for more than an hour, and then returned to the drawing-room, where the girls were waiting for him with the tea-things arranged before them.

"I was very nearly coming up to fetch you," said Mary, "only that we knew how much mamma must have to say to you."

"We dined early because we are all so upset," said Emmeline; "and Clara must be dying for her tea."

"And why should Clara die for tea any more than any one else?" asked Lady Clara herself.

I will not venture to say what hour it was before they separated for bed. They sat there with their feet over the fender, talking about things gone and things coming, — and there were so many of such things for them to discuss! Even yet, as one of the girls remarked, Lady Desmond had not heard of the last change, or if she had so heard, had had no time to communicate with her daughter upon the subject.

And then Owen was spoken of with the warmest praise by them all, and Clara explained openly what had been the full tenor of his intended conduct.

"That would have been impossible," said Herbert.

"But it was not the less noble in him, was it?" said Clara, eagerly. But she did not tell how Owen Fitzgerald had prayed that her love might be given back to him, as his reward for what he wished to do

on behalf of his cousin. Now, at least, at this moment it was not told; yet the day did come when all that was described, — a day when Owen in his absence was regarded by them both among the dearest of their friends.

But even on that night Clara resolved that he should have some meed of praise. "Has he not been noble?" she said, appealing to him who was to be her husband; "has he not been very noble?"

Herbert, too happy to be jealous, acknowledged that it was so.

CHAPTER XXII.

Playing Rounders.

MY story is nearly at its close, and all readers will now know how it is to end. Those difficulties raised by Mr. Die were all made to vanish; and though he implored Mr. Prendergast over and over again to go about this business with a moderated eagerness, that gentleman would not consent to let any grass grow under his heels till he had made assurance doubly sure, and had seen Herbert Fitzgerald firmly seated on his throne. All that the women in Spinny Lane had told him was quite true. The register was found in the archives of the parish of Putney, and Mr. Prendergast was able to prove that Mr. Matthew Mollett, now of Spinny Lane, and the Mr. Matthew Mollett then designated as of Newmarket in Cambridgeshire, were one and the same person; therefore Mr. Mollett's marriage with Miss Wainwright was no marriage, and therefore, also, the marriage between Sir Thomas Fitzgerald and

that lady was a true marriage; all which things will now be plain to any novel-reading capacity, mean as such capacity may be in respect to legal law.

And I have only further to tell in respect to this part of my story, that the Molletts, both father and son, escaped all punishment for the frauds and villainies related in these pages — except such punishment as these frauds and villainies, acting by their own innate destructive forces and poisons, brought down upon their unfortunate heads. For so allowing them to escape I shall be held by many to have been deficient in sound teaching. "What!" men will say, "not punish your evil principle! Allow the prevailing evil genius of your book to escape scot free, without administering any of that condign punishment which it would have been so easy for you to allot to them! Had you not treadmills to your hand, and all manner of new prison disciplines? Should not Matthew have repented in the sackcloth of solitary confinement, and Aby have munched and crunched between his teeth the bitter ashes of prison bread and water? Nay, for such offences as those did you wot of no penal settlements? Were not Portland and Spike Islands gaping for them? Had you no memory of Dartmoor and the Bermudas?"

Gentle readers, no; not in this instance shall Spike Island or the Bermudas be asked to give us their assistance. There is a sackcloth harsher to the skin than that of the penal settlement, and ashes more bitter in the crunching than convict rations. It would be sad indeed if we thought that those rascals who escape the law escape also the just reward of their rascality. May it not rather be believed that the whole life of the professional rascal is one long wretched punishment,

to which, if he could but know it, the rations and comparative innocence of Bermuda would be so preferable? Is he not always rolling the stone of Sisyphus, gyrating on the wheel of Ixion, hankering after the waters of Tantalus, filling the sieves of the daughters of Danaüs? He pours into his sieve stolen corn beyond measure, but no grain will stay there. He lifts to his lips rich cups, but Rhadamanthus the policeman allows him no moment for a draught. The wheel of justice is ever going, while his poor hanging head is in a whirl. The stone which he rolls never perches for a moment at the top of the hill, for the trade which he follows admits of no rest. Have I not said truly that he is hunted like a fox, driven from covert to covert with his poor empty craving belly? prowling about through the wet night, he returns with his prey, and finds that he is shut out from his lair; his bloodshot eye is ever over his shoulder, and his advanced foot is ever ready for a start; he stinks in the nostrils of the hounds of the law, and is held by men to be a vermin.

One would say that the rascal, if he but knew the truth, would look forward to Spike Island and the Bermudas with impatience and raptures. The cold, hungry, friendless, solitary doom of unconvicted rascaldom has ever seemed to me to be the most wretched phase of human existence, — that phase of living in which the liver can trust no lone, and be trusted by none; in which the heart is ever quailing at the policeman's hat, and the eye ever shrinking from the policeman's gaze. The convict does trust his gaoler, at any rate his master gaoler, and in so doing is not all wretched. It is Bill Sikes before conviction that I have

ever pitied. Any man can endure to be hanged; but how can any man have taken that Bill Sikes' walk and have lived through it?

To such punishments will we leave the Molletts, hoping of the elder one, that under the care of those ministering angels in Spinny Lane, his heart may yet be softened; hoping also for the younger one that some ministering angel may be appointed also for his aid. 'Tis a grievous piece of work though, that of a ministering angel to such a soul as his. And now, having seen them so far on their mortal career, we will take our leave of both of them.

Mr. Prendergast's object in sparing them was of course that of saving Lady Fitzgerald from the terrible pain of having her name brought forward at any trial. She never spoke of this, even to Herbert, allowing those in whom she trusted to manage those things for her without an expression of anxiety on her own part; but she was not the less thankful when she found that no public notice was to be taken of the matter.

Very shortly after Herbert's return to Castle Richmond, it was notified to him that he need have no fear as to his inheritance; and it was so notified with the great additional comfort of an assuring opinion from Mr. Die. He then openly called himself Sir Herbert, took upon himself the property which became his by right of the entail, and issued orders for the preparation of his marriage settlement. During this period he saw Owen Fitzgerald; but he did so in the presence of Mr. Somers, and not a word was then said about Lady Clara Desmond. Both the gentlemen, Herbert and Mr. Somers, cordially thanked the master of Hap House for the way in which he had behaved to the Castle

Richmond family, and in reference to the Castle Richmond property during the terrible events of the last two months; but Owen took their thanks somewhat haughtily. He shook hands warmly enough with his cousin, wishing him joy on the arrangement of his affairs, and was at first less distant than usual with Mr. Somers; but when they alluded to his own conduct, and expressed their gratitude, he declared that he had done nothing for which thanks were due, and that he begged it to be understood that he laid claim to no gratitude. Had he acted otherwise, he said, he would have deserved to be kicked out of the presence of all honest men; and to be thanked for the ordinary conduct of a gentleman was almost an insult. This he said looking chiefly at Mr. Somers, and then turning to his cousin, he asked him if he intended to remain in the country.

"Oh, certainly," said Herbert.

"I shall not," said Owen; "and if you know any who will take a lease of Hap House for ten or twelve years, I shall be glad to find a tenant."

"And you, where are you going?"

"To Africa in the first instance," said he; "there seems to be some good hunting there, and I think that I shall try it."

The new tidings were not long in reaching Desmond Court, and the countess was all alone when she first heard them. With very great difficulty, taking as it were the bit between her teeth, Clara had managed to get over to Castle Richmond that she might pay a last visit to the Fitzgerald girls. At this time Lady Desmond's mind was in a terribly distracted state. The rumour was rife about the country that Owen had

refused to accept the property; and the countess herself had of course been made aware that he had so refused. But she was too keenly awake to the affairs of the world to suppose that such a refusal could continue long in force; neither, as she knew well, could Herbert accept of that which was offered to him. It might be that for some years to come the property might be unenjoyed; the rich fruit might fall rotten from the wall; but what would that avail to her or to her child? Herbert would still be a nameless man, and could never be master of Castle Richmond.

Nevertheless Clara carried her point, and went over to her friends, leaving the countess all alone. She had now permitted her son to return to Eton, finding that he was powerless to aid her. The young earl was quite willing that his sister should marry Owen Fitzgerald; but he was not willing to use any power of persuasion that he might have, in what his mother considered a useful or legitimate manner. He talked of rewarding Owen for his generosity; but Clara would have nothing to do either with the generosity or with the reward. And so Lady Desmond was left alone, hearing that even Owen, Owen himself, had now given up the quest, and feeling that it was useless to have any further hope. "She will make her own bed," the countess said to herself, "and she must lie on it."

And then came this rumour that after all Herbert was to be the man. It first reached her ears about the same time that Herbert arrived at his own house, but it did so in such a manner as to make but little impression at the moment. Lady Desmond had but few gossips, and in a general way heard but little of what

was doing in the country. On this occasion the Caleb Balderston of her house came in, making stately bows to his mistress, and with low voice, and eyes wide open, told her what a gossoon running over from Castle Richmond had reported in the kitchen of Desmond Court. "At any rate, my lady, Mr. Herbert is expected this evening at the house;" and then Caleb Balderston, bowing stately again, left the room. This did not make much impression, but it made some.

And then on the following day Clara wrote to her: this she did after deep consideration and much consultation with her friends. It would be unkind, they argued, to leave Lady Desmond in ignorance on such a subject; and therefore a note was written very guardedly, the joint production of the three, in which, with the expression of many doubts, it was told that perhaps after all Herbert might yet be the man. But even then the countess did not believe it.

But during the next week the rumour became a fact through the country, and everybody knew, even the Countess of Desmond, that all that family history was again changed. Lady Fitzgerald, whom they had all known, was Lady Fitzgerald still, and Herbert was once more on his throne. When rumours thus became a fact, there was no longer any doubt about the matter. The countryside did not say that, "perhaps after all so and so would go in such and such a way," or that "legal doubts having been entertained, the gentlemen of the long robe were about to do this and that." By the end of the first week the affair was as surely settled in county Cork as though the line of the Fitzgeralds had never been disturbed; and Sir Herbert was fully seated on his throne.

It was well then for poor Owen that he had never assumed the regalia of royalty: had he done so his fall would have been very dreadful; as it was, not only were all those pangs spared to him, but he achieved at once an immense popularity through the whole country. Everybody called him poor Owen, and declared how well he had behaved. Some expressed almost a regret that his generosity should go unrewarded, and others went so far as to give him his reward: he was to marry Emmeline Fitzgerald, they said at the clubs in Cork, and a considerable slice of the property was destined to give additional charms to the young lady's hand and heart. For a month or so Owen Fitzgerald was the most popular man in the south of Ireland; that is, as far as a man can be popular who never shows himself.

And the countess had to answer her daughter's letter. "If this be so," she said, "of course I shall be well pleased. My anxiety has been only for your welfare, to further which I have been willing to make any possible sacrifice." Clara when she read this did not know what sacrifice had been made, nor had the countess thought as she wrote the words what had been the sacrifice to which she had thus alluded, though her heart was ever conscious of it, unconsciously. And the countess sent her love to them all at Castle Richmond. "She did not fear," she said, "that they would misinterpret her. Lady Fitzgerald, she was sure, would perfectly understand that she had endeavoured to do her duty by her child." It was by no means a bad letter, and, which was better, was in the main a true letter. According to her light she had striven to do her duty, and her conduct was not misjudged, at any rate at Castle Richmond.

"You must not think harshly of mamma," said Clara to her future mother-in-law.

"Oh no," said Lady Fitzgerald. "I certainly do not think harshly of her. In her position I should probably have acted as she has done." The difference, however, between them was this, that it was all but impossible that Lady Fitzgerald should not sympathize with her children, while it was almost impossible that the Countess of Desmond should do so.

And so Lady Desmond remained all alone at Desmond Court, brooding over the things as they now were. For the present it was better that Clara should remain at Castle Richmond, and nothing therefore was said of her return on either side. She could not add to her mother's comfort at home, and why should she not remain happy where she was? She was already a Fitzgerald in heart rather than a Desmond; and was it not well that she should be so? If she could love Herbert Fitzgerald, that was well also. Since the day on which he had appeared at Desmond Court, wet and dirty and wretched, with a broken spirit and fortunes as draggled as his dress, he had lost all claim to be a hero in the estimation of Lady Desmond. To her those only were heroes whose pride and spirit were never draggled; and such a hero there still was in her close neighbourhood.

Lady Desmond herself was a woman of a mercenary spirit; so at least it will be said and thought of her. But she was not altogether so, although the two facts were strong against her that she had sold herself for a title, and had been willing to sell her daughter for a fortune. Poverty she herself had endured upon the whole with patience; and though she hated and scorned

it from her very soul, she would now have given herself in marriage to a poor man without rank or station, — she, a countess, and the mother of an earl; and that she would have done with all the romantic love of a girl of sixteen, though she was now a woman verging upon forty!

Men and women only know so much of themselves and others as circumstances and their destiny have allowed to appear. Had it perchance fallen to thy lot, O my forensic friend, heavy laden with the wisdom of the law, to write tales such as this of mine, how charmingly might not thy characters have come forth upon the canvas — how much more charmingly than I can limn them! While, on the other hand, ignorant as thou now tellest me that I am of the very alphabet of the courts, had thy wig been allotted to me, I might have gathered guineas thick as daisies in summer, while to thee perhaps they come no faster than snow-drops in the early spring. It is all in our destiny. Chance had thrown that terrible earl in the way of the poor girl in her early youth, and all idea of love had flown from her heart. All idea of love, but not all the capacity — as now within this last year or two she had learned, so much to her cost.

Long months had passed since she had first owned this to herself, since she had dared to tell herself that it was possible even for her to begin the world again, and to play the game which women love to play, once at least before they die. She could have worshipped this man, and sat at his feet, and endowed him in her heart with heroism, and given him her soft brown hair to play with when it suited her Hercules to rest from his labours. She could have forgotten her years, and

have forgotten too the children who had now grown up to seize the world from beneath her feet — to seize it before she herself had enjoyed it. She could have forgotten all that was past, and have been every whit as young as her own daughter. If only —!

It is so, I believe, with most of us who have begun to turn the hill. I myself could go on to that common that is at this moment before me, and join that game of rounders with the most intense delight. "By George! you fellow, you've no eyes; didn't you see that he hadn't put his foot in the hole. He'll get back now that long-backed, hardhitting chap, and your side is done for the next half-hour!" But then they would all be awestruck for a while; and after that, when they grew to be familiar with me, they would laugh at me because I loomed large in my running, and returned to my ground scant of breath. Alas, alas! I know that it would not do. So I pass by, imperious in my heavy manhood, and one of the lads respectfully abstains from me though the ball is under my very feet.

But then I have had my game of rounders. No horrible old earl with gloating eyes carried me off in my childhood and robbed me of the pleasure of my youth. That part of my cake has been eaten, and, in spite of some occasional headache, has been digested not altogether unsatisfactorily. Lady Desmond had as yet been allowed no slice of her cake. She had never yet taken her side in any game of rounders. But she too had looked on and seen how jocund was the play; she also had acknowledged that running in the ring, that stout hitting of the ball, that innocent craft, that bringing back by her own skill and with her own hand of some long-backed fellow, would be pleasant to her as

well as to others. If only she now could be chosen in at that game! But what if the side that she cared for would not have her?

But *tempus edax rerum*, though it had hardly nibbled at her heart or wishes, had been feeding on the freshness of her brow and the bloom of her lips. The child with whom she would have loved to play kept aloof from her too, and would not pick up the ball when it rolled to his feet. All this, if one thinks of it, is hard to bear. It is very hard to have had no period for rounders, not to be able even to look back to one's games, and to talk of them to one's old comrades! "But why then did she allow herself to be carried off by the wicked wrinkled earl with the gloating eyes?" asks of me the prettiest girl in the world, just turned eighteen. Oh heavens! Is it not possible that one should have one more game of rounders? Quite impossible, O my fat friend! And therefore I answer the young lady somewhat grimly. "Take care that thou also art not carried off by a wrinkled earl. Is thy heart free from all vanity? Of what nature is the heroism that thou worshippest?" "A nice young man!" she says, boldly, though in words somewhat different. "If so it will be well for thee; but did I not see thine eyes hankering the other day after the precious stones of Ophir, and thy mouth watering for the flesh-pots of Egypt? Was I not watching thee as thou satted at that counter, so frightfully intent? Beware!" "The grumpy old fellow with the bald head!" she said shortly afterwards to her bosom friend, not careful that her words should be duly inaudible.

Some idea that all was not yet over with her had come upon her poor heart, — upon Lady Desmond's

heart, soon after Owen Fitzgerald had made himself familiar in her old mansion. We have read how that idea was banished, and how she had ultimately resolved that that man whom she could have loved herself should be given up to her own child when she thought that he was no longer poor and of low rank. She could not sympathize with her daughter, — love with her love, and rejoice with her joy; but she could do her duty by her, and according to her lights she endeavoured so to do.

But now again all was turned and changed and altered. Owen of Hap House was once more Owen of Hap House only, but still in her eyes heroic, as it behoved a man to be. He would not creep about the country with moaning voice and melancholy eyes, with draggled dress and outward signs of wretchedness. He might be wretched, but he would still be manly. Could it be possible that to her should yet be given the privilege of soothing that noble, unbending wretchedness? By no means possible, poor, heart-laden countess; thy years are all against thee. Girls whose mouths will water unduly for the flesh-pots of Egypt must in after life undergo such penalties as these. Art thou not a countess?

But not so did she answer herself. Might it not be possible? Ah, might it not be possible? And as the question was even then being asked, perhaps for the ten thousandth time, Owen Fitzgerald stood before her. She had not yet seen him since the new news had gone abroad, and had hardly yet conceived how it might be possible that she should do so. But now as she thought of him there he was. They two were together, — alone

together; and the door by which he had entered had closed upon him before she was aware of his presence.

"Owen Fitzgerald!" she said, starting up and giving him both her hands. This she did, not of judgment, nor yet from passion, but of impulse. She had been thinking of him with such kindly thoughts, and now he was there it became natural that her greeting should be kindly. It was more so than it had ever been to any but her son since the wrinkled, gloating earl had come and fetched her.

"Yes, Owen Fitzgerald," said he, taking the two hands that were offered to him, and holding them awhile; not pressing them as a man who loved her, who could have loved her, would have done. "After all that has gone and passed between us, Lady Desmond, I cannot leave the country without saying one word of farewell to you."

"Leave the country!" she exclaimed. "And where are you going?"

As she looked into his face with her hands still in his, — for she did not on the moment withdraw them, she felt that he had never before looked so noble, so handsome, so grand. Leave the country! ah, yes; and why should not she leave it also? What was there to bind her to those odious walls in which she had been immolated during the best half of her life?

"Where are you going?" she asked, looking almost wildly up at him.

"Somewhere very far a-field, Lady Desmond," he said; and then the hands dropped from him. "You will understand at any rate that Hap House will not be a fitting residence for me."

"I hate the whole country," said she, "the whole

place hereabouts. I have never been happy here. Happy! I have never been other than unhappy. I have been wretched. What would I not give to leave it also?"

"To you it cannot be intolerable as it will be to me. You have known so thoroughly where all my hopes were garnered, that I need not tell you why I must go from Hap House. I think that I have been wronged, but I do not desire that others should think so. And as for you and me, Lady Desmond, though we have been enemies, we have been friends also."

"Enemies!" said she, "I hope not." And she spoke so softly, so unlike her usual self, in the tones so suited to a loving, clinging woman, that though he did not understand it, he was startled at her tenderness. "I have never felt that you were my enemy, Mr. Fitzgerald; and certainly I never was an enemy to you."

"Well; we were opposed to each other. I thought that you were robbing me of all I valued in life; and you, you thought —"

"I thought that Clara's happiness demanded rank and wealth and position. There; I tell you my sins fairly. You may say that I was mercenary if you will, — mercenary for her. I thought that I knew what would be needful for her. Can you be angry with a mother for that?"

"She had given me a promise! But never mind. It is all over now. I did not come to upbraid you, but to tell you that I now know how it must be, and that I am going."

"Had you won her, Owen," said the countess, looking intently into his face, "had you won her, she would not have made you happy."

"As to that it was for me to judge — for me and her. I thought it would, and was willing to peril all in the trial. And so was she — willing at one time. But never mind; it is useless to talk of that."

"Quite useless now."

"I did think — when it was as they said in my power to give him back his own, — I did think; — but no, it would have been mean to look for payment. It is all over, and I will say nothing further; not a word. I am not a girl to harp on such a thing day after day, and to grow sick with love. I shall be better away. And therefore I am going, and I have now come to say good-bye, because we were friends in old days, Lady Desmond."

Friends in old days! They were old days to him, but they were no more than the other day to her. It was as yet hardly more than two years since she had first known him, and yet he looked on the acquaintance as one that had run out its time and required to be ended. She would so fain have been able to think that the beginning only had as yet come to them. But there he was, anxious to bid her adieu, and what was she to say to him?

"Yes, we were friends. You have been my only friend here I think. You will hardly believe with how much true friendship I have thought of you when the feud between us — if it was a feud — was at the strongest. Owen Fitzgerald, I have loved you through it all."

Loved him? She was so handsome as she spoke, so womanly, so graceful, there was still about her so much of the charm of beauty, that he could hardly take the word when coming from her mouth as applicable to or-

dinary friendship. And yet he did so take it. They had all loved each other — as friends should love — and now that he was going she had chosen to say as much. He felt the blood tingle his cheek at the sound of her words; but he was not vain enough to take it in its usual sense. “Then we will part as friends,” said he — tamely enough.

“Yes, we will part,” she said. And as she spoke the blood mantled deep on her neck and cheek and forehead, and a spirit came out of her eye, such as never had shone there before in his presence. “Yes, we will part,” and she took up his right hand, and held it closely, pressed between both her own. “And as we must part I will tell you all. Owen Fitzgerald, I have loved you with all my heart, — with all the love that a woman has to give. I have loved you, and have never loved any other. Stop, stop,” for he was going to interrupt her. “You shall hear me now to the last, — and for the last time. I have loved you with such love — such love as you perhaps felt for her, but as she will never feel. But you shall not say, nay you shall not think that I have been selfish. I would have kept you from her when you were poor as you are now, — not because I loved you. No; you will never think that of me. And when I thought that you were rich, and the head of your family, I did all that I could to bring her back for you. Did I not, Owen?”

“Yes, I think you did,” he muttered between his teeth, hardly knowing how to speak.

“Indeed, indeed I did so. Others may say that I was selfish for my child, but you shall not think that I was selfish for myself. I sent for Patrick, and bade him go to you. I strove as mothers do strive for their

children. I taught myself, — I strove to teach myself to forget that I had loved you. I swore on my knees that I would love you only as my son, — as my dear, dear son. Nay, Owen, I did; on my knees before my God.”

He turned away from her to rub the tears from his eyes, and in doing so he dragged his hand away from her. But she followed him, and again took it. “You will hear me to the end now,” she said; “will you not? you will not begrudge me that? And then came these other tidings, and all that scheme was dashed to the ground. It was better so, Owen; you would not have been happy with the property —”

“I should never have taken it.”

“And she, she would have clung closer to him as a poor man than ever she had done when he was rich. She is her mother’s daughter there. And then — then — But I need not tell you more. You will know it all now. If you had become rich, I would have ceased to love you; but I shall never cease now that you are again poor, — now that you are Owen of Hap House again, as you sent us word yourself that day.”

And then she ceased, and bending down her head bathed his hand with her tears. Had any one asked him that morning, he would have said that it was impossible that the Countess of Desmond should weep. And now tears were streaming from her eyes as though she were a broken-hearted girl. And so she was. Her girlhood had been postponed and marred, — not destroyed and made away with, by the wrinkled earl with the gloating eyes.

She had said all now, and she stood there, still holding his hand in hers, but with her head turned

from him. It was his turn to speak now, and how was he to answer her. I know how most men would have answered; — by the pressure of an arm, by a warm kiss, by a promise of love, and by a feeling that such love was possible. And then most men would have gone home, leaving the woman triumphant, and have repented bitterly as they sat moody over their own fires, with their wine-bottles before them. But it was not so with Owen Fitzgerald. His heart was to him a reality. He had loved with all his power and strength, with all the vigour of his soul, — having chosen to love. But he would not now be enticed by pity into a bastard feeling, which would die away when the tenderness of the moment was no longer present to his eye and touch. His love for Clara had been such that he could not even say that he loved another.

“Dear Lady Desmond,” he began.

“Ah, Owen; we are to part now, part for ever,” she said; “speak to me once in your life as though we were equal friends. Cannot you forget for one minute that I am Countess of Desmond?”

Mary, Countess of Desmond; such was her name and title. But so little familiar had he been with the name by which he had never heard her called, that in his confusion he could not remember it. And had he done so, he could not have brought himself to use it. “Yes,” he said; “we must part. It is impossible for me to remain here.”

“Doubly impossible now,” she replied, half reproaching him.

“Yes; doubly impossible now. Is it not better that the truth should be spoken?”

“Oh, yes. I have spoken it — too plainly.”

"And so will I speak it plainly. We cannot control our own hearts, Lady Desmond. It is, as you say, doubly impossible now. All the love I have had to give she has had, — and has. Such being so, why should I stay here? or could you wish that I should do so?"

"I do not wish it." That was true enough. The wish would have been to wander away with him.

"I must go, and shall start at once. My very things are packed for my going. I will not be here to have the sound of their marriage bells jangling in my ears. I will not be pointed at as the man who has been duped on every side."

"Ah me, that I was a man too, — that I could go away and make for myself a life!"

"You have Desmond with you."

"No, no. He will go too; of course he will go. He will go, and I shall be utterly alone. What a fool I am, — what an ass, that by this time I have not learned to bear it!"

"They will always be near you at Castle Richmond."

"Ah, Owen, how little you understand! Have we been friends while we lived under the same roof? And now that she is there, do you think that she will heed me? I tell you that you do not know her. She is excellent, good, devoted; but cold as ice. She will live among the poor, and grace his table; and he will have all that he wants. In twelve months, Owen, she would have turned your heart to a stone."

"It is that already I think," said he. "At any

rate, it will be so to all others. Good-bye, Lady Desmond."

"Good-bye, Owen; and God bless you. My secret will be safe with you."

"Safe! yes, it will be safe." And then, as she put her cheek up to him, he kissed it and left her.

He had been very stern. She had laid bare to him her whole heart, and he had answered her love by never a word. He had made no reply in any shape, — given her no thanks for her heart's treasure. He had responded to her affection by no tenderness. He had not even said that this might have been so, had that other not have come to pass. By no word had he alluded to her confession, — but had regarded her delusion as monstrous, a thing of which no word was to be spoken.

So at least said the countess to herself, sitting there all alone where he had left her. "He regards me as old and worn. In his eyes I am wrinkled and ugly." 'Twas thus that her thoughts expressed themselves; and then she walked across the room towards the mirror, but when there she could not look in it: she turned her back upon it without a glance, and returned to her seat by the window. What mattered it now? It was her doom to live there alone for the term of life with which it might still please God to afflict her.

And then looking out from the window her eyes fell upon Owen as he rode slowly down across the park. His horse was walking very slowly, and it seemed as though he himself were unconscious of the pace. As long as he remained in sight she did not take her eyes from his figure, gazing at him painfully

as he grew dimmer and more dim in the distance. Then at last he turned behind the bushes near the lodge, and she felt that she was all alone. It was the last that she ever saw of Owen Fitzgerald.

Unfortunate girl, marred in thy childhood by that wrinkled earl with the gloating eyes; or marred rather by thine own vanity! Those flesh-pots of Egypt! Are they not always thus bitter in the eating?

CHAPTER XXIII.

Conclusion.

AND now my story is told; and were it not for the fashion of the thing, this last short chapter might be spared. It shall at any rate be very short.

Were it not that I eschew the fashion of double names for a book, thinking that no amount of ingenuity in this respect will make a bad book pass muster, whereas a good book will turn out as such though no such ingenuity be displayed, I might have called this "A Tale of the Famine Year in Ireland." At the period of the year to which the story has brought us — and at which it will leave us — the famine was at its very worst. People were beginning to believe that there would never be a bit more to eat in the land, and that the time for hope and energy was gone. Land was becoming of no value, and the only thing regarded was a sufficiency of food to keep body and soul together. Under such circumstances it was difficult to hope.

But energy without hope is impossible, and therefore was there such an apathy and deadness through the country. It was not that they did not work who were most concerned to work. The amount of conscientious work then done was most praiseworthy. But it was done almost without hope of success, and done chiefly as a matter of conscience. There was a feeling, which was not often expressed but which seemed

to prevail everywhere, that ginger would not again be hot in the mouth, and that in very truth the time for cakes and ale in this world was all over. It was this feeling that made a residence in Ireland at that period so very sad.

Ah me! how little do we know what is coming to us! Irish cakes and ale were done and over for this world, we all thought. But in truth the Irish cakes were only then a-baking, and the Irish ale was being brewed. I am not sure that these good things are yet quite fit for the palates of the guest; — not as fit as a little more time will make them. The cake is still too new, — cakes often are; and the ale is not sufficiently mellowed. But of this I am sure, that the cakes and ale are there; — and the ginger, too, very hot in the mouth. Let a committee of Irish landlords say how the rents are paid now, and what amount of arrears was due through the country when the famine came among them. Rents paid to the day: that is the ginger hot in the mouth which best pleases the palate of a country gentleman.

But if one did in truth write a tale of the famine, after that it would behove the author to write a tale of the pestilence; and then another, a tale of the exodus. These three wonderful events, following each other, were the blessings coming from Omniscience and Omnipotence by which the black clouds were driven from the Irish firmament. If one, through it all could have dared to hope, and have had from the first that wisdom which has learned to acknowledge that His mercy endureth for ever! And then the same author going on with his series would give in his last set, — Ireland in her prosperity.

Of all those who did true good conscientious work at this time, none exceeded in energy our friend Herbert Fitzgerald after his return to Castle Richmond. It seemed to him as though some thank-offering were due from him for all the good things that Providence had showered upon him, and the best thank-offering that he could give was a devoted attention to the interest of the poor around him. Mr. Somers soon resigned to him the chair at those committee meetings at Berryhill and Gortnaclough, and it was acknowledged that the Castle Richmond arrangements for soup-kitchens, outdoor relief, and labour-gangs, might be taken as a model for the south of Ireland. Few other men were able to go to the work with means so ample and with hands so perfectly free. Mr. Carter even, who by this time had become cemented in a warm trilateral friendship with Father Barney and the Rev. Æneas Townsend, was obliged to own that many a young English country gentleman might take a lesson from Sir Herbert Fitzgerald in the duties peculiar to his position.

His marriage did not take place till full six months after the period to which our story has brought us. Baronets with twelve thousand a year cannot be married off the hooks, as may be done with ordinary mortals. Settlements of a grandiose nature were required, and were duly concocted. Perhaps Mr. Die had something to say to them, so that the great maxim of the law was brought into play. Perhaps also, though of this Herbert heard no word, it was thought inexpedient to hurry matters while any further inquiry was possible in that affair of the Mollett connection. Mr. Die and Mr. Prendergast were certainly going about, still draw-

ing all coverts far and near, lest their fox might not have been fairly run to his last earth. But, as I have said, no tidings as to this reached Castle Richmond. There, in Ireland, no man troubled himself further with any doubt upon the subject; and Sir Herbert took his title and received his rents, by the hands of Mr. Somers, exactly as though the Molletts, father and son, had never appeared in those parts.

It was six months before the marriage was celebrated, but during a considerable part of that time Clara remained a visitor at Castle Richmond. To Lady Fitzgerald she was now the same as a daughter, and to Aunt Letty the same as a niece. By the girls she had for months been regarded as a sister. So she remained in the house of which she was to be the mistress, learning to know their ways, and ingratiating herself with those who were to be dependent on her.

"But I had rather stay with you, mamma, if you will allow me," Clara had said to her mother when the countess was making some arrangement with her that she should return to Castle Richmond. "I shall be leaving you altogether so soon now!" And she got up close to her mother's side caressingly, and would fain have pressed into her arms and kissed her, and have talked to her of what was coming, as a daughter loves to talk to a loving mother. But Lady Desmond's heart was sore and sad and harsh, and she preferred to be alone.

"You will be better at Castle Richmond, my dear: you will be much happier there, of course. There can be no reason why you should come again into the gloom of this prison."

"But I should be with you, dearest mamma."

"It is better that you should be with the Fitzgeralds now; and as for me — I must learn to live alone. Indeed I have learned it, so you need not mind for me." Clara was rebuffed by the tone rather than the words, but she still looked up into her mother's face wistfully. "Go, my dear," said the countess — "I would sooner be alone at present." And so Clara went. It was hard upon her that even now her mother would not accept her love.

But Lady Desmond could not be cordial with her daughter. She made more than one struggle to do so, but always failed. She could, — she thought that she could, have watched her child's happiness with contentment had Clara married Owen Fitzgerald — Sir Owen, as he would then have been. But now she could only remember that Owen was lost to them both, lost through her child's fault. She did not hate Clara: nay, she would have made any sacrifice for her daughter's welfare; but she could not take her lovingly to her bosom. So she shut herself up alone, in her prison as she called it, and then looked back upon the errors of her life. It was as well for her to look back as to look forward, for what joy was there for which she could dare to hope?

In the days that were coming, however, she did relax something of her sternness. Clara was of course married from Desmond Court, and the very necessity of making some preparations for this festivity was in itself salutary. But indeed it could hardly be called a festivity, — it was so quiet and sombre. Clara had but two bridesmaids, and they were Mary and Emme-

line Fitzgerald. The young earl gave away his sister, and Aunt Letty was there, and Mr. Prendergast, who had come over about the settlements; Mr. Somers also attended, and the ceremony was performed by our old friend Mr. Townsend. Beyond these there were no guests at the wedding of Sir Herbert Fitzgerald.

The young earl was there, and at the last the wedding had been postponed a week for his coming. He had left Eton at Midsummer in order that he might travel for a couple of years with Owen Fitzgerald before he went to Oxford. It had been the lad's own request, and had been for a while refused by Owen. But Fitzgerald had at last given way to the earl's love, and they had started together for Norway.

"They want me to be home," he had said one morning to his friend.

"Ah, yes; I suppose so."

"Do you know why?" They had never spoken a word about Clara since they had left England together, and the earl now dreaded to mention her name.

"Know why!" replied Owen; "of course I do. It is to give away your sister. Go home, Desmond, my boy; when you have returned we will talk about her. I shall bear it better when I know that she is his wife."

And so it was with them. For two years Lord Desmond travelled with him, and after that Owen Fitzgerald went on upon his wanderings alone. Many a long year has run by since that, and yet he has never come back to Hap House. Men of the county Cork now talk of him as one whom they knew long since. He who took his house as a stranger is a stranger no

longer in the country, and the place that Owen left vacant has been filled. The hounds of Duhallow would not recognize his voice, nor would the steed in the stable follow gently at his heels. But there is yet one left who thinks of him, hoping that she may yet see him before she dies.

THE END.

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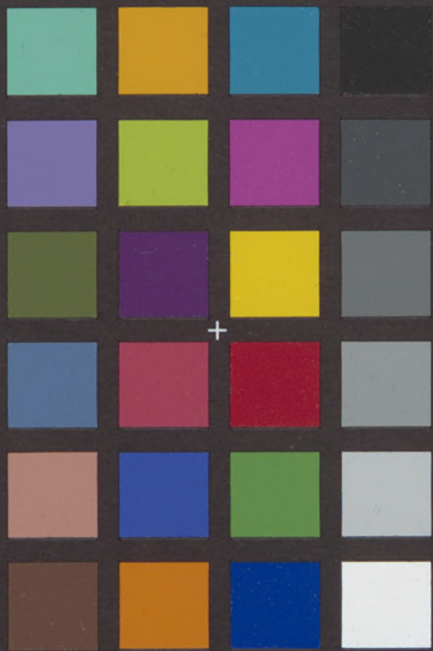
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