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CHILDREN OF THE GAEL

BY

CHARLOTTE DEASE

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CHILDREN OF THE GAEL

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BY

CHARLOTTE DEASE

"Ask for the Good Paths, where is the Old Way : walk therein, and you shall find rest."—JEREMIAS.

NEW YORK, CINCINNATI, CHICAGO
BENZIGER BROTHERS
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1911

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THESE stories have already appeared in the pages of the *Month*, *Weekly Freeman*, and *Irish Rosary*. It is owing to the courtesy of the editors of those periodicals that they are now republished in their present form.

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CHILDREN OF THE GAEL

I

THE COBBLER OF ST. RONAN'S

In one of the old quarters of the city, where the streets are narrow and winding, the pavement rough and uneven, the houses weather-beaten and showing by their stone copings and the irregularities of their doors and windows that they belong to another age, rises an interesting and little-frequented church. Within it is dark and gloomy. Its one aisle is lined with high-backed, worm-eaten old oak pews, where many generations of worshippers have sat and prayed. The hand-rests support a motley collection of church books, their soiled leaves giving evidence of long usage. No advanced ritual can ever have coloured the ceremonies carried on within these walls, judging by the plain severity of the altar-table and the

simplicity of the few religious emblems. In times gone by this church served as a last resting-place for a favoured few. Upon the floor lie two or three flat gravestones, on whose polished surfaces can be traced names not altogether unknown in Irish history, and the sculptured figure of some forgotten hero, whose tomb is destroyed and whose ashes are scattered, leans against the southern wall. A damp, musty smell pervades the interior, as though sun or air seldom penetrated. Outside, St. Ronan offers few pretensions to architectural beauty, but it looks old and eminently respectable. The houses at the east end are built close to its walls, while at the west it overlooks a large open space—once, perhaps, a green lawn, but now a well-worn gravelly surface. A wide set of shallow, slightly slanting steps leads up from the streets below to the thoroughfare above. Here the people of the locality descend or ascend, making constant use of this short cut, as the necessities of their lives take them to market or business in other parts of the town. Here smutty-faced children play merry games during the hours they can steal from school. The steps of St. Ronan's are therefore

not devoid of life by any means, and though the life may not be of an exciting nature, still the intermittent stream of passers-by brings a sense of change and bustle, so that the spot never knows solitude for long.

Within the shadow of the church wall, in a corner formed by the large stone buttress and the mouldings of the doorway, a cobbler might have been seen, day in, day out, plying his tools with energy. A low, strongly-made little stool, pressed close against the stonework, was his seat. Close to it, and also drawn against the wall, so as to be out of the range of all passers-by, was a wooden kitchen chair, from which the top rail of the back was gone, and one leg of which was shorter than the others, giving it a lop-sided appearance. This chair served as a table to support all the implements of the cobbler's trade. On the second rail he twisted his leather thongs. A bag with tools hung on one side, and on the seat were piled up pieces of leather, of different sizes and quality. The cobbler himself was a man between fifty and sixty years of age. His dark hair, somewhat long and bushy, was sparsely sprinkled with white. His eyes were grey and had the keen

look of one who is interested in his fellow-men and observes all that goes on about him. Constant bending over his work had made the man permanently round-shouldered. When he rose up he never straightened himself, but preserved always his stooped appearance. A large leather apron, of which the front formed one capacious pocket, covered his knees, and protected his clothes from the undue action of hobnailed boots. In the corner, by the cobbler's side, stood a large brown cotton umbrella. By an ingenious contrivance it was possible to fasten it to a pole attached to the little wooden seat, and thus it served as a sort of tent for shelter on bad days. Seldom, however, was it put to this use. Its owner seemed indifferent to every kind of weather—wind, rain, and sunshine were all equal, and all had left their traces on his countenance.

About nine o'clock every morning the cobbler took up his station at the corner of the church. There he worked away until the clock above him tolled out its twelve midday strokes. He then gathered up his tools, tidied the pile of leather, and left all his appliances on the wooden chair. No one ever dreamt of meddling with

those things. Even the most brazen of the street children would not have dared to carry off one of those fascinating leather thongs that hung so temptingly across the back of the chair. The cobbler and all his possessions were held sacred. Only the boots he was mending did the man take back with him. Having tied the pair together by the laces, he slung them over his shoulder, a boot hanging back and front; thus equipped, he walked down the street, and up the narrow alley leading to his home. A familiar figure he had become in the locality, and the dwellers in the street learned to regulate the hours of their day by his comings and goings. There was something so distinctive in his appearance that strangers always turned to look at him, and sometimes, even, they stopped to ask who he was. None of the inhabitants of the neighbourhood ever passed the cobbler by without a greeting, and when not pressed for time, as was often the case with them, they willingly entered into conversation.

A life spent in an open thoroughfare is not without its advantages, for it brings with it much knowledge of people and of things. The cobbler's acquaintance with the affairs of the

little world that lived in the streets round St. Ronan's was complete. He was generally the first to know of any local happening. "He can tell you all the news that's worth hearing," was the comment of the neighbours. "You'd get more information talking with him than if you read the whole of the evening paper." But with all his ready talk, his simple life lived in the sight of men, there was a mystery overshadowing Michael Carrigan that no one had ever solved. Not a person of the district could have explained it, yet nevertheless it was there—an indefinable something that was attached to the man's personality. From the oldest crone who sold apples at the street corner to the youngest and most ragged child of the tinker, they all felt it. It was this, perhaps, more than anything else that gave the cobbler his status in the locality. This it was that made the older people treat him with deference, and awed the children into never meddling with his tools. They liked him, but they felt that in some way he was not quite one of themselves. Had he lived in the country, the cobbler would no doubt have been considered a "healer," a "lucky man," whose touch could keep away

evil from babies, calves, and all young things, and whose presence in a house could bring a blessing ; a man whose request it would not be wise to refuse, and who, when he came, must always be offered of the best. In city life, however, where the point of view is matter-of-fact, and where the keener sense of the unseen is choked and overlaid by too many sordid realities, he was merely considered as just a little apart, and as one on whom no pranks can be played, but who must be treated always with a measure of respect.

And what of Michael Carrigan himself? What did he know of the mystery that seemed to enshroud him? Did he realize the certain awe in which he was held by both young and old alike? He spoke little about his own concerns, though so communicative on other matters. Not, indeed, that there seemed very much to tell. Three rooms in an old house in the alley were his home. There he had lived as long as anyone could remember him—first with his parents, and then, when they died, with his wife and two children. He had married late in life, so the latter were young. The boy already evinced a desire little short of passion for his

father's trade. He spent most of his time out of school hours in working upon the bits of leather he picked up through the house, and already he had tried to mend a pair of his mother's old brogues.

"He'll take your place at St. Ronan's one day," his wife said to the cobbler.

"Maybe he will, and a right thing, too; for his father and his grandfather will have been there before him."

Michael Carrigan had succeeded to his father, who had followed after his father again. Three generations of Carrigans, therefore, had occupied the corner of St. Ronan's, and had plied their awls on the boots of their neighbours. Once the cobbler had been asked why it was he had chosen this thoroughfare by the church as the place where he carried on his trade. The questioner was a stranger who stopped one day to speak with him, and his sympathetic and tactful manner had drawn from the man an explanation of that which he had never thought to have told. During twenty years the cobbler had been working in this spot, and had never missed a single day except once, when suffering from a bad attack of

influenza. It had never struck him as possible to set up his quarters elsewhere : a little shop in the street might in some ways have been more convenient, but he could not have done his work in it.

"There does be something that drives me out always," he said. "I couldn't stay within. I must be where I can see the people coming and going. I never like the feel of a roof over my head. It was just the same with my father. He worked here twenty years, cobbling, cobbling always ; and my grandfather—I can just remember him, when I was a little gossoon, sitting on this very seat. He had a long white beard, and he used to wear a grey frieze coat. Well, every morning he used to be down the street, though he was bent nearly double with age and rheumatics, and he had to lean all his weight on an old blackthorn. Here he'd come, with the boots under his arm, and work the livelong day. It was only when he fell ill that he gave up coming. Then he called my father to him, and said he'd have to take his place at St. Ronan's. But my father, who'd already learnt the trade, worked for a shoemaker in another part of the town, and he didn't alto-

gether care to come and settle in the church corner. He said nothing at the time, for he didn't like to cross the old man, and he dying; but he had no intention of changing his place, for all that. My grandfather died, and my father buried him. Then he came to take up the tools that were left here. He found an old pair of brogues on this chair, and thought to mend them first; and somehow the next day he came again, and the day after that. When he didn't come, he was that uneasy in his mind he could do no work. There was something on him driving, driving, that gave him rest in no place. So back at last he came to this corner, and took up the work of the old man. He told me all this himself at the time he was dying, and he said 'twould be better for me to come here at once than be striving to go against what had to be. I asked him then if he could tell the reason of it all. He said he could not, but he thought his own father knew, and 'twas that made him so silent and sad-like; for a gay word never crossed his lips, and the last years of his life he scarcely spoke at all but to tell the price of the job he had made on a pair of boots. After that I thought it best to

obey my father's words, and so I took up his place at this corner. If ever I try to keep away one day, I feel the driving on me just the same way my father told me of, and I can get no peace or rest till I am back again on this little seat. I do be on the look out, too, always for someone who is to pass this way. Who or what he is I don't know, but the feeling is so strong I can't put it from me. My father was expecting always just the same, but the one he was waiting for never came to him. He may never come to me either, though I look out for him every day. After I am dead and gone, maybe he'll come to my son. I often wonder what it all means, and I'd like to know, but it isn't likely I ever will."

So Michael Carrigan continued his boot-mending day by day, year in, year out, like his fathers before him, driven always by an unexplainable force that would not be gainsaid, and ever watching for the unknown person that some time or other would surely ascend the stairway by St. Ronan's Church.

One spring morning, when the cobbler, as usual, was at work in his corner, a message, brought by a neighbour's child, came from his

wife, bidding him to hurry home at once, as he was wanted. It was only eleven o'clock, and he never went back before twelve; only something of importance could require this earlier return. Carrigan, who by long usage had grown wedded to his own hours, felt annoyed at this sudden call. He slowly gathered up his tools, arranged the leather cuttings, and, with a well-patched pair of old brogues balanced over his left shoulder, he ascended the four remaining steps of the stairway and walked down the street for home. At the house his wife met him in the doorway.

"A boy has come with a message, and he would not be satisfied till I sent for you. He says he can speak with no one but yourself."

Preceding her husband into the kitchen, she announced his arrival. A boy, whose homespun tweed suit and fresh sunburnt complexion proclaimed him to be a country lad, rose up from a chair by the grate.

"I was told to find the house of Michael Carrigan, a cobbler who works near St. Ronan's Church, and give him this letter into his own hands, and no one else was I to let have it;" and he handed an envelope much soiled and crushed.

Carrigan took the letter, and, walking to the door, tore it open and drew out a sheet of lined paper, evidently a page from a copybook. The writing was bad and blotted, and seemed to have been penned with difficulty. The words were few, and the cobbler spelt them out slowly to himself, not at first taking in their sense:

"An old acquaintance of your family is dying, and he has something to tell you before he goes. Don't fail to come at once. The boy will show you the way."

Carrigan turned back into the kitchen. The boy had taken up his hat, as if wishing to start on the instant.

"Who bid you come?" asked the cobbler.

"My grandfather. He told me to make no delay, and to bring you back with me as soon as I could."

"Where does he live?"

"In the Wicklow Hills. We'll get there to-night if we make no delay."

"What is his name?"

"Phelim Conor."

The name told nothing. Carrigan stood silent a moment or two, thinking, then he looked up.

"I'll come with you now," he said; and, turning to his wife, he added: "Don't expect me back till you see me here again."

"Glory be, Michael! But you're never going off like that on the word of a strange boy?"

"Hold your whist, woman, and let me be!" and, taking up a stick that stood in the corner of the kitchen by the dresser, Carrigan followed the stranger out of the door. The boy had refused all offer of refreshment, and had answered to Mrs. Carrigan's pressing:

"The old man can't last long, and I was bid to make no delay."

The two walked silently side by side along the streets. The cobbler did not question the lad about the sender of the message; all he asked was how far it was they had to go, and how long it would take them. On the outskirts of the city they were overtaken by a baker's cart. The driver, who was known to Carrigan, gave them a lift. Further on they met a dray of empty bottles, and were again invited to accept a seat. Thus they made their journey far out into the country, now walking quickly over the roads, and now being driven by some friendly passer-by. It was

eight o'clock in the evening when they reached a small village in the Wicklow Hills. They were both weary, and Carrigan, anxious to reach their destination, would not ask his companion were they near, fearing to be told there was a long road still. The boy, however, as if reading his thought, said :

"We have only a small piece of road to go now—just up this bohereen here to the left."

They turned into the narrow moonlit lane, and walked till they came to an open gate. A stream of light from the upper half of the farmhouse door fell across the yard. As their footsteps echoed on the flagstones the light was darkened by a woman's figure, and a voice called out :

"Is that yourself, Patrick ?"

"It is."

"Then thanks be to God !"

The wayfarers entered the kitchen. A turf fire burnt on the hearth, and two lighted dip candles in pewter holders stood on the dresser. Standing by the door was the woman who had addressed the boy. She held her hand out to the cobbler.

"Welcome to you, Michael Carrigan," she said.

At the side of the hearth farthest from the door, propped up with pillows in a wooden armchair, sat a very old man. His white hair fell upon his shoulders, and he wore a long beard. It was plain that the hand of Death was already upon him, for his face was ashen, the only sign of life being the moving eyes beneath their bushy brows. At the sound of the footsteps and voices he extended his hands to the arms of the chair, and seemed to be trying, with their support, to turn himself so as to face the door; but the strength failed him, and his hands dropped back into his lap.

"Has he come?" The eager, quavering tones came as a surprise from that weak form.

"He is here," answered the woman; and, drawing up a stool to the armchair, she pushed Carrigan towards it.

"Leave us," said the old man, pointing with a trembling hand towards the door.

The woman and the boy went out, and the cobbler found himself alone with the stranger. The dying man bent his eyes upon him.

"I've but a few days more at most," he said,

" so I sent for you. I couldn't die easy without. Don't say a word, but listen, for it's little strength I have left to tell the story, and not one in the world knows it but myself. My father told it to me. It happened long, long ago, and he a young man. There was great work in Ireland then—young heroes rising up to save their country, and the greatest of them all was Robert Emmet. He made a grand plan to gather an army, and they were to fight. There were Wicklow men and there were Kildare men, and they were all to meet on the day Emmet would appoint. Well, Dwyer was the hero of the Wicklow men, a grand fellow, without any fear on him, and he was waiting to get the word from Emmet to bring his men up. He knew it was near the time, but the order was not to stir a foot till the message came. Everyone knows as how Dwyer didn't get the message, and how Emmet failed, and the whole band was taken up. 'Tis a sore story. But no one knows how it happened—no one, leastways, but myself, in the whole world now. The messenger Robert Emmet sent was a cousin of my family, and he came riding down from Dublin. His orders

were to go to the house of a blacksmith up in the hills, and there get a change of horses. It had all been settled with the smith. He got down there in the evening. The smith was waiting for him, and bid him rest a while, for he said the horse he had would carry him over the ground like a bird. So the man waited. Then the horse was brought round, and the blacksmith gave him all particulars as to the way he was to go to find Dwyer in the hills. Well, he hadn't gone three miles when the horse went dead lame, and nothing in the world would make him go beyond a foot pace. A fine rain came on, and the night was dark, and over the hills the messenger wandered till dawn. Then he found he was astray altogether, and miles from the place he wanted to get to, and by the order Dwyer should have been in Dublin then. It was to the house of my father the messenger came at last, his own first cousin, and he told him all that had happened. Then they found that 'twas owing to the bad shoeing that the horse went lame, and the way he was told to go was all wrong. So the news came of the failure in Dublin, and every man who was on Emmet's side had to keep quiet for fear

of his life. It was a little while after that my father went with the other man to the blacksmith who had betrayed him, and my father said he cursed him to the third generation, and he put a *geasa* on him and on his children, that they were to work without a roof over their head, that they were to mend the brogues of poor men and women, until the day came when one of them would mend the boots of the hero who was to come and bring a new life into Ireland."

The old man stopped speaking. Carrigan cleared his throat. The moisture was standing in heavy beads upon his forehead.

"And what was the smith's name?" he asked huskily.

"Michael Carrigan, your great-grandfather. I've told you all now, and I'm tired; call the woman."

Half dazed, the cobbler rose, and, walking to the door, called out into the night. The woman and the boy returned. Old Phelim had sunk back against the pillows, and did not speak any more. With the telling of the story his remaining strength seemed to have gone. The woman gently passed a handkerchief over his

face and moistened his lips with a few drops from a spoon; then she turned to their visitor, begging of him to accept the hospitality of the house for the night. Carrigan threw himself down on the sacks and pillows made for him into a bed in the corner of the kitchen. He could not sleep. First he watched the two candles as they flickered out their last flames on the dresser, and then the fitful shadows cast by the burning sods in the hearth. From the corner where he sat came the sound of the irregular, laboured breathing of the old man. At the first streaks of dawn the cobbler rose from his bed. The house was silent: no one was yet awake. He gently raised the latch of the door and went out into the keen air of early morning. Down the lane he walked, his feet stumbling as though he had suddenly grown old. Then he hurried through the village, fearing to see people about, for he felt as if he could not yet meet the eyes of any man. So he knew at last. The mystery was explained. His race was cursed. The blood of one who had betrayed ran in his reins. It was the *geasa* that drove him out—him and his fathers before him. His grandfather must have known, for

he was the smith's son. It was that knowledge that made him old before his time—old and sad and silent. Now he was to bear the same burden that had come to him with the telling of the story. Would the expected hero come his way? he wondered. This hope was the only light on his dark horizon.

It was late when the cobbler reached his home, for he felt too crushed and weary to hurry on his pace. To his wife's questionings he answered little, and she, knowing of old how uncommunicative he could sometimes be, left him alone. Michael Carrigan went back to his corner at St. Ronan's. Even the most unobservant of the passers-by could not have failed to notice the change in him. As the weeks went by it became a subject of speculation in the neighbourhood. "Whatever could it be that has come over Michael Carrigan?" The weeks lengthened into months, the months into years, and wearily day by day the cobbler plied his tools. He was growing more bent, and had become grey and old.

It was April, and even into the city had come the feeling of growing life. Sparrows twittered on the eaves of houses bulbs in

window-boxes pushed up their green heads, and daisies showed themselves in out-of-the-way corners between cobble-stones. The hope of spring had seized on everything; the children screamed louder at their games, and the women even seemed to walk with lighter steps. The clock of St. Ronan's Church was striking the hour of twelve. The worker in the corner by the door prepared to return home for his midday meal. Just as he had risen and had gathered up his boots, something seemed to catch his attention, and he turned to look down the steps. No one was to be seen. The cobbler stood still a minute, then, laying the boot back on the chair, he drew the stool forward, and sat down on it where he could face the rising stairway. For a space he watched the empty street below. Then he saw someone appear at the farther end. It was a young man, and he walked quickly. The cobbler felt his eyes held by the approaching figure, and as he watched the houses, the street, the whole surroundings sank into dimness, leaving only the coming stranger. Lightly he mounted the steps, then at the church door stopped.

"Se do bheatha."

The words were foreign to Carrigan's ears. He looked puzzled. The young man laughed.

"I always begin in Gaelic, and it's wonderful how many understand." His voice was low and very musical.

"Can you put two stitches in this boot? I am going into the country, and I never noticed till I started that I had put on an old pair."

He sat down on the chair and quickly unfastened the laces. While he did so the cobbler looked into his face. He saw a fresh, clear complexion, fine-drawn features, a laughing mouth that displayed even, shining teeth, and eyes of a wonderful blue. There his gaze remained, for it was held by the expression of those mysterious eyes.

"Here is the boot."

Mechanically the cobbler took it into his hands and deftly did the needful work. Then the stranger drew the boot on again, paid the price, and walked away.

Carrigan's eyes followed him. He noted the free, graceful movements; the pose of the head; the light, quick steps; then he turned back, collected his tools and put them into a bag, gathered the pieces of leather and the

long thongs, and strung together the pair of brogues. Nothing was left but the broken chair, the little seat, the old umbrella. On these the man's gaze fell, and he stood looking at them as one dazed, till suddenly the church clock struck the quarter-past twelve. Roused, he turned away and hurried down the street, and it seemed to him as though a great burden had been lifted from his shoulders. As he went, a far-away voice sounded in his ears: "After many years of woe and sorrow, a great light will arise in Ireland."

Though he knew it not, these words had been spoken long ago by St. Patrick.

II

THE INNOCENT

"DON'T mind him, your honour; he's only an Innocent," cried Mrs. Kearney, as she hurried down her garden patch and out through the gate on to the road.

"Well, he's fierce for an Innocent, and he's very strong," and before the woman's distressed face was held up a butterfly-net all torn and broken. "I don't know why he should have attacked me. It is not safe to let such a boy wander at will. I was not aware, Mrs. Kearney, you had a son like that."

"He's not my son, sir, but my nephew—the child of my dead sister: the Lord rest her soul! He does be quiet and tractable always, though he rambles at times. What ailed you at all, Conn, to behave so to the Colonel? Have you no sense or no manners to be disgracing us all and annoying the gentleman?"

The boy thus addressed pressed his hands together, and with his eyes fixed on the ground said nothing audible, but he seemed to be mumbling to himself.

"Speak out, can't you!" exclaimed Colonel Milton, annoyance betraying itself in his voice. "Why did you fly at me just now and break my net?"

Conn raised his head and lifted his eyes slowly to his interrogator's face.

"It was the butterfly. I couldn't let you catch it and kill it."

"And why shouldn't I catch it and kill it? Have you never killed one, or a fly, or a mouse?"

"I'd never kill one. Flies and mice are different; it doesn't matter about them. But the butterflies—they mustn't be touched by anybody."

"And why not? Where is the difference between a fly and a butterfly?"

The boy's eyes dropped, and he appeared to be mumbling to himself again. Then he suddenly looked up, and with a visible effort said slowly:

"Because they're souls."

"Because they are what?" asked Colonel Milton.

"Because they're souls," reiterated Conn, coming a step nearer and fixing his great eyes on the Colonel's face. "Didn't you know that? The souls of the dead waiting to be let into Purgatory. Some have to wait a long while, more a shorter while, according to the way they've lived. The soul of a woman is a yellow butterfly; a man's soul is a brown one; a priest's soul has purple spots on it; and the soul of a little child does be white. That was the soul of a man, and if you'd killed it"—and the boy's voice quivered with emotion—"you'd have kept him back from Purgatory, and so from Heaven."

The boy's long speech, his earnest tones, and the curious haunting expression of his eyes, half awed the naturalist for the moment. Were all the hundreds of butterflies he had collected throughout the world souls waiting for the Purgatorial gates to open, and had he thus delayed their admittance? Then the absurdity of the idea struck him, and he laughed aloud.

"I never heard such nonsense!" he exclaimed.

The boy shrank back into himself at these sceptical words, and the colour slowly left his face.

"He does have strange fancies, sir," interposed Mrs. Kearney. "Don't you take any heed of them."

"Do you believe all those things?" asked the Colonel, turning to the woman.

"Sure, your honour, they're but the notions of one of his sort, poor lad: God help him! And you'll forgive him, sir, I'm sure; he's that sorry now for the way he has behaved."

But Colonel Milton had his doubts as to the reality of Conn's sorrow when he looked at his impassive face.

"Don't worry about it any more, Mrs. Kearney. It is unfortunate that this net should have been my new one. However, it cannot be helped. But keep an eye on that boy, I'd advise you. He may do worse mischief another time and get you into trouble;" and, gathering up the scattered fragments of the butterfly-net, Colonel Milton walked away down the road.

Mrs. Kearney turned to Conn.

"I wish you'd mind yourself," she said. "It's a nice thing to behave like that, Conn;

and, indeed, I wonder he forgave you so easy." Then, laying her hand on the boy's shoulder and lowering her voice, she said gently : "Conn astore, it's best to leave people alone and let them go their own way, for it's the best way to their thinking, and they won't heed yours."

Conn detached himself from her.

"I couldn't let him do that. They'd have come to me in the night if I had." Then, turning to the road, he walked off.

Mrs. Kearney followed with her eyes the lad as he crossed the road, entered the field beyond, and went up the hillside between the whin-bushes and the clumps of bracken—a solitary, lonesome figure, his hands thrust deep into his pockets, his head bent.

"Maybe, after all," she said to herself, "it's the likes of him that's nearer to the real knowledge, that understand what is really about us in the world, and not the Colonel Miltons, with their great sense and book-learning."

She remembered the day she had first seen Conn, a thin, pale boy, his dark eyes fixed on his dying mother's face. Now he was all that remained to her, the one legacy of that dead

sister whom she had loved in her youth. Conn's mother was younger than Mrs. Kearney by several years. She was the beauty of the parish in which she lived, and on Sundays the eyes of the young men followed her admiringly as she walked up the church aisle. But she was not easy to please, and she was wilful. She refused many good offers, and then one day ran off with a poor travelling scholar. Her family heard nothing of her for years. At last, when they had lost all hope of seeing her again, there came a message to Mrs. Kearney, begging her to go to her. She went at once, and found her sister dying. During the few conversations the two women had together the elder was able to gather but little information regarding the younger's life. Yes, she had been happy, the dying woman said; she did not regret the choice she had made, and the travelling scholar had made a good husband. Was she trying to deceive her sister and shield his memory? Mrs. Kearney could not believe the marriage had been a success; or perhaps their ideas on what constitutes a happy marriage were not the same. At any rate, the dying woman seemed very worn, and poor, and desolate. However,

he was dead now, and all the sister had was the boy. Conn sat in a corner of the room and never spoke. When his mother was dead he remained by her side, then followed her coffin to the graveyard, and afterwards went quietly away with his aunt to his new home.

It was not long before Mrs. Kearney discovered that her nephew was unlike other children. He was quiet and docile, and was friendly with his cousins, but he had curious solitary ways of his own. He never cared to run races, to play marbles, or other games; but he liked to wander by himself through the woods and fields, and he knew the name of every flower and plant that grew in the bog, and the note of every bird that flew across the sky. Sometimes he sat for hours together by the hearth, quite unconscious of all that went on around him, his eyes gazing into the glowing turf.

"What do you be thinking, Conn, there all by yourself?" his aunt asked him once. The boy turned round slowly towards her, as if he found it difficult to bring his thoughts back from the regions to where they had strayed.

"I do be thinking of many things," he said.

"I see them in the fire—the people who were here long ago. But it's mostly through the fields or on the bog I meet with them, when the wind is in the west—the souls of the dead. Some do be lamenting and crying, and their voices are carried a long way on the wind, and others do be content-like. Then whispers come to my ears, and tell me many things; and more times it's the roar of the sea."

"But you couldn't hear the roar of the sea from this, Conn: it's six miles away!"

"It may be, but that's no matter. It comes all the same, and calls to me. I must go with it some time—I must go."

At first the neighbours condoled with Mrs. Kearney on the misfortune of her having the care of such a boy, one so curious, so unlike other children, and who was not even her own child. It would be better to send him to some institution than to keep him thus in her home, many of them suggested. This idea, however, Mrs. Kearney scouted indignantly.

"He's my own flesh and blood, my sister's child. Isn't that near enough? And sure you know an Innocent like that always brings a blessing with him; though, indeed, he can

bring a curse too to those who illtreat him."

So she took the strange boy to her heart, and if she ever felt anxious as to what might happen to him in the future, she never showed it.

"After all, God does take special care of them always," she reassured herself.

When Conn first came to his new home he was sent with the other children to attend the neighbouring school. In spite of every effort of the schoolmaster, he learned little or nothing. His sums were always wrong, his home exercises never done, and his mind seemed out of touch with the lesson when he was asked a question. Punishments and coaxings alike proved useless: the boy could not or would not be taught. And yet he did not seem altogether stupid, for he possessed a curious knowledge of his own. At last it was decided to let him be, to give the child his liberty to wander where he would, instead of forcing him to remain for many hours within the walls of the schoolhouse. So Conn grew up into a tall, slender lad, white-faced, dark-eyed, silent, preferring his own society to that of others, and more than content with the companionship he

found in all the life of Nature about him. Sometimes he spoke to the other children of his strange fancies. His cousin Bridget, who was nearly of the same age, was usually his confidante. She was the only companion Conn ever took with him in his rambles through the country-side, and it was but seldom that he asked even her to come.

"It's in the springtime they wake up again, after their long sleep—the souls of the flowers. And how pleased they do be to leave the cold, dark earth, and to find themselves out in the bright sunshine! Look at them, Bridget! How they dance for joy in the breeze!" And Conn pointed to a bank of primroses on the side of the road that the two children were passing.

"What are you saying at all, Conn? Sure there do be no souls in anything, only in living human beings," exclaimed Bridget, who, fresh from her Catechism class, felt this must be rank heresy.

"There's a soul in everything that lives, a kind of spirit. It isn't a soul the same kind as yours or mine, and it doesn't go to Heaven; but it's there, for all that. They can tell you many things, the spirits of the trees and plants. That

crooked oak by the millstream has the queerest spirit, so wise and so knowledgeable, and seen so much. Then, there's the blackthorn growing on the rath; but you mustn't break off the smallest twig, or ill-luck will come on you. In the river, too, there is a wild spirit. It'll whisper a word in your ear, and be off again afore you've hardly time to know it's come. But the great spirit is the spirit of the sea. You have to listen to the others first, or you'll never hear it. Whoever the sea calls should go always."

"Whatever do you mean, Conn? Go where?" asked Bridget, who could not understand this wild talk, yet was fascinated by it, half believing, half disbelieving, as a child who listens to a fairy-tale.

"Over the waves," said Conn. "It isn't to everyone the call comes; and there be some who don't heed it. They turn from the voices of the spring, and won't listen to the whisper that comes to their ear, or care to seek after the knowledge that's found in living things and doesn't be in books. Then their heart gets hard and their ears close, so that they will never understand. There are many such. I know

them always by the look in their face. There are others, too, that have heard the voices and have listened and have gathered a little of the old knowledge that has come their way. And there do be more, again, who might be listening for ever, but could never hear anything."

"And which am I, Conn?" asked the girl.

"You might hear a little," said Conn indifferently, "but you'll never hear much. It's strange to see the people passing by the knowledge that is about them, and they thinking themselves so wise. There's many a thing they might learn if they took the heed! But they like their own kind of knowledge best, just what's on the outside of things. They won't stop to listen to the song of Nature—the great song that's made up of the notes of many things: of the music of the streams, the sigh of the breeze, the rustling of the reeds in the bog, the creaking of the branches in a storm. It's all part of one tune—the tune of knowledge—and till you know it you can't understand."

These strange conversations, scraps of which she or the other children sometimes overheard, caused Mrs. Kearney to wonder greatly. Where had the boy picked up such curious

ideas? Were they remembrances of the stories that perhaps his scholar father had taught him long ago? Did he imagine them all himself, or had he really the gift of seeing beyond what other people saw? There was no one who could explain to her the riddle of Conn's mind.

As the boy grew older he seemed to become more solitary. Every day and all day long he wandered over the bog or among the woods and fields. Neither rain nor storm ever kept him in. Indeed, when the wind came wild and stormy from the west, he was seized with a passion to be out, and would not return home even for his meals. A dry crust of bread in his pocket, with a drink of water from a stream, sufficed him for the day. Remonstrances could not prevail with him, and once or twice he had become almost violent when someone had tried to induce him to stay at home.

It was a week after Conn's encounter with Colonel Milton. Mrs. Kearney, who had been in to the market of the neighbouring town, had found on her return home late in the afternoon the house door closed, the key turned on the outside, and no one about. Making her way into the kitchen, she saw that the fire had gone

out. Annoyed at this negligence on the part of her daughters, she busied herself with the twigs and bits of turf, striving to coax them into a blaze. Whilst thus engaged she heard a stifled moan from the corner near the settle bed. She walked over and saw a heap of something lying on the floor.

"What is this at all?" she exclaimed, stretching her two arms down and trying to draw up the form they caught. After a certain effort she succeeded, and Conn stood before her. The boy's face was white; his great dark eyes shone as though they reflected some brilliant light; beads of perspiration hung upon his forehead; and his hair lay damp and straight over his temples.

"Conn, what is it?" asked his aunt, much shocked at the boy's appearance.

"It's come! it's come!" he cried, "and I wanted to go, but they held me back and shut the door."

"What's come, and where did you want to go?"

"I was hearing it last night and all through the day. Then it got louder and louder, as if the waves were all about me. They were

roaring in my ear as they do when dashing up against the rocky cliffs, the great sea of the West, and they were calling, calling on me to come. I thought it would be soon, for the *down* wind was blowing this while back, the wind that brings the message. Bridget fetched me in to dinner, and I went; but not a bit or a sup would pass my lips, and the roar in my ears was that loud I couldn't hear their talk, so I got up and said I was going to the seashore. Then they took hold of me, and I hit out and I struggled with them, but too many of them were against me. Then they threw me down and ran out and locked the door on me."

The boy sank back on the oak lid of the settle, silent again now his story was told.

"Sure, alanna machree! What notions you take! It's a headache you have, Conn, and it's the buzzing in your ears you think is the roaring of the sea. Come now, I'll wet you a cup of tea. They should not have left you alone by yourself like that, anyway."

The kettle was soon boiling on the fire, but when the tea was made Conn absolutely refused to take any. Holding his hands up against his face, he sat swinging himself to and fro on the

settle and muttering words that seemed to have no meaning. For the first time since he had come to her, his aunt found that her influence could do nothing with him. When the others returned home they verified Conn's story. An almost superhuman strength had come, they said, to the boy, and their united efforts had hardly succeeded in overpowering him.

"They do get wild, I often heard tell, when they grow older," said John Kearney, "and Conn's fifteen now. He'll soon be that strong there'll be no getting the better of him. I think it would be well to get a warrant signed by the magistrate, and have him taken into the town. We can't be sure of managing him here, and there might be trouble."

As she listened to her husband's words, Mrs. Kearney felt a chill at her heart. She looked over at Conn as he sat there, now motionless and apparently unconscious of what was being said about him. Horror filled her mind as she pictured the boy shut up within four walls, subjected to irksome regulations, and deprived of his free, untrammelled life and communings with Nature. He would die. And he was not mad—no, though a hundred doctors

should declare him so. He was only different from others, very strange and possessed of a curious insight. And who dared say that his knowledge was not the true one? In any case, he was harmless, if only they would let him alone. . . . There was a chord in the woman's heart that responded to the boy's nature and his strange ways, though he and they were beyond her understanding. There were other reasons, too, besides the welfare of the lad that troubled Mrs. Kearney. She came of an old Celtic stock, and the traditions of her race were strong within her, and instinctively she had always been guided by them. To injure, therefore, or even seriously to interfere with, one set apart and seemingly overshadowed by supernatural influence was to her a crime—a crime, too, that always brought with it its own punishment. What could she, then, expect in the future for her children, her husband, or herself, if Conn's unhappy fate lay at their door? They would carry the burden of it all their lives. She knew it would be useless to give her husband this warning. John Kearney was a hard-headed man from the North, and he took things as he found them. When his wife's

nephew was brought to his house, he gave him an open-hearted hospitality; but now that the boy's weak brain had become weaker, and that he had begun to threaten violence, the place for him was the county asylum. To John Kearney in such matters there could be no question of the mysterious or the supernatural.

The days that followed were trying ones for several members of the little household. Mrs. Kearney knew from experience that all expostulation with her husband would prove useless. He was what is known as a "quiet, decent man," never asserting himself in the ordinary things of life, but leaving their settlement undisputed in the hands of "herself." Like all quiet, undemonstrative people, however, once his mind was made up, it was impossible to change it. Mrs. Kearney was a wise woman, so she said nothing, but she waited in the hope that in the end some means would be found to save Conn from the awful fate before him. No further conversation passed on the subject, but she noticed that on three successive days John Kearney visited the county town, and on the third day when he returned home in the evening there were papers in the pocket of his frieze

coat. Did the boy suspect? He had grown paler, thinner, and was very quiet and kept continually to himself. Sometimes Mrs. Kearney caught his eyes fixed upon her with a sad, reproachful expression, like that of a dumb animal in pain; but when he found himself observed, he quickly turned them away.

"He knows I ought to help him," the poor woman cried. "But, God in Heaven, what can I do?"

No, she could do nothing, but she hoped that those mysterious powers that seemed to have taken him under their protection would perhaps befriend him still.

At last John Kearney spoke.

"It's all settled," he said. "Conn is to come before the magistrates, and when they've seen him they can sign the warrant. After to-morrow I'll take him in, and you'd better come in yourself with us too, for you can manage him easier nor anyone else."

Mrs. Kearney could not answer her husband. All power of speech left her; she felt dazed. Could it really be true? Conn shut up in the asylum the day after to-morrow—her dead sister's child left to her care. He an Innocent!

Would not Heaven send down fire upon them, or the earth open to swallow them up?

It was the dinner hour, and the children came in hungry for their midday meal.

"Where's Conn?" asked their father, looking round and noting an empty place.

None of them could tell.

"He'll be in likely afore we've finished," said one of the boys. "He does sometimes be late."

But the dinner was over and cleared away and the chairs put back to the wall, yet no Conn appeared.

"I saw him about eleven o'clock going down the bohereen," remarked the eldest lad, as he drew on his coat before returning to his work. "He was waving his arms and seemed a bit excited-like, talking loud to himself. 'It's the great call at last,' he was saying. 'Come on the *down* wind of the West. I must go. I must go to the sea off beyond.' And he passed me by, never minding and walking at a great rate."

"He always told me it would come one day, the call from the sea," said Bridget, looking up with solemn eyes, "and then he'd have to go."

"Glory be to God! we must be after him," cried Mrs. Kearney, "for goodness knows what

may happen him. May we only meet with him on the way!"

Stirred by his wife's anxiety, John Kearney rose, and, seizing his hat, followed her out through the doorway. They both hurried down the short cut across the field on to the road, a nameless dread pressing on their steps as they took the direction of the sea. Would they ever catch him up? and if not, how would it end? It seemed hardly likely they would meet with him, for Conn had had a two hours' start. What was in the boy's mind and what did he mean to do? Had he understood about the asylum, and was he trying to escape from it? Such were Mrs. Kearney's thoughts as she went along. Once or twice she looked at her husband, wondering whether he now reproached himself for Conn's disappearance; but he said nothing, and they pursued their way in silence. It was a long road and a rough one, stony in parts where the loose granite lay on the surface. Mrs. Kearney required all her strength to keep going, and was too anxious to care to speak. Several miles of weary walking brought them at last in sight of the sea, and they looked down from the hilly height to where the white

line of foam broke against the shore, wondering and dreading what they might find there. Anxiously Mrs. Kearney sought for the familiar figure, but no one was to be seen on the deserted strand. The two walkers followed the uneven sandy road that led over the cliffs and down to the beach below ; then, as they skirted a mass of rock, they caught sight of a little group of fishermen previously hidden by it. When she saw them Mrs. Kearney ran forward, crying :

"Where is he? Where is he?"

One of the men detached himself from the group and came towards her.

"God help you, ma'am, if you are his mother," he said, catching hold of her arm.

"You've seen him! In God's Name, tell me where he is!"

"It's in the hands of God he is this minute. I was coming down carrying the net half an hour since, and a young lad passed me on the way. He was talking excited. 'At last! at last!' he said. 'Sure when the great Spirit of the Sea calls, mustn't I come?' and he stretched his two arms and ran down to the shore. Well, he looked so strange I went after him. He

got on to that rock beyond where the waves break over the seaweed, and he stood looking out before him across the sea. Then he turned, and seeing me close behind him, shouted out, 'Is it the hand of man could hold me back when the Great Spirit calls?' With that he gave a terrible screeching laugh and jumped right into the waves. I was in after him, but I couldn't come upon his body, the sea had carried it off that quick."

The Kearneys looked aghast as they listened to the recital, then the woman threw her apron over her head and sank with a great cry upon the ground. The fisherman ran to fetch his wife, but Mrs. Kearney would not be comforted, refusing all efforts made to console her.

"You had better be taking her home," said the fisherman at last, "for it's getting late and it's likely you have a long way to go. We can lend you an ass and cart, for she couldn't walk the road the way she is."

John Kearney went off with the man to secure the conveyance, while the woman remained with his wife, who was rocking herself to and fro and moaning piteously.

"It's a punishment on us, the judgment of

Heaven for thinking so to treat one of his kind. How can I ever meet my dead sister again, and what'll I say to her when she asks how I cared for her child? Movrone! movrone! to think of this day." The words ended in a paroxysm of sobs.

At last the other woman got her upon her feet, and led her gently up the cliff-side towards a row of white cottages that overlooked the sea. Suddenly they heard steps upon the shingly beach behind them, and a hand was laid on Mrs. Kearney's shoulder. Both the women stopped and turned round. Beside them stood a tall, spare man, with bent shoulders, worn face, and eyes, though they gleamed brightly, deeply sunken.

"Don't cry," he said, and at his words the sob-racked frame became still. "It had to be. The Great Spirit claimed its own. Those who are in touch with the things unseen are often called away early, before their time, and it is better so."

Then the stranger turned and walked away as silently and as swiftly as he had come.

"Who is he?" asked Mrs. Kearney in an awed voice.

"Michael Conroy is his name, and he lives alone up beyond in that little cabin on the top of the steep cliff. He consorts with no one but himself, and has queer ways of his own. They say he knows many things, and the children call him the Old Man of the Sea."

III

THE ALIEN

THE smith's strong arms brought the iron down upon the anvil, and myriads of glowing sparks shot through the air. Bang, bang! went the even strokes, the force that caused them seeming to be untiring. As the great bellows awoke the fire into flame the light caught upon the smith's face, revealing his strongly-marked features and his ruddy, shaggy locks. Six foot two he stood in his low-heeled brogues, a fine, stalwart figure — broad-shouldered, muscular, active. Seen through the open doorway of the forge, standing in relief against the darkness, he appeared hardly human. He might have been a metal worker of the early ages, one of the Tuatha da Danaan, that wonderful race that yielded mysterious powers, and when thought to have been conquered disappeared, making for itself subterranean dwellings in the

depths of the earth. So the children thought as they went past the forge on the way home from school, fear urging on their footsteps, while an unexplainable fascination made them pause. Holding hands and keeping close together, they sometimes stopped in the middle of the road, gazing at the glowing figure round which the sparks flew. Then, should the smith turn his head and fix his blue eyes, shining beneath their bushy brows, upon them, they were off and down the road as fast as their feet could carry them, never stopping till they reached the turn where the road divides. There only they halted to look to see if the dread man were following.

"The red-haired man will catch you," the mothers said to their naughty children; "and when he lays hold of you, his hand burns like melted iron."

This threat kept the wildest child quiet, so great was the fear of the man at the forge.

The mothers themselves were not without experiencing a certain awe of the blacksmith. When possible, they tried not to meet him in the village or on the road, so as to avoid bidding him the time of day. They called their

girls to their side when he passed, and many would not allow them to attend a *ceidhlidh* at any house where he might be. That a daughter sometimes cast an admiring glance at this tall, fine man did not make her mother the less careful to keep the road between them.

"What harm is there in him, except that he's big and strong and red-haired, and could knock down any boy in the parish?" the less repressible girls occasionally remarked.

"Never mind the reason. He's not the man your father nor myself would have a wish to see you talking with," was all the answer that was vouchsafed to such a question.

Patrick Costello was an alien. The cause that made him so was a chain of circumstances, each so small and of such little account in itself that, had he belonged to a country where prejudices are less intense, and where memories are not so long, he would not have been treated in any way differently from his fellows. Little did his father think, when he brought a stranger home as his second wife, that he was sowing seeds of trouble for her future son. Who was this tall, red-haired woman with the deep, low voice? No one in the whole

country-side knew either her name or that of her native place. There must be a mystery, the neighbours surmised, or why should they not be told something about her? They watched, therefore, with interest the newly-married pair, but what they were able to discover was not much. Patrick Costello seemed to have thought for little else beyond the red-haired woman who was his wife, and she seemed able to do whatever she wished with her elderly husband.

"And he was not at all so easy with poor Mary Byrne—the Lord rest her soul!—and she the quiet, decent woman. But this one is the sort that gets her own way. Sure I'm thinking he wouldn't dare cross her. It's the witch face she has on her, and God knows what she wouldn't do to him. Now, with regard to a good Christian woman, you'll know about her, where she comes from and what she does be doing. But this one—the Lord save us!—is she a Christian anyways, for all that she does be at Mass on Sundays?"

So the idea sprang up and spread slowly that Mrs. Costello was not like another. Before long several people had some proof

they could bring forward in support of the theory.

"Did you hear tell of poor Mrs. Murphy's butter-making? Well, it happened last Friday. She had the grandest lot of cream gathered during the week, and she and Mary Anne were setting about to begin the churning early in the morning, when a knock came at the door of the dairy. Afore she had time to go and see who it was, who walked in but Mrs. Costello. Mrs. Murphy was not overpleased, as you may be thinking, to see her there, but she bid her the time of day, for all that, and asked her what it was she wanted. 'A pint of new milk, if you please, ma'am. The brawny cow is taken ill, and we have none,' and she handed the jug out to her. Mrs. Murphy gave her the milk, and when she was gone set to the churning again. Well, if they churned for one hour, they churned for two—they churned and they churned; but it might have been hot water was in it for all the butter they got." The listener to the story blessed herself. "The cross of Christ lie between us and harm! It's what I was beginning to fear myself."

Another day a child in the village sickened,

and the doctor who was called in could make nothing of the disease. At the end of seven days it died. Then it was said how Mrs. Costello had been seen to stop and speak to the child in the village street the very day it fell ill, and it was noticed that she had put her hand for a moment on its head. The evidence was conclusive—" the woman with the ruddy hair " had caused the child's death.

Other such stories sprang up from time to time, and they all helped to shape the current of public opinion, till at last there was hardly a person in the whole parish who did not own to a " queer feeling " at sight of Mrs. Costello. As time wore on the visitors who crossed the threshold of the Costellos' house became fewer and farther between. No woman ever found her way there, and the men who did so came to have a talk with Michael Costello, who had the reputation of being knowledgeable about all manner of things. The chapel bench, which the Costellos had always shared with another family, was now left to the undisputed possession of Michael, his wife, and the two sons of his first marriage. Mrs. Costello was hardly ever mentioned by name. She was

spoken of as "the red-haired woman," "the stranger woman," or more often as "that one," an expression meaning that the person so designated is an outsider and beyond the pale of ordinary intercourse. When news came to the village that a son was born to the Costellos great was the talking among the women. "That will be the queer child. God help it!" Later, when it became known that the little Paidin had inherited his mother's ruddy locks, there were many head-shakings and ominous whisperings.

Whether the red-haired woman felt her lonely, ostracized position or not the neighbours could never tell, for she betrayed nothing. If they saw her on the roads she walked always with the same easy, swinging gait and with her head held high. When they passed her she smiled at them, with her curious, unscrutable smile, and sometimes bade them the time of day in her rich low-toned voice. As a rule, however, she kept within the precincts of the homestead sending one of the stepchildren to do the household commissions at the village shop.

"That sort only want their own company," remarked one old woman wisely when the

subject of Mrs. Costello was under discussion in her presence, regardless of the fact that the former had little opportunity of having any other.

Though outwardly she seemed so indifferent to the opinion in which she was held, within her own heart perhaps it was not quite the same with Mrs. Costello. It was maybe the knowledge of the cold world in which she lived that took the fighting courage from her when she fell ill. She was still young, but she made no effort to prolong her life, and let herself die. The little five-year-old Paidin was brought to the mother's bedside. Mrs. Costello pulled his curly head on to the pillow beside her with such passionate force that it seemed as if the lingering life in her must have gone in the effort.

"God help you, *a stoirin!*" she whispered. "You'll have many bitter days, and if Heaven does not send you a good woman to love you, whose love'll be stronger nor her fear, it's little happiness you need expect in this life."

Patrick Costello was not long in coming upon the bitterness the world held in store for

him. A year or two after his mother's death he was sent to school. His first day there was not an unhappy one, though it was hard to have to remain sitting still in a hot classroom when the sun was shining, and the birds, the bees, and all the growing life was calling to him from without. But he enjoyed playing games with the other school-children between the lesson hours. It was the first time he had ever been with playmates of his own age; hitherto his life had been one long solitude. The next morning, however, when he laid his satchel down on the desk and took his accustomed place, his neighbours on either side of him moved away along the bench, leaving a vacant space between him and them. At the play-hour, when he ran out with the other children, they turned from him.

"You can't play with us: my mother said I wasn't to let you."

"And why shouldn't I play with you?"

"Because you're queer, and something might happen us."

"I'm no queerer nor yourself," cried Paidin, as, his face crimson with fury, his little fist clenched, he sprang upon the taller and older

boy with such force that the latter was flung to the ground, his forehead knocking against a sharp stone.

At sight of the trickle of blood the other children screamed, and the master hurried out to see what was the matter.

"It's Paidin Costello has knocked down Mikey Brien," chorused the group, in answer to the master's inquiry.

The delinquent was reprimanded and brought into the schoolroom. There he remained in penance during the rest of the play-hour, his little heart bursting with anger and sorrow. If this day sealed Paidin's doom with regard to any kind of friendship with his school companions, it likewise preserved him from personal ill-treatment at their hands, for they became afraid to meddle with him. He soon formed the habit of making his way to and from the school alone, for when the other children saw him coming they drew up together, and plainly showed they had no wish for his company. During the recreation hour Paidin went out on the road, and there played ball by himself, or, as he grew older, looked for birds'-nests and wild-flowers in the neighbouring hedges. But

of overtures towards his companions he made none. He felt too sore and resentful.

Thus Patrick Costello grew up solitary, his hand against other men's, as their hands were against his. It was seldom that he took part in any local gathering, but wherever he did join in a football or hurling match his strength and activity had to be admired. There was no one in the whole country-side who could run as fast or throw a ball as far. But in the triumph his good play brought he had no share. The game over, the other men drew away and left him alone. When his old father died Paidin joined with his stepbrothers in working the forge, and there again his great strength told, and it was not long before he gained the reputation of being the best blacksmith in the country, and horses that would not stand shoeing from anyone else were brought to him. That his brothers could be ignorant of the public feeling in regard to the young smith was hardly to be expected. Enough had come to their ears to make them know that Paidin was no favourite. Something, too, of the general distrust had penetrated even into their minds. After all, there was never smoke with-

out some kind of fire, as the old saying had it; but they were quiet, easy-going men, and never betrayed to their young brother anything of what they either heard or thought. Besides, Paidin was a valuable helper in the forge, and they could have ill spared him.

A great bitterness filled the smith's heart as he brought his hammer to bear down upon the anvil, a bitterness he usually drove from him, but to-day it was stronger than his strongest efforts. What had he done to bring the ill-will of all the world against him, he who had never willingly done injury to anyone? Why could he not mix with other men, and have his share in the simple amusements of his own country-side? Fiercely he smote the iron, as though it were in some manner responsible for his fate.

"God save you, Patrick Costello!"

Soft as the words were, they came to the smith above the clang of the hammer. He lowered his arms and turned quickly towards the doorway. A slight girlish figure stood on the threshold.

"God save you kindly, Elis Kavanagh! Are you wanting anything?"

"Nothing at all, thank you. But I heard as

how you burnt your arm, and as I was passing the way I stopped to ask how it was."

"'Tisn't many do that," said the man bitterly. "More thanks to you for that same. I'm better, and I can work again, as you are seeing. But I wouldn't be standing there at that door. If anyone sees you at the forge, there'll be the fine talking."

"I don't care about anyone's talk. Why should I? And—and—Paidin, I haven't forgotten."

Then, pulling her shawl up over her head, the girl turned and vanished. The smith stood motionless for a few seconds, his eyes fixed on the empty doorway. Then he walked to the threshold and looked down the road, shading his eyes with his hand till there was nothing more to be seen. Back he then turned to the anvil, and, taking up the hammer, he slowly began to work again.

Elis Kavanagh hurried home. In spite of her defiant words, she had cast a quick glance around before approaching the forge doorway, and as she turned away she looked about her again. No, she had not forgotten, though it was eight years ago, and she had been only a little

slip of a girl. She could still recall the paralyzing fear she had felt when a strange, wild-looking man had stood before her on the wood pathway: "Ah, my little girl, I'll soon have you!" and, brandishing his stick, the stranger had borne down upon her. For a moment terror rooted the child to the ground. Then she turned and fled on through the wood, the hurrying steps behind her coming slowly nearer. At last they were close upon her, and a hand grasped her shoulder. With a shriek Elis fell among the bracken and lost consciousness. When she came to she heard the voices of men, and, looking up, saw her pursuer being shaken as a dog by the collar, and then flung into the underwood. Strong arms raised the child, and as she was lifted up she recognized "the man at the forge." Elis involuntarily shrank back at the sight. The man noticed the movement, and a shadow crossed his face.

"Will I put you down?" he said.

"Oh, please don't!" exclaimed the child. "He might catch me again."

Then she began to sob convulsively. Paidin waited for the little girl to cease crying; then

he soothed her with gentle words, and at last, when she had somewhat recovered, told her stories of the fairies of the wood, and pointed out the dance-rings to make the child forget. He put her down at last on the highroad, telling her to run home, and never to come into the wood alone again.

From that day the memory of Paidin Ruadh remained with Elis Kavanagh as that of her saviour and protector. Then, child as she was, her heart burnt within her when the neighbours spoke of him as a harmful man, an alien, as of one with whom there must be no intercourse. On several occasions she had excited the wrath of her mother by hotly taking up his defence. This attitude was attributed by Mrs. Kavanagh to contrariness, for Elis had kept the story of her adventure in the wood to herself. In the years that followed the girl seldom saw Patrick Costello, but if she chanced to meet him alone she never failed to bid him the time of day, and as she grew older she noticed with a certain pride that the cloud lifted from his face when he saw her.

It was nine o'clock on that same June evening of the visit to the forge when Paidin Ruadh

came slowly up the road to his home. It was his custom during the summer months, when work was over, to leave the forge and go off for a walk by himself. He liked to feel the cool breeze blowing against his face and through his hair, and to wash away the smuts of the forge fire in some hillside stream. Then, when the night began to close in, he turned his steps homewards. In the farmhouse kitchen supper was always left for him—a cup of buttermilk and some griddle bread. These he took, and then, sitting by the fire, he smoked a pipe before going off to bed. The two other men were usually out at this hour, seeing to the animals the last thing at night, and the servant-girl had gone home. Except during their hurried breakfast and at the dinner-hour, the smith seldom, therefore, saw his brothers; they were engaged always on the farm, and since the direction of the forge had been entirely placed in his hands, their business did not often bring them thither. Thus Paidin's evening was nearly always a solitary one, but he did not mind being alone. Circumstances had forced him to live so much apart from the society of other people that he had grown not to look

for companionship ; indeed, he would have found it an effort to talk long with anyone or join in an evening gathering. It had become difficult for him to put his thoughts into words. This evening, however, Costello found the two elder men seated by the fire. The young smith hung up his hat on a peg near the door, and, nodding to the other occupants of the kitchen, walked over to the table by the dresser. When his supper was finished he took a pipe from the window-sill, filled and lighted it, and then, pulling a stool over to the fire, sat down and gazed into the red turf while he smoked. After a few moments Peter, the elder man, cleared his throat, shuffled his feet along the hearthstone, and looked across towards his brother William, who sat opposite with head bent.

"You had a nice walk, Paidin ?"

"I had, thank you, Peter. It's a fine evening."

"Did you finish that work at the forge ?"

"I did. The shoes are all ready for the morning."

"I was speaking with Michael Reilly to-day. He's greatly put about over that mare."

"What's wrong with her?"

"She's dead. She was lame after the shoeing. Her foot all swelled up. He called in the vet., but he could do her no good, and in the end she had to be shot."

"I told him to let her be out at grass a while without a shoe, that she was in no condition to be shod; but he wouldn't mind me."

"Well, he told me she was a bit sore, but not as bad as all that. And the vet. couldn't make out at all what ailed her. Michael says he won't send e'er another horse to the forge again."

Paidin made no comment, but smoked on.

"Well, there's Dan Murphy. His horse has gone lame too. Others have been making complaints as well. And, indeed, there's a great deal of talk back and forwards. Some people do be saying there's bad luck on the forge, a kind of *mi-adh* over it; whilst others go farther than that, saying the horses are 'overlooked' in it. I thought I'd better let you know the way it is in case you didn't hear. But, of course, it's all nonsense."

Peter cleared his throat again, and looked across at William; but the latter did not meet

his glance, for his head was still bent. Paidin took the pipe out of his mouth, and turned round till his eyes caught those of Peter fair and straight.

"I understand what you mean," he said slowly, "and you needn't try and put it soft. I'm not so deaf to what's being said through the country as you may suppose. They think I bring the bad luck, that I 'overlook' their horses. They don't like me in the forge, and they won't send there whilst I'm in it. The wonder is they sent so long. I suppose they knew I was a good smith, and they didn't mind till the first bit of bad luck came against one of their horses. Now they think there can be only one reason for the horses going lame. You've been good brothers to me always, both of you, Peter, and I wouldn't wish to cause you any ill. I'll go."

"Sure, Paidin, we wouldn't turn you out. You know that."

"I do; but you wouldn't be sorry either if I was gone. And small blame to you. Without the forge the farm couldn't get on so well. I wouldn't stand between you and good earning."

"But I'm thinking as how perhaps we could

make some other arrangement. You could work on the farm here, and William or myself 'ud go up every day to the forge. Martin Casey is coming in on the work very well now, and he could have a boy onder him. If anything out of the way awkward should happen you could always run up, but you wouldn't have the name of being at the forge."

Paidin turned his head away, and as he did so the firelight, flickering over his face, showed an angry flash in his eyes.

"No, I wouldn't do that. It's the forge or nothing. It can't be the forge now, so I'll go."

"But, Paidin——"

"There's no 'but' about it, Peter. I'll go, and the sooner the better," answered the other firmly.

"Well, if your mind's set determined on it, we can't keep you. But I'm sorry. We're both sorry. You believe that, and——"

"I do believe it. You stood to me when others in your place wouldn't."

"There's money saved. I can give you fifty pounds, and after, when you want anything, you can write for it."

"No, Peter; I won't take it. 'Twas your

mother's money bought this place. I've no call to anything. Lend me five pounds. I'll pay you back. There is work for a strong arm in other parts of Ireland if there isn't here. I'll get on all right, you may be sure. It's late now: I'll go to bed."

Paidin knocked the ashes from his pipe on to the hearth, then he rose and walked to the door. He stepped out into the evening. The moon had risen and now lit up the valley below. Costello's eyes followed the brow of the hill, the clump of trees, the bit of white road, till they rested on the walls of a house, made visible by the moonlight. He remained looking at it for a few minutes, then sighed wearily and went in.

In spite of the persuasions of his brothers, Paidin refused to remain more than one day longer at the farm. There was a little work to finish off at the forge; that done, he was ready to go.

"She told me I'd have bitter days," Paidin Costello said to himself as he went down the hillside carrying a small bundle over his shoulder. "And she wasn't wrong. I was only a little gossoon then, but I could never

forget her words: 'Unless a good woman loves you whose love will be stronger nor her fear.' 'Tisn't I'll meet with such a one." He laughed bitterly.

The sun had only just risen, and drops of dew sparkled, many-coloured, on briar and bush. The road was deserted, and gathered round the field-gates were the cows waiting to be milked. Paidin looked straight before him. He noticed none of the beauties of early morning, with him an unusual omission, for his lonely soul was keenly sensitive to outdoor things. Now bitter thoughts assailed his mind, and raised a barrier between him and Nature, as such thoughts always do. He passed the beech-wood, the school, the forge, skirted the village, and joined the main road leading to the county town. He had met no one, for which he was glad, for his desire was to bid no farewell nor to give any explanations about his departure. Paidin stopped on the road to look back. He saw the hill on which his home stood. The farmhouse was now hidden, for it nestled in a hollow, but he could see the oat-field, and the meadow where the cattle grazed, and the old blackthorn-tree he had loved to climb as a child. Sadly he bade

it all a last farewell, for never would his eyes rest on those scenes again. The past was cut off, finished with, and must be put behind him, for he had to go forward and meet an unknown future. He turned again to face the road, his head bent and his steps hastened. When he had passed the sharp turn that hid the village from view, Costello looked up and saw that some person wrapped in a brown shawl was seated on a tree-stump in the gap of the broken hedge. He was annoyed that, after all, he was to meet someone, and hurried on to pass quickly. As he approached, the figure in the hedge rose and came to face him in the centre of the way.

"I couldn't let you go without a 'God speed,' Patrick Costello; so I'm here since daybreak, knowing you'd surely pass this road."

"Elis Kavanagh!" For a moment the young smith could say no more, and the tears of a strong man welled in his eyes.

"It was queer of me to come, maybe you're thinking, but I'd never rest content if you had gone without knowing what I think of those that drove you away. Why should you mind them, Paidin? Is it their talk that is to get the better of a strong man like yourself?"

"'Tisn't their talk, Elis: I'm used to that; but I couldn't be a trouble to my own flesh and blood. It's long ago I should have gone, and not waited till now. There do be some things no man can fight against."

"But you'll be lonesome among strangers."

"And what else am I but lonesome and a stranger here? Who but yourself ever speaks a word with me, or would heed whether I lived or died? And why should you heed? It's better to leave me alone, like the rest of them."

"I couldn't, Paidin. I'm thinking of you often, ever since that day long ago—you mind it yourself? And I do be wishing I could do something for you."

"Don't be wishing. Don't be thinking. Forget all about me. Now that I'm going away altogether, Elis, I'll tell you what I never thought to tell. It's company you've often been to me in my mind, and every day going to the forge I'd look out for a sight of your shawl. God be with you. I must be off."

He held out his hand. The girl took it, and as she did so looked up in his face till her eyes met his. The colour mounted slowly in her cheeks.

"Paidin, I'm going to say a strange thing, but you're not one to take it amiss. Would you be less lonesome if—if—if you had a friend with you? Would you mind the talk of people and their black looks if there was someone by you always? Tell me that, Paidin."

The man dropped the girl's hand and stepped back.

"If I'd that, I'd mind nothing," he said. Then, quickly losing the earnest tone in his voice, he added bitterly: "But no one would care that way for me, and if they did I wouldn't ask them."

"No, you needn't ask them. But you wouldn't refuse them if they asked you?"

The man did not answer.

"You know what I mean, don't you?" urged the girl. "What do you say, Paidin?"

"No, Elis. It's your pity for me, your good heart. You'd regret it soon."

"I would not, Patrick Costello. I'm not one to be saying what I don't mean. If you don't care for me, say so. I'll go home and pray God to let me forget this day. But if you do care, say you'll ask me to come to you when you're ready. If you don't, I'll never look at anyone

whilst I live, and sure, it isn't Elis Kavanagh will be the happy woman."

"But your father and mother?"

"They'll be angry at first when I tell them, and it'll be long before they'll forgive. But that won't keep me from you, Paidin, if only you'll say the word."

"It's trouble you may come to with me, Elis."

"I don't mind the trouble."

"You may have to wander the world."

"I don't mind the wandering."

"You'll be lonesome, maybe."

"With yourself I'll never be lonesome."

He took her hand.

"Then come to me, Elis—come. I'll be settled somewhere soon, and then I'll write. God be with you till then!"

Paidin Ruadh turned on his way. The care of the world was lifted off his shoulders, and his step was light and free. As he went the soles of his brogues seemed to strike out a tune on the road surface, and the words of the tune were:

"A woman whose love is stronger nor her fear."

IV

THE TRAVELLING PIPER

THERE was no one in the whole countryside who was not acquainted with Garry Higgins. To the children he was almost their earliest recollection: the young men and women associated him with their dances and merry-makings, while to the older generation he brought back the memory of their wedding-day. No social gathering was complete without Garry. He was the life and soul of every local festivity, for his music and his kindly disposition had won him a place unique in the hearts of the people. The piper's comings and goings were a matter of moment in the neighbourhood. At every house he was a welcome guest, for he brought tidings from one family to another, he knew the gossip of every place for miles around, he had a stock of stories that he related in a way that held his listeners, and he could

tell many amusing adventures of his own. The children were ever on the lookout for him. If one of them cried, "Here's Garry on the road!" there was a general stampede in the direction whence he was coming, and his small friends clustered round him, catching on to his coat, his arms, his pipes, and begging for a tune, a story, for some of his fun. The best chair in every house was always reserved for the piper, and the choicest available food placed before him.

Garry Higgins was a curious little man to look at, and was without one inch of spare flesh on his body. He seemed dried up and wizened, and yet his face was not old, for it had few lines, and he had not one single white hair. Garry's whole person was toned into a brown shade. His small, twinkling eyes were brown, so was his hair; his complexion was tanned to the hue of a russet apple, and the clothes he wore were of brown homespun. It was as if, in the perpetual outdoor life he led, he had stolen from Mother Earth something of her colour. Strapped across his back was a leathern bag that contained his set of *uillen* pipes. This was all his luggage, and, indeed,

all that belonged to him in the world, for Garry was blessed with that greatest of liberties—the absence of possessions. The piper was hardy and active, and had never suffered an hour's sickness in his life. He hardly knew what it was to feel tired, though he did not spare himself, and accomplished his full share of walking, covering often in the day more than twenty miles. He walked quickly, almost with a running step, and with lowered head, turning it neither to right nor left unless something special attracted his attention. He seemed always to be in a great hurry, and yet, as a matter of fact, he never was in any hurry at all; for, as he often said, "I've very little intercourse with time." Time meant nothing to him; he had no calls on it except when bidden to play at a wedding or a *céidhlidh*.

When the fancy took him Garry stopped, and, sitting down on a heap of stones by the roadside, drew out his pipes. There he often played for an hour or even more, one tune after another, finding in the music all the company and refreshment he needed. He had a story of how he was once thus engaged on a Sunday evening when a clergyman passed by the way.

This clergyman was well known for his strict views on the keeping of the Sabbath. He accosted the piper.

"Do you know the Third Commandment?" he asked severely.

"I do not, your honour," replied Garry. "But if you'd whistle the tune, maybe I could play it."

Sometimes in his wanderings the piper tired of the highroad and took to the fields. He was acquainted with every short cut, every gap, every *bohereen* for miles around. Blindfolded, he could almost have found the way, and was a surer guide than any Ordnance map.

Garry Higgins came of a family of traditional musicians. From father to son, or from uncle to nephew, the talent had descended like an heirloom through hundreds of years. In days gone by the O'Higgins had been hereditary players to the Lords of Glenmalane. No O'Flannary ever visited another chief, attended a gathering of the tribes, or went to battle, without an O'Higgin in his train. Times had changed since then. The chiefs of Glenmalane were scattered, their glories forgotten, but in the country where they had once reigned an O'Higgin still played the airs they had loved.

Garry's father had been a stonemason, and both his sons were brought up in the same trade; at least, every effort had been made to teach Garry the work, and what knowledge he did acquire of it was certainly with very little will of his own. Other ideas than those of stones and mortar filled his mind. The family talent was strongly developed in him, and as soon as he was able to hold it a fiddle was in his hands. Often he escaped from the house, and, going out of sight and earshot, tried to work out as best he could the airs he heard singing in his ears.

When the boy was sixteen years old his uncle died and left him his set of pipes. Martin Higgins had been the piper of the countryside during his day, and when he came to die he felt his mantle should descend on Garry. With this legacy fled the last hope of ever making the lad a tradesman. He refused to use a mason's tools when the pipes were his. Garry's parents then saw it was no use opposing him, and besides, they had a superstitious feeling it would not have been right to break with the family tradition, and that no good would come of it if they did. So Garry

was left to go his own way, and the spirit of the wandering piper grew on him, and he was nearly always on the roads. "He must have trod some time on the *fód seachrán* when he was a child," his mother said, "for ever since he's been ten years old it has been the one way with him." And perhaps, indeed, he had stepped on that mysterious sod, that lastingly affects those who touch it, so that they are ever impelled to travel over the bog, the fields, along the roads, or across the hills, and have no wish to tarry long in any place.

From the day on which Garry Higgins obtained the complete mastery over his pipes, his home never kept him for any length of time. He was away sometimes for weeks together, his family hearing nothing unless some wayfarer who chanced to meet the piper should bring back news of him. But he always returned from time to time, to see how they all were, to tell of his own doings, and, above all, to have his clothes put in order. Garry was no sloven, and he had the honour of the O'Higgins to uphold; it would therefore have ill become him not to have been well clad. Brian Higgins, the elder brother, took possession of the fiddle

discarded by the younger for the pipes. He often played it in the evenings or when going across the fields to his work. To him also had come the hereditary talent, though not in the overmastering degree in which it had come to Garry.

Garry's playing was not of the usual order, but a thing quite apart. It seemed, when listening to him, that the pipes must be alive, for surely no inanimate thing could produce the go, the spirit, or convey the almost human message that came from the instrument in his hands. He made his hearers cry sometimes with the sobbing wail of his notes, or he set them dancing if they passed, even when hurrying along the road. It was said that should the vagary have seized on Garry Higgins to play in the church, the most devout among the congregation would not have been able to keep their feet still. Garry's pipes created any impression that he wished. They laughed and spoke and sang; they sounded like lowing cattle, and made the hearers think of pasture-fields and kine; they gave a tolling like church bells ringing over water. He could with them imitate the ripple of a stream, the moan of the

wind in the trees, the roaring of the sea. The whole voice of Nature seemed within the compass of the pipes. Sometimes he played a battle tune, and if the listeners closed their eyes they could hear the tramp of horses' feet, the clash of arms, the firing of guns; or he played a funeral dirge, and the sound of *caoining* women came from afar. Though the music he played was so wonderful, the way the piper played was careless in the extreme. While his arm pressed the bellows and his fingers and wrist worked up and down along the keys, he spoke, he laughed, he joked with the company, and turned his head this way and that; the last thing he seemed to pay attention to was his musical instrument.

Garry Higgins enjoyed playing for a good dancer as much as he disliked playing for a bad one. Often at a gathering did he change his place the better to watch those who danced well, or to avoid seeing those who did not. There were two dancers in the neighbourhood for whom Garry never tired of playing. He always inquired if they were to be present when he was asked to a *céidhlidh*, and often the giver of a feast invited them from a long

distance, knowing that if they came Garry would play his best.

Of the many tunes the piper played, whether dance tunes, song tunes, or marches, there was one that, according to the gossips of the country-side, surpassed all the music ever played by mortal man. None of the neighbours could say that they themselves had ever heard the tune, though several of them had met with people who had. One person could tell of a man who, late on a May evening, had come alone across the bog. All was silent about him except for the slight whisper of the breeze through the rushes. Suddenly he was startled by the sound of a low note of music that came from a little distance away. Gradually it grew fuller and louder, till at last the whole air was filled with sound; no longer did it come from one spot, but from above him, from the ground at his feet, from every side. It was unlike all the music he had ever heard before, and it held him rooted where he stood. A great fear came on the man, a fit of shivering seized him, and a cold sweat broke out over his body. For though the music was more beautiful than any he knew of, it was so strange and weird, so unearthly, he felt it could

not come from any human person. A mist seemed to rise up from the ground about him, and enveloped him so completely that he could see nothing. His mind became dazed, and the memory of all he had ever done or known left him, and he could not tell who or where he was. Then by degrees the music grew less full and less loud, and died away gradually into the distance, and then stopped on one short, sharp note as suddenly as it had begun. The mist cleared away, and the man's senses came back to him. He was standing as before in the midst of the lonely bog, and all seemed still around him. He brushed the back of his hand across his forehead and looked about. As his eye followed the bog-track to the left, just where the white moonbeams fell across the path, he caught sight of a short brown-grey figure hurrying away. When he told the story of his adventure to the people of the house where late that night he received shelter, they said what he had heard must have been the fairy music of Garry Higgins, the piper. Many and curious were the explanations given of how Garry had acquired the knowledge of this strange music. Some said it was transmitted in the family from

one generation to another ; that the Higgins of the day taught it to his successor, but that the latter was put under *geasa* not to play it until the former was dead and the pipes had come into his possession. Were two of them ever to play the tune, it would pass altogether from their minds. It was on no ordinary set of pipes that such music could be played. Garry's pipes were very old indeed, and were worthy of belonging to the descendant of a long line of musicians, for the wood was ebony and the stops were silver. But it was not the richness of their make that gave them their chief merit. There was a mysterious power in them of their own, apart from any ebony or silver. Garry, who was careless about most things, who heeded little whether he were paid for his playing or not, who readily shared his money, food, anything he had with the first needy comer, never let anyone meddle with his pipes. If by any chance he left them lying on a bench, and some curious hand took them up, the piper by instinct seemed to know it. He was back at once, and had the pipes again in his own possession. "It's because there's something altogether strange and peculiar about those pipes that he

wouldn't have anyone interfering with them. You couldn't tell but that some misfortune would overtake anyone who injured them." Thus the pipes came to be treated with almost as much respect as the piper himself. Garry had a secret way, known to himself alone, of preparing the reeds—at least, so it was said. It was certain, anyway, that no one had ever seen him making them. The reeds he used were not those found in ordinary places, but in remote spots where they grew with a special virtue. Generous and open-handed as he was, Garry had never been known to give a reed to any fellow-piper.

As it was over a hundred years, according to one version, since the knowledge of the fairy music had come to the O'Higgins, according to another it was the piper himself who had learnt it under strange circumstances when he was still young. One *Samhain* eve, something over thirty-five years ago, Garry Higgins, according to his wont, was journeying by himself along the road. The night was not cold, and as no homestead was in sight where, in a rick of hay, he could have found his usual shelter, he sought about for a spot where he

could lay himself down to sleep. A gap in the hedge led into a field, and, following the sheep-walk, he reached a banked enclosure, where bushes and briars grew round an old ruin. In one corner, sheltered by the bushes, stood a clump of half-dead bracken, and Garry quickly chose it for his bed. A few belated blackberries still clung to a briar-branch near by, and as the piper's mouth was parched from his long walk, he picked and ate all he saw. Then, stretching himself on the dead ferns, with his pipes under his head to serve as a pillow, he was soon asleep. It might have been several hours that Garry slept, when, as though through a half-dream, there came to him the sound of many voices. Slowly and gradually he came back to consciousness, to find himself lying, stiff and cramped, in the same position as that in which he had gone to sleep. The moonlight, which was flooding the whole field, beat full into his eyes, and everything was almost as clear as daylight. The rest of the enclosure was hidden from him by the barrier of bushes that shut off his little corner. The voices he had heard in his sleep were now quite distinct. It seemed as though a great

number of children were gathered together close by, and were fighting and quarrelling among themselves. The voices were sharp, thin, and high-pitched, and sounded very cross. Garry was more amazed than frightened, but he did not stir. After a few moments he heard a faint swishing sound, as if the briar-bushes were being pushed aside, and then, full into the moonlight, came a little figure. It was that of a tiny man, and he was dressed in bright green. Boldly he fixed his eyes on Garry's face; then he turned his head in the direction from whence he had come and called shrilly. Immediately came the noise of pattering feet, and the piper found himself surrounded by a multitude of little people, all talking and gesticulating furiously.

"Come along! you must play for us!" they cried. "Come! come!"

Garry, hardly knowing how it happened, found himself on his feet, his pipes in his hand, and he was led through the bushes in the midst of the throng. On the moss-grown stump of a fallen tree he was told to sit. He obeyed, and, drawing the pipes from their bag, began to play. The little company divided itself into

four groups, each one going into a corner of the enclosure, and all of them set off dancing vigorously. Reel after reel was stepped through without any pause, and every now and then one or other of the dancers shouted imperiously: "Quicker! quicker!"

How Garry's fingers ever kept the pace they did, or how he was able to continue playing during what seemed to him like hours, he could not have explained; but on and on he fingered, one tune following another as the sharp, impatient little voices called for them. At last a glimpse of the dawning day appeared in the sky. On the moment all the tiny feet became still, and all the tiny hands were clapped violently; then followed a great deal of whispering, and the green man who had first discovered Garry approached him.

"You invaded our fort on *Samhain* eve; you ate our blackberries; therefore you fell into our power. We have the right to put a heavy punishment on you; but you have played so well that we will forgive you, and not do you any harm. On the contrary, we will do you a good turn, for I shall teach you some of our fairy music."

Taking Garry's pipes, which were quite as large as himself, the little man sat down on a root of the tree and began to play such music that the piper could not have stirred for wonder, it was so unlike anything he had ever heard before. When the piece was finished the player jumped up briskly and handed back the pipes.

"Go now," he said, "at once! Our time is over. You will always be able to play this tune whenever you wish; but, remember, we put you under strict *geasa* never to play it for mortal man. If you do, you will be in our power again, and I promise you we will not let you off."

This story was told by many people, and yet it was not known how first it had arisen, for no one was able to state that he or she had heard it from the piper himself. Indeed, Garry was altogether reticent on the subject of the fairy music, and had never even mentioned it to anyone. No person had ever dared to question him about it directly, but opportunities had been given him of speaking of it, had he so wished. Often he had been asked if there were no other tunes he knew besides the reels,

jigs, and airs—tunes different from those that other pipers played. Or it was sometimes mentioned in his presence how strange music had been heard after nightfall in some lonely place, and could he tell anything about it?

But the piper never committed himself. To the first question he replied that very likely there were other tunes he knew, but it was impossible to remember every one of them at once, and all he could do was to play those that came into his mind. As to what was said about the strange music, Garry observed that things often sounded strange at night that no one would heed by day; and perhaps it was only some singing-bird, or some other wandering musician like himself.

Once some young men had sought to wrest his secret out of Garry, and at a wedding gathering had made him drink more than his usual share. Then they brought him to a corner and excited him to play; but the piper, instead of playing, had got angry, had packed up his pipes and left the house. Though they failed to discover the truth, still, the idea of the fairy music remained in the minds of the people, and it served to explain many things in the

piper's mode of life. Why should a man such as he, who had been brought up in a comfortable home, prefer to live out in the open by night as well as by day, instead of taking shelter under a good roof? There was a reason, surely; and what better reason could be found than that he did not like to be at close quarters with other people? The fairy music could only be played away from houses and out of hearing of their inhabitants. At night, when no one was about and all the world asleep, Garry had the countryside to himself, and then, in a remote spot, he could play to his heart's content the wonderful tune that the "good people" had taught him.

With all his great love of freedom and independence, with his taste for a roving and untrammelled life, a time came when Garry Higgins was very near forging a chain to bind him. In a neighbouring parish there lived a certain Bridget Malone, the eldest of a family of several sisters. Nature had been ungenerous in dealing with her, and she was ill-favoured. She was tall and angular, her hair was brick red, and one of her eyes was crooked. Poor Bridget was very sensitive to her lack of charms,

and when, not only her sisters, but young girls whom she had known almost as babies, were married before her, she felt it keenly. A final blow was dealt to her when she had passed her thirtieth year. By some curious mischance, Bridget had not been confirmed in her childhood, and it was only when well advanced in life that, on the occasion of an Episcopal Visitation, she found herself seated with the children on a bench in the parish church. The Bishop, Catechism in hand, questioned in turn each of the group. When he came to Bridget he asked her: "What is matrimony?" On receiving no answer, the question was repeated, and said again a third time. Then Bridget could no longer contain herself. Her face flushed crimson, she threw her head back, and exclaiming indignantly, "I didn't come here to be insulted!" turned on her heel and walked out of the church. It required endless persuasions to induce her to return, and afterwards she was never quite disabused of the idea that the Bishop meant to convey a reproach by his words.

However, a change of fortune came to Bridget in the end. A distant cousin of her mother's

died, and left her his place. It consisted of a three-roomed cottage and four acres of good land. Bridget accordingly left her old home, where she had lived not too happily with her brother and his wife, and established herself in the midst of her new possessions. To be her own mistress in her own home was not, however, the sum-total of her desires. She was still under a reproach; that which she most wished for was still lacking — she had no husband. But now, under these altered circumstances, the acquisition of a husband did not seem such a difficulty. Bridget, with her house and her acres, to say nothing of two cows, a calf, and a pig, had much to offer, and she began her new campaign with confidence.

It was at a *céidhlidh* that her eye first fell on Garry Higgins. She had known him previously by repute, but now, when she saw him, it struck her at once that he was the man for her. He had no home, no one to mind him; he was a wanderer. Surely he would readily accept all she had to give him. Bridget that night danced as in all her life she had never danced before. Whenever, by hook or by crook, she could secure a partner, she was on the floor.

Once, when the bench-end next the piper was vacant, she hurried to the seat and talked away to him until Garry was carried off to be given a drink. All through the winter that followed the assiduous attentions of Bridget were showered on Garry whenever the occasion offered. The piper accepted them all. He talked to Bridget; he played the tunes she called for; he listened with seeming interest to all she told him about her little farm and her good dry house. Bridget was full of hopeful expectations that before the coming Lent they would be man and wife.

The neighbours now began to notice what was going on. They commented on it, saying to one another that it was often the strangest things that happened, for whoever could have thought that Garry would marry anyone, least of all Bridget Malone? One day someone asked the piper when his banns were to be called. The man's astonishment was great. "Whatever did they mean at all, and what reason could he have to marry?" He thought it was a joke and began to laugh; but when it was explained to him what the whole countryside were saying of him and Bridget Malone, poor Garry

became greatly troubled in his mind. He to marry—Bridget Malone or anyone else! Why, the idea of it had never entered his head. Were they all mad, to be thinking such a thing? When he was told how the people noticed that he and Bridget often sat side by side at the *céidhlidh*, and at the wedding dances, and that he always seemed pleased with her attentions, Garry was astonished at first; but, as he came to think it all out, it did at last strike him that Bridget was often near him and always ready to talk. To him it had meant nothing one way or the other, for his mind had never been given to running on those matters; but with other people it was different, so perhaps they had some cause to believe what they did. It was difficult to realize anything so strange, all the same. However, Garry was thoroughly frightened, and he determined from that day to avoid Bridget as much as possible. This was not altogether easy to do, for at the next *céidhlidh* Bridget again took a seat beside him. The piper was in despair. Never in his life had he been rough or rude with anyone, and he did not know how to begin now. Still, he felt that if he did not take some energetic measure, he might find

himself bound against his will. He got up to seek another place, but Bridget soon followed him. Thus it continued during that evening, and during every other evening when the two found themselves in the same house. All the neighbours now talked of nothing else but of Garry Higgins and Bridget Malone. They watched the proceedings with interest and amusement, and great was the speculation as to how it would end.

At last a brilliant idea came to Garry. He thought of a way by which he might rid himself of his unwelcome pursuer. The pipes could be used as a defence. It was on the occasion of a wedding party that he tried his plan of self-preservation. The floor was cleared, the guests assembled, and the dancers waited for the starting-up of the reel. Garry was seated near the door, and when Bridget entered she dropped into a chair by his side. As she turned to speak to him the pipes set up such a droning, groaning screeching that nothing like it had ever been heard before. It seemed as if fifty devils were let loose in the room—some among the rafters of the roof, others up the chimney; others, again in the corners, behind the dresser, under

the tables and chairs. It was a pandemonium of yelling noises, with, running through them, a deep, beating sound, like the striking of a great drum. The whole company jumped to their feet, dazed and scared. Those hardest of hearing held their hands to their ears. Then a stampede was made for the door, and Garry was left alone in the empty kitchen. The plan had succeeded. A second time only had the piper to repeat the experiment, and he was freed for ever from the unwelcome attentions of Bridget Malone.

It is only when we come near to losing any good that we appreciate its value to the full. Garry Higgins had never enjoyed or understood his freedom as he did after the time when it was almost taken from him. He laughed to himself with sheer contentment as he walked along the road, knowing that he might go whither he would and do what he liked without the interference of any living person. The pipes, his one constant companion, had become all the dearer on account of the part they had taken in saving him. They were all he wanted in the world, they and the share of food that was his at whatever house he called. Garry

could not have lived bound by ties or trammels of any kind, for at heart he was a rover. The open countryside was his home, and he loved alike the sun, the rain, the blowing breeze. Had there been any check upon his life, he could not have played as he did. It was this complete liberty and constant intercourse with Nature that gave the tone to his music. His way of playing was not such as is found in the taught musician. No Joachim, no Isaie, could bring into their music the freedom, the abandonment, with which Garry played. These are gifts that belong only to the wandering musician, and they must pass away with him.

So Garry Higgins continued playing up and down the countryside, delighting his hearers with his music, and prolonging a little by his hereditary talent the ancient traditions of the O'Higginses.

V

THE OLD-TIME WOMAN

BIDDY was very old—so old, indeed, that no one's recollections could approach hers in that far-away past where her thoughts mostly dwelt. On her last birthday she was ninety-six, but to see her you would never give her that age—youth seemed to linger so about her still. She had been a fine, tall, handsome woman once, and though stricken by sorrow through the years and with time's burden weighing on her shoulders, she still could draw herself up half a head over many of her juniors. The neatly-kept hair, which she wore parted and drawn down on either side of her forehead, was black and glossy still; a few grey hairs only had made their appearance, and these, as though half ashamed of their intrusion, hid themselves among their darker brethren. The various changes of fashion which unfortunately had

begun to find their way into the remote spot where Biddy lived affected in no wise her own dress. She always wore a dark-red petticoat, well pleated and descending just a little below her ankles; another, newer and of slightly finer texture, was reserved for Sundays and holy-days. Her dark-blue or red flannel jacket showed at the neck a piece of fresh white linen, and a black-and-red knitted crossover kept the cold from her shoulders. When she went to Mass, and on the rare occasions when she went into the county town, Biddy wore a large black hooded cloak, that covered her whole person. This was a treasured possession, for it had been her mother's before her, and had been given to Biddy on her wedding-day. A snow-white frilled cap, with the strings tied underneath her chin, completed the attire, and within it was Biddy's bright fresh face; for the hand of Time had dealt kindly with her complexion, and many a young girl in the parish envied the bloom on her cheeks.

"Sure, she'll never die at all," her neighbour, Mrs. Finegan, remarked. "She's something curious altogether. My own poor old mother—the Lord have mercy on her!—was seventy-eight

when she was taken, and Biddy's just a young slip beside her."

And certainly Biddy seemed to defy age. Every Sunday morning—hail, storm, or rain—she tramped the good half-mile of road that lay between her door and the church, and even up the steep path to its entrance she footed it briskly, aided by a stout blackthorn that Thady Conor, with great tact and diplomacy, had prevailed upon her to use.

Biddy's little cottage was wonderfully spick and span. The only complaint Nora Caffrey, her dead husband's grand-niece, who for the last ten years had been "minding Biddy," ever made was that her aunt was "horrid particular over a bit of dirt you'd hardly see with a telescope. She's the quietest, easiest body in the world, and there's never a cross word out of her; but if the ashes fall about the floor, or if the chickens hop on to the dresser, it is real angry she does be."

This same dresser supported a row of handsome pewter plates, some lustre jugs, and a few dishes of stone china. For generations these things had been heirlooms in Biddy's family, and when one day two ladies and a gentleman

found their way to the cottage, and, lost in admiration over these old pieces, had offered any money for them, Biddy had scouted the idea of selling them with scorn.

"I'm regretful to disoblige your honours," she said, "but as for parting with them things, it 'ud be like giving my heart's blood. They've been under my eyes a'most since the day I was born, and belonged to my mother and grandmother afore me. Indeed, I often heard my mother say that it's hundreds of years they've been in the family."

The visitors retreated somewhat abashed, but Biddy followed them out to the door with her innate courtesy.

"Sure, it's sorry I am not to content your ladyships, and if there's any other thing you'd have a liking for it's yours this minute."

But there was nothing else of any value in the cottage except, perhaps, Biddy herself. And so the china and the pewter remained to ornament the little kitchen and await the day when they would be left in legacy to Nora Caffrey, or to whomsoever Biddy deemed the most worthy of possessing her treasures.

Biddy was a notable personality in her small

world, and was treated with marked respect by all the neighbours. There were many reasons for this. In the first place, she had lived so much longer than anyone else, and could talk of the times before most living people were born. The historical horrors of the famine were to her stern realities; she had seen and heard the great O'Connell, and the men of '48 had been to her familiar figures. Then, Biddy was a saint in the estimation of her neighbours. She was never cross or crabbed, as old people are apt to be, but had a smile and a good word for everyone, and never had she been heard to complain of her many troubles. She was "great, too, at her prayers." Her old, well-worn brown beads seldom left her hands day or night, except when she was knitting or spinning, and when she was not talking to someone there was a prayer on her lips.

"It's Biddy's beads have the good time," remarked Nora Caffrey one day to Pat Hanlon. "There she'll be sitting, sometimes an hour or two on end, with them passing through her fingers, and never minding a ha'porth about her; and at night, when she's asleep, don't I hear her still at the Hail Mary!"

However, it was hardly surprising that Biddy's beads should occupy so much of her time. Whenever any calamity, either great or small, befell one of the neighbours, the first thing was to have immediate recourse to "Biddy's beads." If one of the little Finegans were sick, or if Mrs. Finegan's pet white hen had strayed, it was:

"Nannie, run in to old Biddy and get her to say a round of the beads."

Some days it would happen that she had quite a number on hand.

"Och, then, alanna, and is it another round you're coming for, and me with so many to say already that they'll last me the day and the night? I promise to say it the first thing in the morning."

Biddy was not in any degree elated that her prayers should be esteemed so highly. She explained it all in a simple and matter-of-fact way.

"For what's an old creature like me for but to be praying? I'm good for nothing else. If it wasn't for the prayers I'm given to say I'd a'most think God had forgotten me entirely down here. And small blame to Him, either,

seeing I'm of no great consequence, and Him having so many to be minding. Then, them that are busy haven't the time to be praying, and must get someone else to be doing it for them."

In spite of her good nature and amiability Biddy could speak out strongly when she thought the occasion demanded it, as she did once to Bessie Hanlon, who came one day to pay her a visit. Bessie, until she was fifteen, had run about short-skirted, bare-headed, and bare-legged, looking after her small brothers and sisters. Then she received the offer of a situation in Dublin, and went off in a great deal of excitement at the prospect of the new world before her and some small regret at leaving Mickey and Tom—for Bridget, the next girl, was only twelve, and not very sensible. One fine morning Biddy was sitting outside her doorway, spinning in the sunshine. As she worked, a shadow fell across her. She looked up and beheld a fine young woman, with a trailing skirt and a hat of many plumes.

"Good-morning to you, ma'am," said Biddy politely.

"Sure, don't you know me, Biddy?" ex-

claimed a familiar voice. "Why, I'm Bessie Hanlon, who went to Dublin three years ago."

"Bessie Hanlon, is it?" and Biddy stared at the new-comer. "Well, I'd never have thought that. What's come over you at all for the little Bessie I used to know?"

"Nothing's come over me; but I've grown, I suppose; and, then, I put on the new clothes I got in Dublin."

"Well, it's the queer clothes they are entirely. And is that the way they dress in Dublin?"

"It is so—just the latest!" exclaimed Bessie with pride, turning herself round so that Biddy might have a complete view of her garments. "All the skirts do be streeling on the ground, and big feathers in the hats. Sure, you'd feel yourself a show if you went in the streets any other way."

"It's more of a show, to my mind, you're looking like that, alanna. What reason or sense at all is there in them streeling things? Is it the dirt of the parish you want to be collecting when you go out with them sweeping the road? And as for that hat, it's for all the world like the top of Mr. Lawler's hearse. It's ashamed I'd be to be seen in such a get-up."

Bessie felt decidedly crestfallen at this criticism on the smart clothes she had put on with such pride that morning, but she determined to make at least one effort at defending them.

"It's because you're not used to them, Biddy; that's why you think they're queer. This is such a backward sort of place that there's no way of seeing anything. Even down beyant, at Mrs. Morrisson's shop in the town, that I used to think so grand before I went, why, it's only last year's fashions they have."

"Fashions may be good enough in their way," returned Biddy, "and I wouldn't be for saying anything again' them in themselves, though I like the old ones best. But what's suitable to one isn't to another. I don't see what good it's to you to wear those outlandish things. When I was young a well-minded skirt and clean apron was enough for any decent girl, with a good shawl to throw over her head when she went to Mass or out on a wet day. What will you do with your fine hat when there's wind? It'll be blown off your head from this across to the town. I don't know what girls are coming to at all nowa-

days, disfiguring themselves with nonsense, let alone the lashings of good money they put into it."

"She did not like them at all," Bessie remarked later to her mother, "and thought I'd no call to be wearing them."

"She's right there," said Mrs. Hanlon, "and it's Biddy has the sense."

Never a day passed but several visitors dropped into the little cottage. The mothers, when their house-work was over, often came in with their knitting; and sometimes, if they were busy, they sent in the younger children for Biddy to mind. On their way back from work the men stopped to exchange a word with the old woman. Biddy's advice, especially in matrimonial affairs, was much sought after, and many a young girl came for consolation when Tom, Larry, or Ned had been "a bit contrairy," and she seldom failed to carry away some comfort, for Biddy had plenty of shrewd common-sense and understood human nature well. On Sunday evenings there was often quite a gathering round the hearth, and Biddy would be asked to tell something of the old days. This she did willingly, for the memories

of the past were more real to her than the facts of the present.

Biddy had suffered quite her share of this world's troubles. Married at eighteen to a "quiet, decent man," who owned a little place in Tipperary, she had left her native county of Waterford to go to her new home. Six dark-eyed, bright-faced, sturdy children by degrees made their appearance, and the young wife had her hands full. The first trouble came in connection with Andy, the youngest boy.

"He was the beautifullest child you could lay a sight on. Big blue eyes, the size of tea-saucers, and brown curls all over his head, and so good and wise. Sometimes I'd think he couldn't be all right, he was that cute and sensible. There was a Mrs. Connolly, the other side of the road, who had the great fancy for him. One day she was going to a fair, eight miles off, and, right or wrong, she wanted to take Andy along with her; she said she'd be that lonesome driving by herself. I was loath to let the child go—it was a sort of presentiment I had—but I didn't like to be bad-natured, and Andy went. It seemed a long day

without him, and to make the time pass I mixed up a potato-cake, a thing he was real fond of, to have hot and ready when he came back. It grew dark at last, and I felt uneasy. Then I heard the ass-cart, and I went out on the road. There was a crowd gathered, and a great deal of talking and crying. My heart stopped beating with fright. Then my husband, who'd ran on afore, came back with my darling Andy stiff and cold in his arms. He'd been run over by a dray at the fair. After that I'd like to die, and not a bit or a sup crossed my lips for three days, and whene'er I looked at a potato-cake my heart near broke."

As the years passed two or three more of the merry troop went to join Andy. Rosie caught a bad cold one winter, which turned to consumption, and she faded away in the spring. Michael, the eldest boy, who had devoted himself to the care of his sister, never regained his spirits after her death, and within a year followed her, struck down by the same disease. It seemed a sad and empty house now to poor Biddy, and there was a great void in her warm, capacious heart, for the three she had left could not make up for those who

were gone. Then came the terrible years of the famine, when the country was devastated in its length and breadth, and no home but had its tale of sorrow. The air was heavy with the scent of the decaying potatoes; and here and there the crops were left standing in the fields, with no one to put a hand to the reaping, while many dead and dying lay on the roadside. Two of Biddy's children succumbed, and their father followed. How the poor mother lived through it all it is hard to say, for she stinted herself in everything. She made play at eating her own portion of the scanty fare, which, when the others were not looking, she hid away, to be added to the general stock for the next meal. Weary months followed, and Biddy and the one child left to her struggled on till brighter days dawned. Thousands around them left the country to seek their fortunes in another land, but Willie and his mother clung to the little homestead, and at last saw with hope the tops of potato green coming up again through the earth. They had been living comfortably for a year or two when one day Willie announced his intention of looking out for a wife. Biddy

was pleased that he should, and when Mary Anne Fitzpatrick, a girl who had always been her favourite, was chosen, she was glad indeed, and began to look forward to the time when children's voices should again sound in the cottage, and when the new generation might partly allay the aching of her heart. But this happiness was not destined for her. Just a week before the marriage-day Willie was badly kicked by one of the horses he was minding, and never recovered. So a funeral took the place of the expected wedding, and Biddy was left utterly alone. She would not remain in the neighbourhood that contained so many sad memories, but preferred to return to the scenes of her childhood, where her own people had lived. The little farm was given up, and part of the furniture sold; a few special possessions only did Biddy retain, "just to give a bit of homelikeness to the new house."

In a little cottage near the village where she was born she settled down to her new life. Though all she cared for had been taken from her, Biddy bravely faced the future. She made herself a living by her spinning, her knitting, and her chickens; for she had no wish to be

a burden to anyone. Several friends of her childhood still lived in the neighbourhood, and they welcomed her warmly, offering her all the help that lay in their power; but their friendship was all she asked of them. And so the years crept on, till at last Biddy began to grow very old and somewhat feeble. Then it was that Nora Caffrey appeared and took up the self-imposed task of minding the old woman. That was more than ten years ago, and Biddy was still so hale and hearty, and seemed to have so little intention of relinquishing her place in this world, that Nora often declared it was more than probable that she herself would be taken first. Had it not been for an unexpected and unfortunate accident, in all likelihood Biddy would have accomplished more than her hundred years; for when the last summer of her long life dawned illness and death seemed very far from her.

On the last Sunday in June it was announced in the church that a mission was to be held in the parish, and that it would open that day fortnight. This announcement caused a wave of excitement to sweep over the neighbourhood, and many preparations were taken in hand.

The best Sunday clothes were brought out and set in order, and a few quite superfluous articles were got from the town, for it was essential that all the people should appear in their best. Then the houses had to be thoroughly cleaned and "readied against the mission," and a little whitewash dashed over the outside walls. It was well also to make use of this opportunity to mend the holes in the roof where the thatch had given way. In fact, it seemed necessary that the houses and attire of the parishioners should be as much renovated as they hoped their souls would be.

The tenth of July broke out a glorious morning, and the crowds wended their way up the hillside to the parish church. Every available spot was occupied, and some less fortunate people had to content themselves standing outside. Biddy was among the number who had secured places well to the front and missed nothing of the morning's ceremonies, and afterwards had a great deal to say about them.

"Och, then, it was grand! I never heard the likes of such preaching, and the great words the missioner used, just as if he was reading out of a book. 'Twas the saint's face he had on

him, too, with the light of Heaven shining out of his two eyes."

All through the week that followed Biddy was an assiduous frequenter of the mission devotions, for the neighbours around managed to make a place for her in their donkey-carts, and one or other always stopped at the door to pick her up. She stood each day ready waiting in her doorway, the large black cloak about her and the brown beads twisted round one wrist. On the last day of the mission Biddy had been greatly troubled as to how she was to procure a wax candle to take up with her to the church, to be lighted during the closing ceremony. Nora had suggested buying one at the mission stall, but this idea did not satisfy the old woman.

"Those are only ordinary candles," she said. "It's one of real yellow wax I'd like to have. Wasn't that what the missioner said—'A lighted wax candle in the hand of every one of you to-night?'"

It was useless to tell Biddy that the candles at the stall were there especially for the purpose. No, no! she must have real wax or nothing. At last, after many fruitless suggestions, Nora

said she would walk up to the "big house," and perhaps one of Biddy's friends there could send her what she wanted. The quest was successful, and a great long yellow taper was handed to the old woman.

"Sure, I'm made up altogether, Nora," she cried delightedly; "it'll be the grandest one of them all."

And so it was. When the neighbours who passed her on the road noticed and admired the candle, Biddy's pride and contentment were complete.

It was late when the evening's devotions were over, and in the rush to the door Nora got separated from her aunt. Outside it was very dark, so she waited near the entrance till the old woman should come out. Not seeing her, she went again into the church, and, after looking in vain, felt sure she must have already started for home with the neighbours who had promised her a lift. So Nora hurried back, and busied herself in preparing some supper. When nearly an hour had elapsed, she began to grow anxious and ran into the Finegans' to inquire whether they had seen Biddy, but they had not. Then Nora and two of the boys went along the road

towards the church, thinking that perhaps she had missed the others, and might be coming back alone. They had gone about halfway when the youngest Finegan called out that he saw something in the ditch below. They all jumped down, and there found Biddy lying. At first they feared she was dead, but when they raised her up she groaned feebly. Back they carried her to the cottage, and sent for the doctor, who came with the first streaks of dawn. Her hip-bone was badly broken, and, owing to her great age, it would not set, and so it was a mere question of time how long she would linger on. The first days, during the intervals of consciousness, Biddy suffered a great deal, but after a week or two the pain abated. Still, she could not turn without assistance, nor could she ever leave her bed again,

"Sure, it might have been worse," she said resignedly, "and, anyways, didn't I see out the end of the mission?"

For nearly three months Biddy resisted the approaching hand of Death, and it was a weary time, for all her life she had been active and alert, and now could only lie quite still. Sometimes her mind wandered, and she imagined

herself back in the old days, with all the children about her. She seemed to see them, and often carried on conversations with an invisible Pat, Michael, or Rosie. Then, at other times she thought it was the days of the famine, and absolutely refused to take the food they brought her.

"Is it what's for the children you want me to eat? Why, it's starving they are, the creatures. No, I won't touch a bit of it. Take it away." While this phase lasted nothing could prevail on her to swallow a morsel.

It was on one of the early days in October that Biddy died. Her mind had grown quite clear, and she understood everything that went on around her. One matter only troubled her—in fact, it was the only thought pertaining to earth that remained with her—the funeral.

"I'd like to have it just a bit nice; and perhaps some of the boys would carry me, for it's a queer sort of fancy I have against them big black hearses. None of my own were buried that way, and I'd be loath to be the first of them."

The question as to where she was to be buried had occupied Biddy's mind some time

previously. Her husband and the children were all lying far away in another county, and she wondered whether she should not make beside them her last resting-place. But her own family, for many generations, were buried in the graveyard of this, her native, parish, and in the end she determined to join them.

The people were coming backwards and forwards all day, for the intelligence of the old woman's precarious state had spread quickly through the neighbourhood, and not one of her many friends but came to inquire. She had been lying still, and apparently sleeping, all the afternoon, and it was thought she would slip away quietly, without waking again. But suddenly, as the day began to wane, the life returned to her face. She half raised herself in bed with outstretched arms, and lifted her eyes up to the blackened rafters above.

"Och, children darlints," she cried out, in a clear, strong voice, "is it come to fetch me ye are? Every one of ye, too—Michael, Rosie, Kate, Andy, and all. Sure, it's ready I am to join you this minute. Haven't I been waiting these years and years? Blessed Mother, I am coming."

Biddy sank back upon the pillows. Her spirit had gone to join the much-loved children at last.

Two afternoons later a modest funeral wound its way up the hillside. The "boys" of the parish carried the coffin, two or three relays of them taking their turn in supporting the burden, and all that was left of the old woman was buried among her own. For a long time Biddy was missed in her small sphere, for the place she left vacant could not be filled again. She was a woman of the "old time," a representative of a vanishing type that modern manners and customs will never fashion. In the next generation there will be no Biddys.

VI

THE BEE-FANCIER

It was a very small holding, only three acres of land on the edge of the bog. The land could not be said to be of the best quality, and long ago must have formed part of the bog itself. Even now it required considerable care and attention, constant digging and manuring, to induce it to grow potatoes, cabbage, and a little corn, in the place of rank grass and weeds. Still, indifferent though it was, this little plot represented a great deal to Martin Halvey, for it was his own. His forefathers had lived on the place for many generations as tenants. When Martin, as a young man, succeeded, he bought it out, under one of the early Land Acts. Since then he and his sister Anne had dwelt there together. Had they depended merely on their small property, it might have fared hardly with them when seasons were bad.

But Martin was a carpenter, and his work easily supplied the shortcomings of the income. It was a misfortune in his childhood that had compelled Martin Halvey to be taught a trade. As a small boy he had rheumatic fever, and when he recovered it was found that the sinews of his right leg were contracted, and he had become a hopeless cripple. Thus incapacitated from field-work, it was necessary that he should have some other means of earning his livelihood. His father, therefore, apprenticed him to the local carpenter, and it was not long before he showed how apt he was. Later on, when the master, who was growing old, could no longer do his share of the work, his apprentice added it to his own. Then, when the old man died, Martin Halvey took his place as carpenter of the district.

Up against the side of his cottage Martin had built a shed, which served as a workshop. Here, surrounded by his tools, by cart-wheels, gates, and whatever things he was engaged in making, he spent the greater part of the day. While he worked he usually sang or whistled, for his infirmity had in no wise made him melancholy. On the contrary, he was a most

cheerful person, and had seldom or never known what it was to feel depressed. Through all the surrounding district he was a notable personality and a familiar figure to everyone. He had never discarded the old-fashioned dress of his fathers, and which he was accustomed to see in early days, for the modern readymade reach-me-down. A bottle-green, swallow-tailed coat, white corduroy breeches, and a soft wide-brimmed felt hat constituted Martin's Sunday costume; while on weekdays he wore a thick grey homespun frieze. His status as a landed proprietor, too, had much to say to the consideration in which he was held in the neighbourhood, and of this he was well aware. Martin liked himself to attend the local fairs, and never entrusted to his sister the buying and selling of their pigs. When Anne had a dozen chickens to take to the market, and proposed to select the *bonnuvs* and bring them back, her brother never agreed.

"Women are no judges of pigs," he declared, "whatever they may know about chickens."

So, whether Anne went to the market or not, he always insisted on going himself. There was another matter, too, about which Martin

was even more particular than he was over his pigs, and that was his bees. No one, under any pretext whatever, would he allow to interfere with them. Not, indeed, that there was much difficulty in reserving his personal control, for few, if any, of his neighbours were desirous of approaching them. In a sheltered nook at the back of the house, just near the edge of the fir-wood, the hives were established. It was long ago, soon after he had bought out the little place, that Martin developed what his sister called "that queer and contrairy taste."

"Sure, hadn't he enough, with the few acres of land, the workshop, and the pigs, to fill up any man's time, without going out of his way to bring these creatures into the place? Or, if he had that fancy for strange beasts, let him get pigeons or doves: they are harmless enough."

Anne stood in considerable awe of her brother, and, as a rule, never gainsaid him in aught; but on this occasion her feelings were too strong—she had to speak out. Her expostulations, however, were useless. Martin proved obdurate in his determination to keep the bees. The only consolation he vouchsafed to his

sister was: "If you'll leave them alone, Anne, they'll leave you."

"Do you think I'd go within a mile of them if I could help it?" was her only answer.

Occasionally, during the spring and summer months, a bee or two flew into the kitchen, to the great discomfort of Anne Halvey. When her brother was present, she tried to hide her annoyance and endure it passively; but when he was absent, she would not tolerate the insect, but did her best to hunt it away, chasing it round and round with a flapping duster. Once while she was thus engaged in wild pursuit Martin unexpectedly came in.

"Is it to get stung yourself you want?" he exclaimed, "for you're going the right way about it."

Anne was hot and cross.

"I want to get rid of your horrible bee. Hasn't it been buzzing round here this last half-hour, enough to annoy a saint!"

"What harm does it do? Don't mind it, for it will do you no injury."

"And would you have me let it settle on my head, or walk over my face maybe?"

It was in vain for Martin to explain that bees

rarely sting unless provoked. His sister had her own fixed opinion on their ways, and nothing could make her change.

At first Martin Halvey housed his bees in primitive straw skeps, and, though they were successful, it always went to his heart when he had to smother the swarm in order to take the honey. Chance, however, at last brought to his knowledge better methods. He was engaged to do some carpentry in a neighbouring country-place. The lady of the house was a bee-fancier, like himself, and they quickly fraternized. She introduced Martin to the modern way of bee-culture, and showed him her beautiful section hives. When the carpenter had finished his work, she made him a present of a wooden hive, and he carried it away in triumph. He put it up in his garden, and comfortably lodged in it a swarm from one of his old hives. Anxious to make a return to the giver of this new treasure, Martin awaited the moment when the first new colony of bees should leave the wooden hive. He then collected them carefully into a skep, and, covering it with a cloth, lifted it into his donkey-cart. To keep the bees secure, he placed a

board across, and on this he sat. Arrived at his destination, Martin asked for his benefactress, saying he had brought her the first swarm from his new hive. Together they went out to the apiary, Martin carefully carrying the skep. Gently he laid it down, and removed a corner of the cloth. The bees seemed very quiet. He pulled it farther away, and then saw a black motionless mass heaped up upon the plaited straw. All the bees were dead. They had been smothered. Poor Martin was very unhappy, and it was a long time before he could console himself.

By degrees Martin Halvey discarded his old skeps, replacing them by a fine row of wooden hives. But this improved arrangement did not continue to satisfy him. After a little time his inventive genius carried him on to other improvements. He determined to build a house for his bees. Once engaged on this, all other work was cast aside. No matter how many people came with carts to be mended and other things to be made, Martin sent them all away.

"I've work of my own to attend to for the next week or so, and I can't be giving heed to anything else."

When the house was finished, it certainly did credit to the designer's ingenuity. Even Anne, as she looked at it from across the whole length of the cabbage garden, had to admire. Constructed on the pattern of a large sentinel box, it stood on four legs, and was closed by a door. Inside partitions divided every hive, while without there was a separate entrance for the bees into each. Glass doors lining the sides of the house enclosed the partitions. Here, seated on a little wooden bench and protected from all kinds of weather, Martin was able to study his bees undisturbed. Through the glass he watched his colonies; he could open each division, examine the honey, and handle the insects, as he pleased. It was wonderful the way he was able to manipulate them. He took them up in handfuls, sorted and studied them without any hesitation or fear, disdaining all protection from veils or gloves. The bees did not seem to resent this treatment, for they never stung him. Perhaps they knew and trusted him, or perhaps he possessed some occult power which kept them under control. There was nothing in the manners and customs of his little colony that Martin Halvey did not

know. He understood the way of life of his bees, what they liked and what they did not like, and their rules of government. In his way he was a kind of Maeterlinck, and might have written a "History of the Bee," with philosophical interpretations of his own. They would have differed from those of the Belgian writer, but they would have been entertaining and original.

The most important part of the year for Martin Halvey was swarming time—more important even than the harvest itself. Poor Anne dreaded it, for all her household arrangements were then upset, the workshop was neglected, and she never knew when her brother would appear for his meals. Then, as she knew to her cost, the place outside was filled with swarming, angry bees, and she could not with safety put her nose beyond the door. In spite of his crippled leg, Martin followed in pursuit of the departing swarms, and often climbed a ladder when the bees inconsiderately installed themselves on the high branch of a fir-tree. There was one boy in the neighbourhood upon whom Martin had prevailed to assist him in these operations, for it was necessary to

have somebody to hold the skeps into which the insects were brushed. Little Patsey Kay did not altogether relish the business, and it was only the promise of giving him some tempting thing from the workshop that ever induced the boy to render his assistance.

The gaining of the honey was to Halvey a very minor consideration in comparison to the interest of the bees in themselves. When there was a large store he collected it, and put aside a share for the winter feeding of the bees. Anne could take what she liked of the rest; but as neither she nor her brother cared much for sweet things, she reserved only enough to cure the possible colds they might catch during the coming winter. To the neighbours who wished for it Martin gave whatever honey they cared to take away. If any sections were over, Anne, who was a thrifty soul, exchanged them for groceries in the general goods store of the county town.

When Martin was nearing fifty years of age an incident occurred which bade fair to change the whole tenor of his way of life. From the day when they had started housekeeping together, it had never entered the mind of

either of the Halveys that any alteration could come into their existence. Anne would always mind the house and its precincts, while Martin occupied himself with his workshop, his field, and his bees. Anne Halvey had often thought it out in her own mind—how they would both grow old together, she looking after her brother always and letting him want for nothing. Then, when the time came, she would be taken first. Martin was her junior by several years; hence it was unlikely that she would outlive him. It was at this point of her meditations that Anne grew worried. How would her brother Martin be able to manage by himself? He would be lost altogether without her, she felt sure; for he was not the kind of man to keep himself comfortably. Perhaps some old woman might come and tidy up the house from time to time. But with this thought Anne felt her soul rise up within her. The idea of any other woman, no matter how old, coming into the house where she had reigned, and interfering with things that had been her own, even after she should be gone, was more than she could bear. After all, Martin was very handy, she began now to

think, and he might manage for the short time he would be alone ; and surely a stranger about him would but worry him. With this thought Anne Halvey sought to put her mind at rest, but she was not always successful.

Such was the future Anne had looked forward to ever since her parents had died, and she and Martin had only themselves to consider in the world. Never had it even crossed her mind that she might ever marry, and her brother had absorbed all her thought and care ever since the time he had become a cripple. As for Martin, the question of the future had never disturbed his mind at all. He lived from day to day engrossed in his own pursuits. When, therefore, Anne noticed a change in her brother—a certain restlessness, a shortness of temper, a moody discontent, and an evident desire to be left alone, such as she had never seen in him before—she became alarmed. Sisters who live with unmarried brothers are generally the most jealous of women. The very insecurity of their position sharpens their perceptions, so that they are quick to detect the first signs of an influence other than their own creeping into their brothers' lives. Anne

had never expected the possibility of such an influence, but when she noticed this alteration in Martin her suspicions were aroused. Some person or thing was evidently occupying his thoughts. Why else had he become so restless, so irritable, so reticent? She would make no delay in finding out. Martin was quite unconscious of his sister's suspicions. On the one hand, he was too much absorbed in his own new emotions to observe outside things; on the other, he was so accustomed to be the chief consideration of the little home, to have his wishes always deferred to by Anne, that it never struck him to wonder what her point of view might be with regard to any of his actions. If he thought of her at all in that connection, it was merely as of someone who would be pleased at whatever he chose to do.

A new influence had indeed come into the life of Martin Halvey. He had been engaged to make wooden gates for the Kennedys, farmers who lived some few miles away. The first morning, while working in a corner of the yard, Bride Kennedy, the farmer's only daughter, came out to feed the chickens and collect the

eggs from the hen-house. Martin knew the girl well by sight, for he had often seen her with her parents going into the church to Mass on Sundays. But he had never spoken with her; nor, indeed, except when he saw her, did the thought of her ever cross his mind. Now, as he sat whistling an old air over his work, Bride accosted him:

"A fine morning, Mr. Halvey."

"It is, thanks be to God!" replied Martin, and he looked up. For the first time, his eyes met those of Bride Kennedy—grey-blue eyes, shaded by long dark lashes. Her head was uncovered, and strands of her black hair were blown about in the breeze. Bride's cheeks were bright and matched the red petticoat she wore. Across her shoulders hung an old shawl. Looking at her thus, standing in the sunlight, Martin thought he had never seen anything so beautiful. His heart beat fast, and the words seemed to stick in his throat, so that he could not speak. What had come over him at all? Never in his life had he felt so queer a sensation. He continued to stare at Bride, unable to draw his eyes away. The girl laughed, disclosing her even teeth.

"You'll know me when you see me again, anyways," she said.

Abashed by these words, Martin withdrew his gaze and bent his head again over his work.

"You're a great carpenter, Mr. Halvey. My father does be saying your gates are grand."

His power of speech now returned to Martin.

"Sure," he answered, "it's only because I'm at it so long. I've been making gates nearly since I can remember."

"That won't be so very long ago," said Bride. Then, looking at him critically, she added: "You can't be so old."

"I'm forty-seven."

"Well, that's a nice age for a man. But I must be going to see after the hens. It's likely you'll be here to-morrow again"; and with a nod the girl went off to the fowl-house.

That evening, when Martin Halvey journeyed home behind his grey donkey, the thought of Bride Kennedy accompanied him. It was the first time in his life that the idea of any person had thus occupied his mind. Often he had been absorbed by his bees; occasionally he had been pursued by the plan of some new contrivance

he was making in his workshop. When Anne was ill a few winters ago, he had thought about her a great deal at the time, but that was in a different kind of way. He was anxious on her account, and kept wondering what were the best remedies to cure her. Now it was very strange that he should suddenly begin to think so much about Bride Kennedy, a girl on whom he had never once cast a thought before this day. He did not seek to understand the reason, though in a subconscious way he was puzzled and worried. That evening Martin was unusually silent. He barely answered his sister's questions, and volunteered no information of his own. The next morning Halvey started off to his work very early, leaving Anne to puzzle out as best she could by herself what might be the matter with him.

The work at the Kennedys' farm lasted the whole of the week. Many times every day Bride tripped through the yard, according as the different departments of the homestead demanded her presence. Never did she pass by Martin without stopping to speak a word or two with him. On his side, he grew less shy, and lost the constraint he had first felt towards her.

"You're getting on finely with that job. When I think of the botches other men are! There's not one in this place that could nail a couple of sticks evenly across each other."

Bride's remarks of subtle compliment worked their effect on Martin's mind. He began to wonder now whether he was not a superior man in many ways. Never had he thought about himself before, or compared himself with anyone. Both himself and his life and work he took as they were, without a thought. There was no necessity to take them otherwise. Even with regard to his crippled leg, it had never occurred to Martin to consider that he was handicapped and at a disadvantage. These days, however, brought a change to his mode of thought. He was certainly a clever carpenter, now that he came to think of it. No one in the whole countryside could do the work that he could. He was knowledgeable also in other ways that were not common to everyone. But there was another side to the question. Once Martin thought about himself at all, he had to face his affliction. If his hands were better than those of other men, what about his leg? He was very lame—he was disfigured. For

the first time in his life, the whole horror of his infirmity came upon Halvey. How could he compare himself favourably with other men who held themselves straight, who walked without limping? Poor Martin! his head was in a sad whirl. Never before had he experienced such conflicting emotions. The thought of Bride was always in his mind. How would it be with him when the work he was engaged on was finished, and he was back at home with no chance of seeing her bright face? The days would be very dreary—there was no doubt of it. And what about Bride? Could any girl as tall, as straight, as fine as she look at a crippled man like him? It was not in reason to expect she would. The elation Martin had first felt at Bride's compliments now turned into a kind of despair. Over and over again in his mind he turned the whole question, but no happy solution came to him. Once he thought of asking Anne her opinion. Though she was an old maid, still she could perhaps understand what the feelings of a young girl might be. Then he felt ashamed. Anne would laugh at him for his pains. So Martin completed the last gate for the Kennedys

without being able to determine what he meant to do.

The weeks dragged on after that, and Martin thought to forget his worries in the interest of his bees. Meantime his sister, by dint of much perseverance in putting two and two together, had solved the cause of her brother's depression. At first she could hardly credit it, then she grew indignant. Black looks greeted Martin when he came into the kitchen, and she became as silent as he was himself. It never struck Anne that Bride Kennedy could hesitate if the chance were offered her of marrying Martin.

"The hussy! She's determined to get him. When I was young, girls were not that bold."

Poor Anne! she passed many sleepless nights thinking of the future Mrs. Halvey.

"Here she'll be trapesing in and out and putting the whole place astray. Martin needn't think she'll know how to make him comfortable."

It was the fair-day at Clonard. Martin Halvey had sold his fat pigs, and, with two small sleek *bonnuvs* taking their place in the cart, he drove slowly homewards. A turn in

the road brought him in sight of a cloaked figure. As he drove a little farther he recognized Bride Kennedy. He slowed the donkey as he came beside her, so as to bid her the time of day.

"It seems a long while since you were up at the farm," said Bride, after they had exchanged a few words.

"It's three weeks," said Martin.

"I do be missing you there, for I like to hear the talk of one who is knowledgeable and a scholar, like yourself."

Martin flushed up.

"It's only a poor sort of scholar I am, Bride, but I have a great wish to be reading the papers."

"There aren't so many who have that same liking, anyways. I'd rather have a reading man any day nor one who was only big and strong."

"You don't mean that, surely, Bride?" and Martin looked down at his crooked leg.

"And why wouldn't I?" answered the girl.

For a few minutes Martin was silent. If that was the way it was with her, she would not mind his being a cripple. But there was still

an obstacle. Another matter had been disturbing Martin all this time, as well as the thought of his lameness—his bees. What if Bride objected to the bees? Could he overrule her objection? On the other hand, could he ever bring himself to part with his hives? Suddenly he looked up.

"Have you a liking for bees?"

"For bees!" the girl cried, astonished at the question. "Sure, I never thought about them. But, indeed, I eat a bit of honey whenever I get a chance."

"Would you mind living near a hive?"

"I don't say that I would."

Martin needed to hear no more. He hit the donkey with the end of the rope reins.

"Good-evening to you, Bride. I may be seeing your father by the end of the week."

He was decided at last. He would ask Michael Kennedy to give him Bride. The following Saturday evening, taking advantage of the opportunity when Anne had gone to the village shop, Martin dressed himself in his Sunday clothes, harnessed the donkey, and set off. He felt excited. It was a great step he was taking, a completely new experience he was embark-

ing on; but he was full of hope — hope in the success of his visit, and hope in a happy future with Bride Kennedy sitting by his hearth. He stopped to borrow a piece of tobacco on the way. His own week's supply had run out, and he felt it would be easier to approach the difficult subject sustained by a well-filled pipe.

As Martin took the tobacco from his friend, cut it small, and pressed it into the bowl of his pipe, the latter remarked:

"That's a fine match they're after settling up, beyond at the Kennedys'?"

"At the Kennedys'!" exclaimed Martin. "And who could they be settling up a match for over there?"

"For Bride, to be sure—who else? Didn't you hear? With a strong farmer from the other side of the hill."

"Are you certain sure?"

"Indeed and I am; for hadn't I it from Michael Kennedy's own first cousin herself?"

It took Martin a few minutes to gather his thoughts; then he nodded to his neighbour and drove off. So this was the end of his dream! Bride Kennedy, whom he had already

looked on as his own, was going to marry a strong farmer. What had she meant at all by her words? Why did she say she had a liking for a reading man—that it wasn't strength she cared about, but skill and scholarship? Had she been making sport of him all the time? Martin could not understand it. He had lived his own life so much apart that he knew little or nothing of girls and their ways. What was the sense in her talking to him as she did, in her telling him how much she thought of him, of how she missed him, if it did not mean she was willing to marry him? Poor Martin! it was a sad awakening. The knowledge that taught him his inexperience was bought very dear. One thing only brought him any comfort, and in that, though he did not know it, he was deceived. He imagined that his sister was unaware of the mistake he had made.

That same evening Anne also learnt the news at the shop, and she came home with a light heart. So she was to retain her rights undisputed over her brother after all. No stranger would come to usurp her place. Martin's attempt at marrying had proved such a failure, it was unlikely he would take such

foolish fancies into his head again. But at the same time Anne was too much of a woman not to resent Bride Kennedy's action. She felt angrier with her for slighting her brother than she had felt when she thought the girl was pursuing him. Still, the relief soon outweighed every other consideration. The brother and sister were very silent over their supper; Martin was too depressed to speak, and when Anne's eye turned on him he felt ashamed. Anne Halvey had only one thought in her mind: "Thank God, Bride Kennedy will never wet my brother's tea." If she had spoken she must have said that, for she could not have kept the words back. So it was better to say nothing. The meal was soon finished. Martin hurried out to his bees, and Anne began to tidy up the kitchen for the night.

The years passed quietly, and the two Halveys grew old together. When Martin found he was unable to do much work, he gave nearly all his time and attention to his bees. At last Anne died, and the brother was left alone. He did not, as his sister had half-dreaded, engage any woman to manage for him. What he could do he did himself; the rest he left undone.

Seldom did he leave the precincts of his little place. The neighbours said he had grown queer, for he was often heard talking to himself by the passers-by. Even the bees were neglected at last, as he became unable to collect the honey for their winter feeding. One day the house door remained closed. A neighbour wrenched the latch and walked in. Martin was sitting dead in his chair by the burnt-out embers on the kitchen hearth. Outside a few bees still lingered in one hive.

VII

THE FAIRY DOCTOR

It was strange that anyone should have built a dwelling in so lonely a spot. The little cottage stood by itself on the bare mountain, far away from any other human habitation. On one side the ground rose rough and stony, narrowing in gradually to form the distant mountain summit. On the other it fell sharply, spreading out lower down, till at last it became part of the cultivated land below. A narrow *bohereen* led up from the highroad to a few houses clustered together in a sheltered hollow on the mountain base, but there it ended. Not even a narrow footpath carried the walker any farther. The way beyond was over rough mountain, by granite boulders, through clumps of heather and stretches of short coarse grass turning here

and there into boggy morass, and then a steep and stony climb. Long ago some thrifty landowner had sought to fatten sheep on this poor soil, and had built a mountain cottage for the shepherd. But the sheep did not fatten. They grew thin, they grew sick, and they died. Then the shepherd was dismissed and the cottage left empty. Since that time seldom or never did anyone pass that way. A tiny ridge of land that had been cultivated to grow with difficulty a few rows of cabbage had gone back to barren mountain, and the four winds of heaven blew without let or hindrance through the two rooms of the little house. Time and weather had also turned the once white walls to a dusky grey, and had thinned the heather roof till in places it let in the wet. Situated thus on its lonely height, with no soil to till and no other house within reach, it was not a dwelling to attract even the most homeless wanderer. When, therefore, one autumn afternoon some schoolboys, climbing over the mountain to look for frockens, noticed a faint column of blue smoke issuing from the cottage, and told afterwards what they had seen, they were not believed. It seemed impossible that anyone

could come to live in such a place. What the boys had seen must have been mountain mist or cloud. But two days later a man passed near-by searching for a lost sheep, and noticed the same thing. Then many people went to look, going up the mountain road, or to a neighbouring hill from where the cottage was visible. All of them saw against the mountain background the pale, thin, rising column. There could be no longer any doubt—the mountain cottage was inhabited. But what manner of person was it who had come thither? Some strange and curious individual, surely, for no ordinary person could have chosen a wretched cottage on a mountain for a dwelling! Speculation became rife in the neighbourhood, and various were the explanations given. Perhaps it was an escaped convict come to hide from the law. Perhaps it was a madman, or one who had relations with another world and did well to live far from human beings. Several days passed before anyone ventured to find out by approaching the cottage who its inhabitant might be. It required some courage to do this, for who could tell what kind of a reception an uninvited visitor would receive? If given time the stranger might

reveal himself, for surely some necessity must bring him down from the mountain. But no, he did not appear. Whoever or whatever he was, this curious person evidently sufficed for himself and had means of living independently of any outside help. As the mystery did not solve itself, at last one afternoon two young men from the village climbed up the mountain, determined to solve it for themselves. They were ready to face the unknown tenant of the deserted cottage. It was a long climb, and before they had reached their destination the sun had already begun to sink behind the hills. The air grew chill, the shadows deepened, and the granite boulders acquired an added grimness.

"It's a queer place for anyone to live in," said one of the climbers. "I'm not one that minds lonesomeness, but this would be altogether too lonesome for me."

"Well," returned the other, "if you had some good cause for to seek lonesomeness, you mightn't mind it so much."

"If I did want it, I couldn't find it in a better place, anyway."

As they approached the cottage the men

noticed that some fresh bits of heather had been woven into the roof in one or two places, and that a piece of sacking filled up a hole in a broken window-pane. The inside door was open and the lower half-door latched across. A large black cat sat balancing itself on the top of the latter. It glared at the two visitors with its luminous green eyes, then arched its back, and with an angry whisk of its tail sprang down and disappeared round a corner of the house. Stepping forward cautiously, the men looked in through the doorway. Two unpainted wooden shelves nailed to the wall and a rickety and now worm-eaten table below had been left by the former tenants. The shelves were bare of any crockery, but on the table lay a tin mug and plate. A few sods of black damp turf smouldered on the open hearth, emitting a volume of smoke, but no blaze. By the hearth stood a small three-legged black pot, containing a dark liquid. Two sacks filled with moss or heather were placed one on the other in the corner farthest from the door. The floor was clean, and had evidently been swept, for a broom made of furze branches stood against the wall. The men examined all there was to be seen.

They had passed into the house, and had turned this way and that in search of a clue that might explain something about the occupier, but nothing they could see made them any the wiser.

"I wonder what is this?" And the elder of the two men pushed a thick twig he had found on the floor into the black pot. He stirred it round, and then raised a twisted dark substance that looked like the root of a plant. Both the men bent to examine the object, and were standing thus stooped when suddenly a curious sensation seized on them both. They felt that they were no longer alone. The root was let fall back into the pot with a splash, the twig dropped, and simultaneously the two turned round. They saw that someone was leaning over the half-door and watching them.

"I hope you're satisfied with what you've found."

The words came low and distinct in a sneering tone. Astonished and shamefaced, the men were unable to say anything. They just stared at the stranger, noting the dark parted hair, the broad face partly in shadow, the long brown hands lying crossed on the top of the half-door.

"I'm asking if you're satisfied with what you've found. It 'ud be a pity if you were not; and you taking the trouble to search another person's house."

One of the men found his voice.

"Sure this used to be nobody's house. It's not a place you'd expect any man to come and live in."

"Well, I'm living in it now, so it's my house; and when I want visitors I can invite them."

Then the door was pushed open, and the stranger stepped into the kitchen. Startled as the men had been at first, they were doubly so now. Whatever they had expected, it was not what they saw. Standing before them was a tall, gaunt figure, with pale face and dark piercing eyes. A black jacket fitted the body, and below it fell a short, thickly pleated skirt. The tenant of the lonely house was no man, but a woman. She eyed them both for a few moments without speaking, and then burst into a mocking laugh.

"Yes, I'm the man of the house," she said, "and you can tell it to anyone who wants to know."

"Well, this is the last thing we ever thought

of!" exclaimed one of the men, when he had recovered from his surprise.

"And why should it be the last thing you thought of? Though why, indeed, you should have thought about it at all I don't know. I'm obliged to you for your visit, and you can go now."

"Sure we don't want to interfere with you, anyways. But surely it's lonesome for you up here by yourself, with no one at hand, and no means of getting anything."

"There do be some people that find their own company is the best; and as for getting things, it depends altogether on the kind of things you want whether you can get them or no."

"Well, might I make so bold as to ask what brought you here? for it's a desolate place enough for a man, let alone for a woman."

"You may ask what you like, but whether you'll get any answer is another matter. Anyway, isn't it enough if I say that I choose to come in it?"

"That's a reason, of course," said the man. Then he looked at his companion.

"I suppose we had better be going."

The other nodded, and they both went out

through the doorway. The stranger followed them.

"You may tell those that sent you that it'll do no good either to them or to me to be trying to find out my business."

The men said nothing to this, and turned away. When they had gone a little distance they stopped and looked back. The strange woman was standing silhouetted against the cottage wall. She was watching them, and the black cat at her feet was rubbing itself against her ankles.

For many days after the visit of the two young men to the mountain cottage the chief topic of conversation at every fireside, in the shop, at the market, at the church gates, before and after Mass, was the strange woman. From where had she come? Who could she be? What was she doing? How did she live? No one was able to answer any of these questions. The account the men gave of their visit deterred even the most curious from making another. Still, it was probable that some day or other the woman would descend from her mountain height. With this expectation all those, whether young or old, who passed

by the road looked up to see if any strange person were coming down the mountain-side.

On a Saturday afternoon some few weeks after the smoke rising from the shepherd's cottage had first made known that it was inhabited, four women were coming back together from the market. As they reached the *bohereen* they stopped, and from mere force of habit looked up.

"I wonder what she's doing at all there beyond. It's no real woman she is, I'm thinking, but just something else that has taken her appearance," said one of them. "But, whatever she is, I'd like to see her. Well, maybe I'll meet her on the way up. Good-night to you all! and God speed your way home!"

The speaker then turned into the lane, and left the others to pursue their own way.

In spite of the eight miles she had already walked, and in spite of the large bundle she carried under her shawl, Mrs. Beirne went quickly. Her home stood in a hollow of the mountain base, with others near it. Before she was in sight of the house two of the children came running down the bohereen to meet her.

"The brown calf is ill," they both cried in

one breath, "and old Martin thinks it's like to die."

This bad news hastened Mrs. Beirne's steps. She almost ran up the steep incline, asking a few questions as she went. Some neighbours had gathered in the yard, and two men could be seen through the doorway of the cowshed. Sympathetic words greeted the woman as she passed. The calf was the finest born in the district during the year. Old Martin Whelan, the most knowledgeable person about all animal ailments in the whole countryside, had tried every remedy he knew of, but none of them had seemed to do any good.

"It's no use tinkering at him any more," said the old man at last. "Just keep an eye on him. I'll come back in an hour."

He then left the shed, and went out through the yard gate, the other people following.

"I'll fetch a sup of spring water, anyways. It might like a drink."

Mrs. Beirne ran to get a can, and hurried to the spring that bubbled up a few yards farther on by the side of the lane. She drew the water, and was lifting up the can, that glittered in the rays of the setting sun, when

suddenly it was darkened by a shadow. She looked up and saw a tall woman standing beside her. For a moment Mrs. Beirne was startled, for there had been no sound of a footfall. Then she said :

"God save you kindly."

"God save you," answered the woman. "What is wrong down in the house beyond?"

"It's a calf that's sick—our own calf, the best we've ever had. And they say as how it won't live."

"Let me see the calf," said the stranger. "It may live after all."

"But we've had the best men of the country with it, and they could do it no good."

She was looking at the woman as she spoke, and noted that she was gaunt, had dark parted hair, wore a black jacket, short skirt, blue worsted stockings, and pampootie shoes. Then she remembered. Surely that was the description the men had given of the dweller they had seen in the house above. What should she do? Bring the stranger with her, or refuse to let her pass the gate? It was not like another she was—that could be seen at the first glance. What was she? A witch in touch with evil

powers, who might bring harm to her children? But had she not answered the greeting? Had she not said, "God save you"? No real witch would use those words. She could not be a witch. What then? A woman with cures? Then the sooner she was brought to the sick beast the better. This chain of reasoning passed rapidly through Mrs. Beirne's head. She hardly seemed to hesitate before she added:

"You can see it if you like, and maybe you'd know of some cure."

The two women then turned down the bohereen, walking silently side by side. The stranger took long strides, but her feet, clothed in the hide-skins, made scarcely any sound as they touched the stony road-surface. At the yard gate Mrs. Beirne turned to her companion.

"I'll just go in and acquaint himself that you're here."

Her husband was still in the shed. Hurriedly she explained to him whom she had brought to cure the calf.

"I don't like the notion of that one coming in here. How do you know she won't put evil

spells on us all? You'd better go back and make some excuse to her."

Though her husband's misgivings had been her own but a few minutes before, Mrs. Beirne had now persuaded herself that the woman was no witch.

"If she is harmful, as you say, she's more likely to work spells on us if we send her away. And as for being harmful, if she was the kind you think she is, it's not saying the Name of God to me she'd have been on the road just now."

"Well," said Beirne, hesitating for a moment, "if that's the way it is, I suppose she can be no witch. Fetch her in; but first send all the children into the house. It'll do no harm to keep them from her, however it is."

Mrs. Beirne sent the children running into the kitchen, shut the door on them, and went to fetch the stranger at the gate. The woman followed her into the shed. She did not answer Beirne's greeting, but went straight up to the calf that lay on a heap of straw. She bent down and gently raised the animal's head. Then she put her hand into her pocket and drew out a skein of white linen. From this she took seven

threads, knotted them at one end, and stuck a large brass pin that was in her jacket through the knot. Still without saying a word, she walked to the door and drove the point of the pin into the wood. With deft fingers she twisted the seven threads into a peculiar kind of plait. The two Beirnes watched her wonderingly, but without daring to ask a question. When the plait was finished the stranger made on it three knots at even distances one from the other. As she did so she murmured words, her voice rising and falling in a kind of chant. What she said could not be understood by the listeners, nor could they tell whether it was in a strange language or not. The woman removed the pin and replaced it in her jacket, then returned to the calf, holding the twisted skein in her hand. She knelt down on the straw and wound the linen threads round and round the left leg of the beast, repeating at the same time words in whispered tones. Then she rose and turned to the other two.

"You may leave it now, for it'll sleep. To-morrow I'll come down this way and bring it something to drink."

"We're greatly obliged to you," said Mrs.

Beirne. She was much impressed by what she had seen, and longed to question the strange woman. But the latter showed no inclination for conversation, and walked out into the yard. Mrs. Beirne stepped quickly after her. Curiosity as well as gratitude made her regardless of her husband's injunction.

"Won't you come into the house and take something before you go?"

"I won't go in, but if you give me a few potatoes, and maybe a bit of bread, I'll carry them with me."

Mrs. Beirne went into the kitchen, and returned holding a filled cloth in her hands.

"You can take the cloth with you and bring it back to-morrow."

"No," said the stranger; "I won't take the cloth."

She drew from her pocket a blue handkerchief, and spread it out on the ground at her feet. She opened the cloth and transferred the potatoes and bread from it to her own.

"And the bit of bacon—aren't you going to take it?" asked Mrs. Beirne.

"No," said the other; "I won't take the meat."

She knotted the corners of her handkerchief together, said no word, but turned on her heel and walked swiftly away with her long stride and her soundless footfall.

The calf lived through the night. Every hour or so Beirne went to see how it fared, but he did not touch it or give it anything. As he crossed the yard at dawn he thought he saw in the half-light a dark figure passing out of the gate. Then, in the shed, he found a little bottle lying in the straw. Evidently the strange woman had come early to administer the lotion she had promised.

It did not take long for the story of the curing of the Beirnes' calf to become known all through the neighbourhood. Everyone was anxious to hear it, and to tell it again. In the course of the telling the story suffered some variations and additions. The calf was all but dead when the woman came. She had pricked her finger, and as the blood trickled on its nose the calf had got up and walked out of the shed. These and other things were said. Still, the main fact remained—the calf had been very ill, and now was cured. This incident enabled the people to form some opinion of the stranger.

She had powers, and whether some of them were for evil or not, others undoubtedly were for good. All those who had seen the sick calf were agreed that its illness had been no ordinary one, such as can be cured by every-day remedies. Something must have bewitched the animal, and only a person possessed of mysterious cures and with a knowledge of secret things could have saved it. The strange woman was surely a Fairy Doctor : she could be nothing else. Were not the words she had spoken over the calf secret words that no one understood? Had she not brought the cure potion at early dawn when no one was by? Had she not refused to take any meat? Then, she had not asked for money, as she might have done, for surely she was poor. But the Fairy Doctor must never reveal his or her secret knowledge, or all power goes. Neither may any money be received in payment for anything done, though a gift in kind can be accepted. Those among them who seek to advance far in their knowledge eat no meat, but live only on the fruits of the earth. Though the people had now satisfied themselves as to what the stranger really was, their interest in her did

not grow the less. There was much concerning her they were still ignorant of, and many questions to be solved. The old people—some of whom had seen Fairy Doctors and Herb Healers—had much to say on the subject. One of them knew of a family that possessed the power of healing as an inheritance. But the cure went away from those who changed the family name. The children of a married daughter were powerless. Another could tell of an old man who had a great knowledge of herbs. He knew the seven herbs of greatest value, the seven other herbs that nothing natural or supernatural can destroy; of those that cure fever, and those that give it. This man was to have taught his nephew all he knew, but he died suddenly, and the secret knowledge went with him. But Fairy Doctors were different beings to the mere Herb Healers. The knowledge that was theirs had not come from the ancient books and the old traditions; either they had been carried away in early childhood by the fairies, or else their mothers had been fairy women. The Healers could only cure with their herbs, but the Fairy Doctors had great powers at their command,

as well as all the knowledge of the Herb Healers.

The first descent of the strange woman from her mountain solitude was followed at intervals by others. Sometimes two or three weeks elapsed between one visit and another, but still she came. The people at last grew to expect the appearance of the tall gaunt figure, and ran to see her pass by when anyone gave the warning that she was coming. But though she came thus to and fro, she did not make friends with anyone. Now at one house, now at another, she stopped and asked for food. Potatoes, bread, eggs, or a little flour and oatmeal—these were the only things she took. She never crossed the threshold of any door, but stood outside and waited till someone came; then she made her request, but not in the tones of a beggar. She demanded what she wanted as one who expects no refusal, and the woman of the house always hurried to fetch her what she had. Thus the Fairy Doctor remained to the people as great a stranger as she had been the first day they saw her, and nothing more was known of her but what the imaginations of the neighbours could devise. From time to time,

when an animal fell ill, she had worked her charms as she had done for the calf. The people all believed in her powers, and the most of them were ready to seek her help; but a few there were who, though they believed, feared too much to ask anything of her.

Thus the months slipped by, and in spite of the mystery that shrouded her, the stranger became an established personage in the neighbourhood. Perhaps she might have lived there during the rest of her life, had not an event happened to change the even current of her days.

A child fell ill in the village. She was the only daughter of a man named John Mulvaney, and was all he had in the world. Therefore this illness made him very anxious. The neighbours came in to offer help, this one suggesting one remedy, that one another. The doctor lived far away, and before he could come many hours must pass. One of the women had seen the mountain stranger on the road, and had hurried after her to bring her to the sick child. Mulvaney hardly seemed to see her come. He was too much overwhelmed by anxiety to

notice anything. She entered the house, and, sending everyone out of the room, remained there alone with the sick child. The other women waited in the kitchen, commenting in whispers on what might be happening, and every now and then dropping into silence to listen if they could hear anything from the other side of the closed door. But no sound came through. At last the door was opened and the Fairy Doctor came out. She stood without speaking, looking from one person to another. Then one of the women came forward.

"Himself is that distraught he can attend to nothing, so you had best tell me what is to be done."

The stranger walked out over the threshold, and the woman followed.

"Let no one go near the child but yourself. Keep watching her, and if she sleeps don't let her be awakened. When she wakes answer no question she may ask. I will bring something for her to drink; give it to her at the dawn. Do not forget to leave at nightfall a saucer of milk and some crumbs of bread on the window-sill."

The neighbour went back to the kitchen and

told the others what the Fairy Doctor had said. Two of the women counselled her to be exact in carrying out the directions, whilst a third shrugged her shoulders.

"I'd rather have a real doctor." Then, turning to the child's father: "Would you rather have the real doctor or that one. I'd be sorry to see her in my house."

"I'd rather have anyone as would cure the child," said he. "And hasn't the doctor been sent for?"

Late in the night a knock came on the window-pane of the sick-room. The woman in attendance raised the sash. A long brown hand was thrust inside, and it held a little bottle.

"Give that to the child, as I told you," said a low, penetrating voice.

The dispensary doctor came the next morning, and again in the middle of the day. At sundown the child died. Mulvaney then became as one mad. First he threw himself on the bed, calling back the dead child to life; then he rushed out of the house and along the road, waving his arms wildly. Some men followed him and brought him back, and after

a time excess of grief seemed to numb him, and he became quiet.

The neighbours who came and went to and from Mulvaney's cottage discussed in all its bearings the death of the little child. Some blamed the dispensary doctor, others the Fairy woman.

"Maybe, after all, it was the will of God, and the child's time had come," put in one man. "So it's nobody's fault."

"The will of God!" exclaimed the woman who the day before had advised Mulvaney to have nothing to do with the stranger. "Black Magic isn't the will of God! Didn't I hear she was seen coming from the Poisoned Glen, where queer and harmful herbs grow?"

"Good herbs grow in it too," rejoined the man. "As the old proverb says, 'The resurrection of many is in it.'"

The next morning the Fairy Doctor came down the road and stopped in front of the Wake House. Mulvaney, catching sight of her through the doorway, sprang from his seat and rushed across the kitchen. In spite of his dazed condition the night before, he had understood something of the conversation, and one thing

had remained in his mind—the Fairy Doctor had used Black Magic upon his child. The man seized the nearest object to him, and it chanced to be a flat-iron. He stepped to the threshold.

"You've come to see your work," he cried. "Take that!" But the iron flew wide of the mark.

The woman stood perfectly still, and kept her eyes fixed on his face.

"You've killed my child with your Black Arts. May you never know either peace or rest! May chickenweed and nettles grow on your hearthstone! The Raven's curse on you! A bad death to you! May——"

Mulvaney's voice broke. He could say no more. His voice was all spent, and he tottered against the doorpost.

The woman, who had not flinched, now advanced one step.

"It's not on me the curses will fall," she said slowly, and so harshly that each word sounded like the rasping of a rusty saw. "I don't heed them. That the child is dead is not my doing, but the doing of those that did not mind what I said."

She glanced over the little crowd that by

now had gathered, seemed as if about to say something more, then turned quickly and walked away. As she passed them, the women drew back a little, blessed themselves, and murmured, "The Cross of Christ lie between us and harm!"

Two days afterwards no smoke was seen to rise from the mountain dwelling, nor was any seen in the days that followed. Then the two men who first had ventured to interview the stranger climbed up again to see what had happened. They found the house door shut, and pushed it open. Ashes lay on the hearth, the sacks were in their corner, the broom propped up against them. The cat, the black pot, the tin plate and mug, were no longer there. The Fairy Doctor had disappeared as mysteriously as she had come, and had left no trace behind.

VIII

THE SCHOLAR

He was known as "the Scholar" all through the island. "You go and ask Peter; he'll tell you." Or, "If Peter O'Dwyer doesn't know the meaning of it, no one does." Such remarks were constantly made to persons in search of information. Strangers who came to the district to collect facts of Gaelic lore were always brought to him. Students sometimes, when nonplussed by the derivation of some Irish word, travelled across the country to lay the difficulty before Peter O'Dwyer. Thus the reputation of the old man had spread beyond his island home, and great was the pride of all the neighbours on account of the esteem in which he was held. The knowledge he possessed was indeed wonderful and varied. In the days of his childhood schools as they are now understood did not exist. Travelling teachers went

from place to place, holding classes here and there for the benefit of those who wished to learn. Versed in many things, and possessing a remarkable degree of culture, the masters of the hedge schools gave a wide and varied teaching. They taught Latin—and Greek often—and the history and poetry of the Gael, as well as the ordinary subjects of reading, writing, and sums. Filled with a love of the knowledge they wished to impart, there was an earnestness in their instruction and an originality in their methods that rendered them different to the ordinary master of to-day. The students who attended these schools were possessed of a desire to learn; that alone brought them over the many miles they often had to cover in order to attend the classes, held sometimes out in the rain under a hedge, on the bank of a river, in an unused barn, as circumstances permitted. Then, the teaching had to be paid for by the taught, for at that time there were no public grants for education.

It was from an eccentric and learned travelling teacher that the little Peter picked up the first rudiments of knowledge. This man visited the island from time to time during the year, re-

maining there for a period of from six weeks to two months. On fine days he held his classes on a sheltered stretch of seashore below the village. There, seated on the keel of an upturned boat, he had all his pupils gathered in a semicircle in front. A long rod lay at his side, and woe betide the child who let his or her attention wander—a stinging cut across the shoulder quickly brought back the straying mind. Severe though he was during lessons, the master never taxed the children too hard. There was no fixed number of hours, no official red-tape. When he noticed the little faces growing weary, and found the answer came unreadily, he shut up the book and sent the whole class racing down the sands. Often, too, he carried a parcel of brown sugar, and when the lessons were over he poured some of its contents into each outstretched palm. In those days, when sweets were not so common as they are now, and could not be procured in every village shop-window, the brown sugar was a luxurious treat. During winter the pupils assembled in a boat-shed near the landing-stage, where they sat among the wood-shavings, or else in the kitchen of a deserted house at the farther end of the village.

There were two or three families on the island with whom the travelling teacher lodged, spending a fortnight with each during his stay. One of these was that of the O'Dwyers. Peter's mother had attended a hedge school in her early days on the mainland, and afterwards, in her busier life, had never quite given up the books of her youth, and she was well versed in the stories of the Gael. The old man often said he had learnt more from his mother than from anyone else. When the schoolmaster stayed in the house, he and Mrs. O'Dwyer discussed many things over the turf fire in the evenings. Stowed away in his little settle-bed in a remote corner of the kitchen, Peter was supposed to be asleep; but he lay with ears alert to catch all that was being said, motionless, fearing to excite suspicion if he stirred. It was thus, listening to the old-time stories—to the feats of the Fianna, to the legends of the Sidhe, and the tales of later-day heroes—told in the fitful light of the burning turf, that his imagination was awakened and his love of Gaelic lore aroused.

Peter O'Dwyer, now in his seventy-fifth year, was a fine specimen of his race. He was tall,

and his upright figure did not reveal that he was carrying the weight of so many years. His hair and beard, both of which he wore long, were the colour of tow. Brown they must have been once, but much exposure to sun and wind had bleached them to a pale yellowish hue. The old man's face was handsome; his features regular, and singularly refined. His eyes, now a rather faded blue, were quick, still and alert; they had the look of one who observes, and who is accustomed to gaze on far horizons — an expression often noticeable in the eyes of seamen. Well-shaped, long, narrow hands and pointed fingers betrayed the blue blood that ran in his veins. Peter came of no ignoble stock, but could boast of a lineage as good as any in the land. The O'Dwyers, a family of the ancient Gael, were once the great chieftains of the district in which Peter's humble cabin now stood. They had fought with neighbouring kings; they had lost, and they had won. Sites could still be pointed out where they had gained their victories. When the Normans landed in Ireland, O'Dwyers marched to meet them; and later, when Connacht became the only refuge of the Gael, those that

remained retired to the island, which was all that was left of their great possessions. Peter and a few others such as he were the last of the clan. He could count kings and princes among his ancestors, and generals and heroes who, with the "Wild Geese," had played their part in the destiny of Europe. All these glories of the past had long since died away, and their memory remained only in the mind of an old seaman. Though he seldom or never spoke of these things, he was proud of them, and this pride of race added, no doubt, something to his quiet courtesy and calm dignity of bearing, characteristics of a pure ancestry.

Peter O'Dwyer's life had been a varied one. In the course of his wanderings there is no land that he did not at one time or another visit. At fifteen he had joined a merchant vessel, and from then until he was past fifty the sea was his home. His love of books and learning were a great solace to him all that time, and kept him occupied during the many hours that hang idle on the hands of the seaman of a sailing-ship. Whatever money Peter had at his disposal was spent on books. At every port where they put in he passed his days off

duty in rummaging through book-shops, and returned to the vessel laden always with a packet of miscellaneous literature. Sailors' quarters are not roomy, and the space he had at his disposal could not contain all the books he bought; therefore the old ones had to be thrown away, in order to make place for the new. While his mates played cards, drank, sang, talked, and generally amused themselves together, O'Dwyer, lying in his hammock or sitting on a coil of rope in some remote corner of the deck, spent his time poring over his books.

"When you don't like the association you can get, then disassociation is the best." Thus it was that he explained it. It was this lonely life, spent with his own thoughts and surrounded by the great expanse of the boundless ocean, that gave to Peter O'Dwyer the detached philosophical turn of mind that was so characteristic of him. He always seemed alone, and living in a world apart where no one else could penetrate. It was impossible to really get at Peter. He could be jovial enough, for he was no misanthrope, and he seemed to enjoy himself at the gatherings of his friends; but all

the time one felt that his outward life and the points on which he touched his fellows was the mere shell—the real Peter lay beyond.

Whatever books the sailor might throw overboard to make room for others, there was one he kept by him always. This was an old seventeenth-century Bible, written in Irish. It had been left to him in his will by the Protestant minister of the island. This clergyman was a student, and had asked to be sent thither in order to have leisure to continue his studies. The duties of his parish encroached but slightly on his time, for the coastguards, their wives and children, with an occasional official who came on business, were the sole members of his congregation. Two benches in the little church was all that Sunday's service ever filled. His life, therefore, was given up almost entirely to Gaelic studies, and he and Peter soon fraternized over that which they both loved. When on furlough Peter spent many an evening at the Vicarage, and the two often discussed far into the night some debatable point of Irish philology.

Once, on returning from a long voyage, O'Dwyer was greeted with the news that his

old friend was dead, and the Irish Bible was put into his hands. This book then became the treasured possession of its new owner, both for its own sake and for the memory of him from whom it came. It accompanied O'Dwyer on all his travels, and was his constant companion. He often said that but for this book he would have forgotten all his Irish, and it was no doubt much acquaintance with its Scriptural style that had given the old man his peculiarly classical mode of speech.

When he had had enough of seafaring life and of wandering to other lands, Peter came back to settle permanently in his island home. The little stone-built cabin that had sheltered so many of his forefathers was the only place he felt he could end his days in. His parents were long since dead, and his brothers and sisters scattered. One sister had remained in the dwelling and kept it from ruin, but before he was able to return for good she, too, had died. So it was to an empty house that Peter came, and he was left to make his way of life as best he could alone. Of all men, sailors are the best fitted to cope unaided with the small emergencies of domestic life, and Peter managed

well. His house was situated at the extreme end of the straggling village, and stood a few paces up a narrow *bohereen.* A little wooden gate in the rough stone wall led into a grass-grown yard. Through it the visitor had to pass in order to reach the entrance, placed on the side of the house farthest from the road. The cottage was built of blue limestone, now turned to a yellowish-brown hue from the dwarf moss that had crept over its surface. Within, all was clean, though very poor, and here and there were noticeable contrivances that betokened the seaman's natty fingers. The hearth was bare of fire, for Peter could ill afford that luxury. A table, a couple of chairs, a dresser, and a little wooden bench, completed the contents of the kitchen. On the right hand, beyond the fireplace, a door led into a workshop, where all the repairings and renewings of the household's furniture were done by its master. The door on the left of the entrance opened into Peter's bedroom, where was kept, on a wooden bookshelf above the window, all his library. Into this humble abode Peter O'Dwyer received his visitors with old-world courtesy.

"You're welcome, but I'm afraid this little house must be distasteful to you."

It was the guest, however, who felt himself honoured, for Peter had a way, all unconsciously, of seeming to confer a favour.

The yard round the cabin served as a playground for the children of the neighbourhood. Here they often came, a merry, barefooted, red-skirted troop—from motives of economy small boys in the West wear petticoats—and proclaimed their presence loudly. If they were ignored, a shower of small pebbles and sand thrown against the windows usually aroused the inmate of the house. The moment the door was seen to move, the whole band scrambled over the wall, leaving a track of falling stones behind them. There was no end to the pranks they played on the old man. Sometimes he got angry, but they did not care. "No matter what Peter says, he'll beat none of us," and they were right. His gentle heart was incapable of harbouring ill-will against any child.

Peter O'Dwyer earned his living by sail-mending. The old deserted schoolhouse was usually the scene of his labours. Here, in the

midst of the débris of old brown sails, tarred rope-ends, and bits of cord, he and three or four other men did their work. It was here that the visitors who came in search of Peter were usually directed by the people at the landing-stage. If he were not working in the school, the other men there generally could tell where he was to be found. O'Dwyer was not always ready to enter into conversation with the chance visitors who came to see him. Sometimes he did not feel inclined to be bothered, and at others a spirit of contrariness seized on him and made him refuse to reveal his identity. The workmen, who always humoured the old man, waited to take their cue from him, and readily played up to whatever rôle he chose to adopt. Afterwards Peter enjoyed relating how he had puzzled those who came.

One day a student arrived bent on acquiring Gaelic lore, but whose knowledge of the tongue of his forefathers had only been derived from books.

"*Bail ó Dia orriabh*," he began.

"*Sé do bheatha-sa.*"

Silence followed, while the newcomer sought

to put together another sentence of idiomatic Irish. But the anxiety to appear a fluent speaker to those who had the language from their birth drove what knowledge he possessed from his mind, and he found himself obliged to continue in English.

"I hear there is a great Irish scholar on the island, and they told me down below that I could find out where he is if I inquired here."

Peter never stirred, but went on with his sail-mending. The man sitting nearest to the stranger then looked up.

"It's an Irish Scholar you're looking for? Sure, we're all Irish scholars here"; and he looked round, his eyes twinkling, at the other men. "We do be speaking the language every day and all day."

"But he's more than a mere speaker, the man I mean. I heard of him in Dublin, and was told that all I had to do was to ask for the Scholar, and anyone on the island would tell me about him."

"Well, that's curious, now. What do you think of it, Peter?" And the man who had constituted himself the spokesman turned towards O'Dwyer.

"Is it a scholar you'd look for here?" said Peter. "Why, didn't I think 'twas in Dublin you had all the scholars, with your fine books, and your classes, and your gentlemen who go about the country making Irish speeches? What for would you be looking for a scholar in this backward place?"

This remark somewhat abashed the stranger.

"Oh, there are men who have a great knowledge of Irish in Dublin, but, of course, it can't be quite the same with them as with those who have it all their lives."

"Well, I don't know indeed, for I met one of them, and he was ready to teach the native speakers."

"I suppose, then, you cannot give me any information about this Scholar?" said the visitor, beginning to lose patience.

"Well, now that I come to think of it," rejoined Peter, "I do know of a man who might be able to tell you some things you haven't heard before. It's at Mrs. O'Brien's you are staying, I suppose? He'll come round to see you this evening."

Then later Peter described the scene when he appeared and announced that he himself

was the Scholar. He thoroughly enjoyed imparting his knowledge, and was always ready to devote his leisure to the instruction of any Gaelic student who came to the island. When he took a liking for his pupil, and when the barrier of reserve he raised before strangers was broken through, he became interesting. As he himself said, "I'm slow to make acquaintance, but I'm quick at friendship, and it becomes a part of myself. I never forget a friend."

The soul of punctuality, Peter O'Dwyer always arrived at the appointed hour at the lodgings where his pupil for the nonce resided. His sail-mending clothes—a well-patched, thick brown-leather suit—were exchanged for others of grey frieze. On either side of his forehead his long hair lay parted. His beard, untrimmed but combed, hung down his chest, and gave him the appearance of a Viking of old. That his hands had been well scrubbed was always evident, in spite of the brown stains that long contact with sails and ropes had made permanent. O'Dwyer was a severe master, and never allowed his authority to be made light of. If ever a pupil seemed to doubt his explanation he turned on him fiercely, asking, Was it usual

for the teacher's knowledge to be questioned by the taught? But what roused his indignation more than anything else was a slight cast on the language he loved so well. When he spoke of those who made little of the Gaelic tongue his eyes flashed angrily. Of would-be scholars who wrote books in the Irish they had acquired merely in the towns, Peter felt the contempt the professional has for the amateur.

"Sure, it's destroying the Irish they are, murdering it altogether. What is their language at all but English covered with an Irish mantle? If you want the proper speech you must seek for it where it has remained pure, on the lips of the aged who know."

He had no mean opinion of himself or of his learning, and this he never sought to disguise. It was with a sort of proud simplicity that he sometimes discoursed on his own knowledge.

"I owe all I know in the first place to God Almighty, then to my mother and the hedge schoolmaster, and after them to no man living or dead but myself."

Occasionally Peter brought some of his books to show his pupils. An old edition of Ossianic

poems he possessed, some histories, and several other works long out of print.

"Do you know the worst person to lend a book to?" he once asked. "A priest. And do you know the reason why? If it's a bad book he'll burn it, and if it's a good book he'll keep it, for he'll say that it's more fitting for him to have it than another man."

Peter O'Dwyer was not only a scholar, he was also a poet, and he had two manuscripts filled with his own compositions. They were a motley collection. Some were rather laboured descriptions of scenery; others were amusing skits on his neighbours or on local events, and he had turned some of the old stories and legends of the West into verse. There were religious poems also, and poems on various historical and literary subjects. Some were written in Irish and some in English, for their composer had an equal facility in both tongues.

"There's another book I have that I keep at home and show to no living man. I wanted to see if I could write on coarse subjects without using a coarse expression; and I've succeeded."

One day when he was not working Peter came to give his lesson at twelve o'clock.

"I've had no breakfast this morning," he remarked calmly as he sat down. When asked the reason of this omission, he said that he had been too busy.

"I was mending my clothes, for I can't bear to see a hole anywhere. There are some people, now, who wouldn't demean themselves by wearing a patch. But I can't see any reason in that, for why should a man be ashamed of wearing the leavings of his own cast clothes on his new ones? You were asking me if I was hungry with no breakfast. Well, I am, but I make it a habit to keep my hunger in subjection. Indeed, I've steeled my mind to let no outward thing trouble it. Whether it's pain of the body, or whether it's sorrow of the heart, it's all one. There's nothing in this world worth shedding a tear about only the loss of the grace of God."

Peter was very religious, as, possessed of the spiritual mind of the Gael, he could not fail to be. But his religious attitude was individual, like himself. He had ideas of his own, and had thought them out in his own way. He

loved engaging in an argument with some theologically minded student, and not infrequently scored the victory. There was a story he liked to tell of a priest who gave a mission to the islanders, and who had done his utmost to induce Peter to take the temperance pledge. After listening silently to all the arguments in its favour, Peter had ended the discussion by saying :

"Well, your reverence, there may be a great deal in it, and I'm sorry to disoblige you, but this is the way I look at it. God gave me ten Commandments, and the Church has given me six. I'm thinking that's enough for any man, without his putting another on himself."

This was conclusive, and left nothing more to be said.

"I'm not a drunkard : thanks be to God for that same," the old man added. "But I'm fond of a drink now and again, and no mistake. A pure drop will always do you good as long as you don't go too far in it. That is where the mischief comes in."

On any subject that he knew about the old seaman had a great deal to say, and if it were one that specially interested him, he was often quite carried away by it.

"I forget the person I am myself; I forget the kind of person I am speaking to; I forget everything but the truth I'm speaking about."

But if he were not interested, or if he were not directly addressed, he sat silent when in the midst of other people without saying a word, his own thoughts entirely engrossing him.

"My thoughts have always been my best company," he often said. "They have stood to me well. And sure, what have we to account for in the end if it isn't our thoughts? Are not they the things that matter? What else have we to answer for? And doesn't the great God note down every one of them, even though we don't speak them out?"

Once Peter had been induced to attend a session at one of the Gaelic Summer Colleges as a teacher of Irish. The experiment, however, was not altogether successful. His methods were old-fashioned, and they were peculiarly his own. He was unable to adapt himself to what the city students demanded, and their way of learning was not such as recommended itself to him. No doubt, also, the old Scholar felt himself astray in strange surroundings, and was not one to bear transplanting easily. True,

he had in his day travelled round the world, and had visited many lands; but then, he had lived on his ship, a moving home, with the sea, his childhood's friend, ever near him. Quickly, too, after he had given up seafaring, had he taken root again in the rocky island soil where he had been born and had dwelt as a boy, and soon his years of wandering seemed very far from him. Therefore, to find himself suddenly in unfamiliar scenes and in the midst of strangers, and bound by certain regulations, was trying to the old man. The few weeks of the engagement over, Peter returned home, and did not venture forth again to unknown places. It was easier for him to impart his knowledge in the island which he knew so well, and where there was no need to change his way of life.

It was not only students from his own country who made their way to Peter O'Dwyer. Now and then a foreigner journeyed to see him—a French, a Danish, or a German philologist, whose names were well known in their own country, but who were content to sit at the feet of the old Irish sailor and glean the words of wisdom from his lips. Peter readily made friends with these distinguished visitors, and

often spoke about them afterwards. There was one he particularly remembered—a little dark man with spectacles, Professor of a great European University, the name of which Peter could not recollect — who came several years running, spending three weeks or a month on the island each summer. He had loved the old stories and legends, and had made Peter tell him every one he knew. In the book which this learned man afterwards wrote were footnotes stating that many of the explanations he had given had been obtained from an old Irish fisherman of the western coast.

Like all true Gaels, Peter O'Dwyer was a lover and understander of Nature. He was susceptible to all the beauties of the scenery about him, and never tired of commenting on them. "I'm as great a traveller as any man, and I can say that of all the places I've seen throughout the world, there's none I like better, nor that pleases me more, than this." And indeed he was not far wrong in his appreciation, if space, wondrous colouring, sea, mountain range, and grey-green rocks count for beauty. Apart from these surroundings it would have been hard to picture the old man, he and they

seemed so to fit one into the other. The spirit of the climate and of the place had penetrated into Peter O'Dwyer's soul, and he reflected something of that mystery, that intangible charm of the West, that seems to be the heritage of the Irish Celt.

In his rocky island home Peter continued to live out his life, dividing his days between his sail-mending and his studies. With the Gaelic past his thoughts dwelt, and they were stimulated by the constant sight of the great forts of the old pagan heroes, and the ruined cells of the saints and scholars who had given the isle a name through the civilized world in the far-off days. Now, as he watched the slowly growing stream of students coming, as their forefathers before them, to learn the ancient lore that the island dwellers still could teach, hope rose in his heart that this remote spot might again become famous, and the Gael, like the eagle, renew his youth.

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And the weak shall prevail,
And a glory shall sit
On the sign of the Gael."

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