

THE RACE OF
CASTLEBAR

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THE RACE OF CASTLEBAR

BY

EMILY LAWLESS, Litt.D.

HURRISH

WITH ESSEX IN IRELAND

GRANIA : THE STORY OF AN
ISLAND

MAELCHO

MAJOR LAWRENCE, F.L.S.

PLAIN FRANCES MOWBRAY

TRAITS AND CONFIDENCES

THE BOOK OF GILLY

IRELAND. (STORY OF THE
NATIONS)

MARIA EDGEWORTH.
(ENGLISH MEN OF LETTERS)

WITH THE WILD GEESE
(POEMS)

BY

SHAN F. BULLOCK

THE AWKWARD SQUADS

BY THRASNA RIVER

RING O' RUSHES

THE CHARMER

THE BARRYS

IRISH PASTORALS

THE SQUIREEN

THE RED LEAGUERS

THE CUBS

ROBERT THORNE

A LAUGHING MATTER

MASTER JOHN

HETTY

THOMAS ANDREWS, SHIP-
BUILDER

THE
RACE OF CASTLEBAR

BEING

A NARRATIVE ADDRESSED BY MR. JOHN
BUNBURY TO HIS BROTHER, MR. THEODORE
BUNBURY, ATTACHED TO HIS BRITANNIC
MAJESTY'S EMBASSY AT FLORENCE, OCTOBER
1798, AND NOW FIRST GIVEN TO THE WORLD

BY

EMILY LAWLESS, LITT.D.

AND

SHAN F. BULLOCK

LONDON

JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET, W.

1913

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TO
S. S. AND E. DE V.
ALSO TO
THE LATEST OF ALL THE GRANIAS.

COLLABORATION—A NOTE

THE art of collaboration is apt to wear an air of mystery that is not without attraction, and the writer whose name stands first on the foregoing title-page has puzzled herself before now as to the means by which so ingenious a dual result had been attained. In the present case that mystery is reduced to very humble dimensions. A subject, interesting in itself, doubly interesting to any student, however casual, of Irish history, led her into embarking upon the present book. Fate in the shape of inveterate ill-health decided that the said book should be carried less than half-way towards its predestined end. In this state it lay long, and would doubtless be lying still, but that in the course of one summer's afternoon talk chanced to turn upon the French invasions which had at various times threatened Ireland, and upon this one of Killala and Castlebar in particular. One word leading to another, the idea gradually grew up that possibly the writer whose name stands second on the title-page might be willing to take up the poor derelict, and see whether anything could be made of it. This, after a little hesitation, he agreed to do, and from the time Bunbury reaches Castlebar

down to when he leaves Killala and rejoins Lavinia, the lapsed pen finds itself once more held by vigorous fingers. For the final chapters the original writer is again responsible, but that the book, as a book, exists at all is entirely due to her only too kind and self-effacing collaborator.

HAZELHATCH,
GOMSHALL,
August, 1913.

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THE RACE OF CASTLEBAR

CHAPTER I

HOW THE NEWS REACHED US

You have a perfect right, and I readily concede it, dear and venerated younger brother, to a full and particular account of all that befell your unvenerated senior during his recent notorious expedition. That this same expedition was not an unmitigated success, and that much which I witnessed in the course of it was hardly creditable to the government of a country in which we both take a certain interest, may be admitted. What then? Shall my tale limp, because my matter is unpleasant? Shall I refrain because all that I have to say is not precisely what it would be were I free to indulge those powers of imagination with which kind nature has so liberally endowed me? Emphatically no! A truce to such mealy-mouthed cautiousness! The truth, the whole truth shall be my aim—at all events during the continuance of the present ingenuous narrative.

You, beloved Theodore, who possess, as we all know, a perfect genius for discretion; who have been a diplomatist from your cradle, an ambassador, and a Minister plenipotentiary while you still wore knitted shoes and sucked lollypops; you, I was

about to say, would, I am convinced, be incapable, were the case yours, of an equally daring recklessness. You are a diplomatist; therefore a personage with a credit for discretion to maintain. I am no diplomatist. My reputation for discretion being already at zero, cannot well go lower, let my indiscretions be what they may. Consequently I roam, free as air, over precipices and quagmires, the very thought of which would cause your responsible locks to stand on end. On then, though I be hallooed down by all the diplomatists in Christendom! Though Discretion, that extremely tiresome virgin, shriek at me to forbear! Though the post betray my secrets, and the myrmidons of government violate and lay bare all my warmest and most cherished convictions!

One consideration, indeed, disturbs me. Will my present fit of exceptional energy last, I ask myself, till I get to the end of my narrative? Judging by my previous experiences, I should be disposed to say 'No.' Well, never mind! Come what, come may, here I lay a petition before the all-powerful Fates, praying them that my way may be prosperous, and the blessed and deeply-to-be-desired word *Finis* may at last be reached. With which petition laid upon the Altar of Achievement, I now proceed with my tale.

To begin at the beginning. You will remember—it is impossible you can ever forget—the extraordinary condition of irascibility to which gout and the recent reports from Ireland had reduced our respected parent, Sir Peter? Upon my shoulders, allow me to observe, sir, fell the chief weight of that formidable manifestation. You were departing at

the time for your Grand Dukery, consequently your preparations took up the greater part of your attention. Happy diplomatist! You could depart; it was your duty to do so; orders from headquarters, and the disastrous condition of affairs in Europe, carried you far from Miles Bottomley. If you are at times a trifle over-aware of the disadvantages of being a younger son, believe me, virtuous Theodore, that I have often enough been sensible of the penalties attached to having been born some eighteen months your senior. Never had those penalties so burdened me as upon the day before you left us. It was a Friday, the 23rd of January. I had come to your room upon some pretext. The day being mild for the time of year, one of your windows stood open, and the yellow winter jessamine, which our mother planted upon the wall outside, had put forth a few sickly buds to the deceitful sunlight. A faint odour from it reached my nostrils as I came into the room, and suddenly evoked—I know not what visions of warmth, sunshine, love—of things and of people far removed, certainly, from Miles Bottomley!

Of all this, even of the fact of my having entered your room at all, you will probably recall nothing, for you were enthroned at the moment, I remember, upon a chest which had refused to lock, and were mildly but convincingly informing it that it would have to submit in the end. I seated myself upon a chair, and gazed like some Stage Desperado out of the window. Black George, your man-servant, came into the room at the moment, with a mouth screwed into an aspect of even greater self-importance than that of his master. He started, I remember, and

stared at me for a moment. What he saw in my face I cannot tell; but if ever the heir to a certain number of peculiarly dirty acres felt disposed to surrender that heirship, and to depart to—himself hardly cared where—it was this particular heir who has the honour of addressing you!

That I did not do so, that I did not even seriously think of doing so, was due assuredly to nothing within the circuit of Miles Bottomley. What restrained me was a certain deeply-nourished Hope of which you are aware, and which no discouragement has as yet been able to extinguish from my breast. Forgive this digression, dear brother: my first, but, I plainly foresee, by no means my last!

Next day you drove away in your post-chaise, and I stood by the stable door and looked after you. The clock over my head struck one, as you disappeared round the corner, and the dust of your going settled down. I looked at my watch, and yawned.

One o'clock! Dinner-time would therefore be in two hours. In two hours I should have again to confront Sir Peter; again to listen to his paternal roarings; again to go over the ground so many times traversed—now without even your discreet and diplomatic face opposite to console me. I groaned audibly, and strolled disconsolately away down the shrubbery.

After this matters went on much as usual for the next few weeks. It must have been, I think, about the middle of March that our monotony was broken in upon by reports of a new French Invasion, one of which Ireland was this time, it was said, to be the scene. This news awakened a crowd of slumbering

devils in Sir Peter's breast. He bellowed ; he raged ; he poured execrations upon everyone in general, and upon your humble servant in particular. With a faint hope of diverting his wrath, I—unfortunately as it proved—ventured to remind him that my sister Byrne's home happened to be in a part of Ireland not at all likely to be the scene of a descent, seeing that every hitherto-planned French invasion had been upon the east rather than the west coast of that island. At the moment this interposition appeared to have the desired effect. Sir Peter merely stared at me without answering ; indeed, my impression is that it had not before occurred to him that Ireland was a country possessing probably two sides ! Unfortunately the lull was a short one.

A few days later, as ill-luck would have it, there appeared a long account, setting forth with minute details the tremendous preparations being made by General Buonaparte to effect a landing upon that identical west coast of Ireland. Sir Peter shook the paper in my face, and then whirled it around his head like a battle-flag.

'Look at that, sir !' he roared ! 'Look at that, you self-opinionated young puppy ! Are you still going to tell me that there is no danger of your sister being carried off by those damned miscreants, eh ?'

Then, without giving me time to examine the paper for myself, 'How about her safety now ?' he thundered. 'How about her distance from the scene of danger ? How about your damned preternatural knowledge of the geography of Ireland *now*, sir ? Is it, or is it not, upon the west coast of that infernal country that your unhappy sister is living ? Is it, or is it not, upon that same coast that this—this—'

I leave you to supply the adjectives— 'monster and his forces are about to land? Answer me, you puppy! Don't sit there, staring at me in that exasperating manner, but answer!'

You must please to understand that while this cascade of invective was descending upon my head, I had picked up the news-sheet, and had contrived to grasp the sense of the report in question. Unfortunately it appeared to be too true. According to the writer—though we have since reason to know that he was wrong in every particular—a portion of the French army under General Buonaparte was about to embark for the west coast of Ireland, the exact spot being as yet unascertained.

'Well, sir,' said I, 'I must acknowledge that you appear to be right. At the same time, even supposing this report to be correct, His Majesty must by this time have sufficiently large forces in Ireland to be able to make short work of any similar invasion?'

What Sir Peter's views were upon this subject I was not destined to learn, for having by this time finished his beef and beer—did I say that we were at breakfast?—he left the room, hobbling and muttering, and I heard him shortly afterwards roaring out Brimstone and Thunder at old Tarbox in the gun-room.

Following this explosion another delusive calm settled down for a while upon the scene. Sir Peter's gout got better, and I began to hope that matters, private as well as public, were about to mend. The 17th of May came, however, and within less than a week of that date we received news of the outbreak of the Rebellion in Ireland; the arrest of the Ringleaders, the interception of the Mails, the

flight of the Loyalists, the slaughter of a considerable number of unhappy soldiers at a place appropriately called Prosperous; the whole performance as you must by this time know it. Again I was breakfasting alone with Sir Peter. I had just poured myself out a cup of chocolate. He had already drunk two horns full of ale, and was about to embark upon a third. At this moment the news-sheet came into the room, carried by John Mulberry, who—old idiot as you know he always is—must needs thrust it into his master's hands, with his thumb at the very place. Sir Peter is usually slow enough in his reading, but on this occasion he took in the sense of the passage with diabolical rapidity.

Forgetting his gout, he leapt from his chair with the bound of a tiger. 'Great God! my girl will be butchered! Kate will be butchered!' he shouted, dropping the horn from his hand, so that the ale ran all over the table. Then, turning upon me, his eyes bloodshot, his lips trembling, his whole face working, and the colour of an over-ripe mulberry:

'If you had the spirit of a cockroach, sir, of a flea, of a maggot'—he mentioned other even less agreeable animals—'if you had as much spirit as would go into that spoon which you hold in your hand, you would not sit there drinking slops like an old woman, and leaving your only sister to perish helplessly at the hands of these miscreants!'

I had at first been really moved by his emotion—'pon my soul and honour I had, Theodore. But after such a choice collection of epithets I felt it only due to myself to resume my accustomed phlegm.

'What has happened, sir?' I inquired calmly. 'Anything fresh transpired about the French?'

I really thought he would have flung his knife and fork at me.

'The French, sir! The French, you idiot! Transpired! you damned, mouthing, affected fool! Murder has transpired, sir! Bloody murder, treason, arson, massacre have transpired! That's all, sir! *Transpired!*' And he glared at me like an ogre.

'Excuse me, sir, but you forget that I am still in the dark,' I began, stretching my hand towards the news-sheet.

He interrupted me with a fresh bellow.

'The devil take you, and your phrases, sir! Are you going? That is the question? Are you going, I want to know? *Are you going?*'

'Am I going where?' I inquired mildly. Then, as he merely continued to bellow, 'Do you mean to Ireland?' I asked, getting up and beginning to fold my table-napkin.

'Yes, sir, I do mean to Ireland,' he repeated, perking up his mouth, and mincing his words, as he does when he is pretending to imitate me. He was in too great a rage, however, to keep that up, and in another minute began roaring out a string of further incoherencies, each more abusive apparently than the last.

I waited till, from mere lack of breath, he was obliged to pause, and then, 'Very well, sir,' I said. 'I will start for Ireland at once—to-morrow, if you like.'

In this way, my dear Theodore, my going was decided, and all I had to do was to pack my trunk, and prepare for as speedy a departure as possible.

CHAPTER II

OF THE LADY LAVINIA

ONE visit I was determined that I would not leave England without paying. Brothers, it is said, seldom make one another confidants of their love affairs. How little truth there is in that assertion, you, oh faithful and judicious Theodore, can bear ample witness. Have I not from the beginning confided to you, sir, and to you alone, the alternations of hope and despair that have beset me; the distractions of my poor persecuted soul; the alternate encouragement and rebuffs with which my vows have been received; all the variety of sufferings, in short, endured by me at the hands of my adored, adorable, but exceedingly capricious Lady Lavinia? That the path of Love is apt to be a prickly one, is an aphorism which my case seems only too likely to justify. That her illustrious parent, Lord R——, is unaware that I so much exist as a suitor, that our own less illustrious parent would roar like innumerable bulls of Bashan were I to announce my intention of marrying, and, as a consequence, of demanding settlements—all this is certain. In addition to these facts, my lady's own humour is, I may confide to you, of so paradoxical a nature that, were our path made apparently smoother, she, like

the fair Mistress Languish of the play, might easily cause it, I suspect, to be of remarkably little advantage to me in the end.

Promptly then I wrote to her, explaining the state of the case; became a trifle pathetic, as a lover about to brave stormy seas and infuriated rebels has a right to be; laid myself, in short, at her feet, and implored permission to see her before departing for what might prove to be an indefinite period.

By return of post—in fact by one of my Lord R——'s own couriers who happily chanced to be coming this way—I received an answer. She is an angel, Theodore, an angel complete and absolute, although an angel with a naughty little imp attending her to suggest occasional modes of tormenting her poor suitor! R—— Hall, she informed me, was about to be invaded by a mob of fine folk who would occupy it to the very garrets. My Lord Barmouth and his Countess were to be there, also my Lord Davenport and *his* Countess, my Lord —— (here a word had got blurred), Sir Thomas St. Leger, Sir Adolphus Carnegie, Sir Fosberry Dilke—in short, a perfect shoal of fine people, who proposed to drive from town in their own chariots for the recess. In this very fact, however, she hinted, might lie our best hopes of a meeting, since, amongst so many, one more or less would scarcely be observable. I might come, therefore, she graciously decreed, only I must be exceedingly discreet. I must keep my distance; I must remember that I was there on sufferance, and behave myself accordingly. I must talk prettily to the misses, must fetch my Lady S—— her cloak, and my Lady D—— her fan; I must run errands, carve the veal, if called upon to

do so; in a word, my presence must be revealed only when it was required.

Upon these terms, Theodore, I went—nay, flew! Between the arrival of her ladyship's despatch and the ordering of my own post-chaise there was barely an hour's interval. My luggage was already packed. My farewells to Sir Peter were neither of a prolonged nor of a harrowingly tender nature! I had my passport, it is true, still to obtain; there being at present no travelling to Ireland without one; but this necessity I knew could wait until after my visit to R——.

Well, Theodore, I arrived. Heavens, how my heart beat! What agonies of mingled bliss and terror your poor brother experienced as he drove up the avenue, between my Lord R——'s ancestral oaks and beeches! Alas, I soon found that all this emotion was merely wasted. No chance had I of any intercourse with my charmer: no hope of even the shortest stolen interview; scarcely so much as a glance could I obtain from her beloved blue eyes. The house, as she had truly warned me, was crammed from cellar to roof. There were fine people sleeping in the very garrets, and at least one potential Prime Minister in a back closet. As for me, I got a corner in a gardener's cottage hard by, and had to thank my stars for being so well lodged. We sat down to dinner at half-past five—a monstrously fashionable hour, you will observe, and a monstrously fashionable gathering; one in which Members of Parliament were but as the Dust of the Earth, and Countesses and their Offspring as mere Flowers of the Field.

My own place proved to be near the bottom of

the table, amongst secretaries' secretaries and great men's underlings. This in itself I should have borne easily, had not Lady Lavinia, seated at the head of the same table 'twixt my Lord of O—— and my Lord of S——, been so placed that I could barely catch an occasional glimpse of her enchanting countenance between these noblemen's bewigged and be-ribboned persons. Once, indeed, she glanced at me with an arch lifting of her eyebrows, as though amusing herself at the thought of my discomfiture. Before I could return her salutation, however, or even succeed in throwing some of my despair into a glance, her attention had been recaptured, and I was compelled perforce to turn for distraction to such poor entertainment as I might find amongst my immediate neighbours.

Next to me sat a short, stout little gentleman, who might have been a schoolmaster, but turned out to be a certain Mr. Hinks, and my Lord Davenport's private secretary. He was dressed in black, with the exception of a good deal of silver lace embroidery upon a very prominent waistcoat; his hair being tied in the old style in a long queue.

'This is an extremely distinguished gathering, sir,' said I, by way of breaking the ice. No one at my own end of the table, I may inform you, had up to that moment uttered a syllable, everyone's eyes, ears, thoughts, their whole attention, being entirely absorbed by the Great Ones at the upper end.

He turned sharp round, and scanned me with a glance like a gimlet, calculating, it would appear, into what category he was to put me.

'Sir,' he finally replied, very stiffly, 'my Lord

R——s' entertainments are never other than distinguished. May I inquire if you are an Intimate of this family, since it does not appear to me that I have ever had the pleasure of observing you in this house before ?'

'Faith, sir,' said I, 'as to my claims to intimacy I think I had better leave that to be decided by his Lordship himself'—or by his lordship's daughter, I was tempted to add. 'As for my name, if you have any curiosity about so small a matter, it is plain Jack Bunbury, of an obscure Cambridgeshire family.'

'Son,' said he, eyeing me with rather more consideration, 'of Sir Peter Bunbury, of Miles Bottomley in that county ?'

'The very same,' replied I.

'I have heard your father, Mr. Bunbury, spoken of as an excellent man and a constant supporter of the Government.' This was said, I may tell you, with an air of the most prodigious self-consequence and condescension.

'He will be enchanted, I feel no doubt, when I inform him that he has been so reported to you,' replied I, in a tone copied as closely as possible from his own.

This, you will perceive, Theodore, was scarcely the sort of entertainment that a man travels fifty miles out of his way to enjoy. As soon, therefore, as politeness made it possible, I turned from my improving neighbour, and devoted myself like the rest of the world to listening to what was going on at the more august end of the table.

I soon found that the talk there had settled down upon the famous duel of Sunday se'nnight, which

was fought, as you know, or, in any case will shortly know, upon Putney Heath, Ryder acting for Mr. Pitt, Walpole for Mr. Tierney. Two shots were exchanged, one of which passed close to the left ear of the Sustainer of his Country. An inch more to the right, a little more practice, or possibly a little less practice on the part of his antagonist, and we should have been left with a furious Rebellion going on, and the most sanguinary War of modern times raging in Europe—minus a Prime Minister!

Presently Ireland came in for its share in the discussion, and I pricked up my ears to hear whether anything was said likely to be of assistance to me on my travels. I found, however, that the talk turned almost entirely upon the recent debate in the House of Lords, regarding which the Opposition, as you will easily believe, came in for some handsome abuse—the Dukes of Norfolk and Bedford, the Lords FitzWilliam, Moira, and Holland, being soundly trounced; the entire body of Whigs, with Mr. Fox at their head, being, in short, consigned to Perdition, and the Hangman with a unanimity that left nothing to be desired.

By-and-by the ladies rose and left the room, whereupon I took advantage of the movement to escape from the companionship of my immediate neighbours, and to seek that of my old friend, Horace Cornwallis, son of the Bishop of Lichfield and nephew of the newly-appointed Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. Patting him discreetly on the back as I passed, I dropped into a vacant place beside him.

He started, frowned a little, stared at me, and the next moment almost fell upon my neck.

‘Why, Jack! Damn it, old Jack! is that *you*?’ he

cried joyfully. 'What good star brought you here to-night?'

'The Star of Love, the only star that ever takes any man anywhere,' I replied, glancing discreetly towards a recently vacated chair at the head of the table. 'And you? How sits that star in your case, Master Horace? How about you and the fair Miss Cynthia Leigh?' said I; for at our last meeting Horace had been in the toils of that charmer, niece and reputed heiress, as everyone knows, of my Lord Tophaven, and for years the admitted belle of Bath.

'Faith, Jack,' said he, 'the adorable Miss Cynthia has given me the polite go-by, and has taken up with a bandy-legged fellow of forty-five—a creature in the Government, may the devil take him! 'Tis the way of the sex! A Plague on 'em one and all! For my part, I have forsworn them altogether, and am at present consoling myself with a much less inconstant and flighty style of charmer!' And he pointed to a great three-quart decanter, now almost empty, that stood before him.

'Well, Horace, I am sorry for your disappointment,' said I, 'though my own affairs are not, I am free to confess, in a much better plight. At the same time, Heaven forbend that I should compare my Mistress to yours, after the scurvy way in which the latter has treated you. Nevertheless, here I am, fifty miles out of my way to Ireland; and so far as I can see, for any good I shall get here, I might just as well be fifty miles the other way.'

'Ireland? Are you going to Ireland too?' cried he. 'Good Gad! all the world seems to be rushing

to Ireland! And what takes you there, may I ask, Jack, seeing that you are neither a soldier to shoot rebels, nor a lawyer to help hang 'em?'

'Family reasons, and the fact of my being a remarkably affectionate brother,' returned I sententiously. 'Hardly the sort of mission that is likely to take you anywhere, I imagine, Master Horace. Possibly you are not aware that I have a sister married by my father some six or seven years since, to an Irishman, one Sir Owen Byrne, proprietor of an outlandish residence, in some equally outlandish part of the West of Ireland. Since the recent explosion of rebellion in that country, nothing will convince Sir Peter that my sister is not being daily butchered, though whether by the local rebels or by the French invaders he has not, I think, quite made up his mind. Anyhow, to allay his fears, and in some degree my own, I have volunteered to go to Ireland, and intend, if I can persuade her, to bring my sister back with me.'

'Gad! then we'll crack a bottle of claret in Dublin together,' cried he joyfully. 'I am told they have the best in Europe.'

'Dublin?' I repeated doubtfully in my turn. 'Why——? . . . But of course. Where are my wits? Naturally you are going in the train of your illustrious relative.'

'Ought to be doing so, you mean, Jack. Ought to be doing so—only, as it happens, my illustrious relative has played me a scurvy trick, and has set off for Ireland without me. Gad! 'tis at his orders, sir, I am here, there being some letters, or papers, or the devil knows what, to carry him from my lord yonder'—jerking his head towards the upper end of

the table—‘and I wish to Beelzebub he had hit upon some other errand-boy than his obedient nephew. Here am I, sir, kicking my heels with nothing to do, and any little fun that is going on over there will be finished and done before ever I get my small spoon into the pickle-pot. ’Tis my luck, Jack, always my luck! Luck’s a jade, that’s what she is, like the rest of her sex. Let her once find a man down, and she never stops pecking at him till she has pecked out the very heart and soul of him, body and bones, horse, foot, and dragoons.’

I was really afraid that my friend, Horace, was about to fall a-weeping upon my breast, his tone at this point grew so desperately lachrymose. I could only conclude that he was under the influence either of his late disappointment, or of his new charmer, since he was not wont, in former days, to indulge quite such woebegone sentiments. Indeed, by this time, most of the company were more or less under the same influence. Even my sober little gentleman with the embroidered waistcoat had taken on an air of such preternatural virtue and importance as could only be the result of potations.

For my part, I have always, as you know, been a degenerate son of Sir Peter in this respect, and am, moreover, too fond of certain little mental whims and fancies of my own to care about fuddling them. Added to this, I had a special reason for remaining sober. So soon, therefore, as I could effect my escape, I slid quietly from the table, making as little noise as possible, lest I should arouse some toper and invite capture. The staircase safely reached, I bounded up it three steps at a time to the drawing-room door, where I paused for a moment

to compose myself; my heart throbbing afresh with hope and expectation.

Alas, Theodore, again I might just as well have restrained my emotions! If all was conviviality downstairs, here upstairs all was etiquette and the deadliest formality. My sprightly Mistress was enthroned upon a large red plush ottoman, between a couple of stout dowagers, she of B—— on the right hand and she of S—— on the left. Had it been the former Countess only, I might have faced the ordeal. My Lady of Barmouth hath a friendly and an inviting countenance; she is human still, no question of it. There is a light in her eyes and a surviving rose in her cheek which proves her to be no enemy to a lover—even to another woman's lover.

But the other Countess, Theodore, the other is a dragon! a vulture! a scraggy-necked, scandal-hatching, turban-wearing, death-breathing old vulture! The glance of acidulated disgust which she flung at your poor brother as he endeavoured discreetly to approach the ottoman would have blistered the hopes of Eros himself. 'What does the puppy mean by presuming to present himself here, when he ought to be fuddling his wits away in the company of his betters downstairs?' That was what her glance meant, or so I read her Ladyship's amiable expression.

Am I a coward, Theodore? I trust not, though there have been sundry occasions of late when some little doubts upon the subject have obtruded themselves. This, I must tell you, was one of them. I quailed, sir, palpably and visibly quailed, before that detestable old virago, and having hovered about feebly a little while in the background, I did as our illustrious troops were forced to do last autumn—

retired before the Enemy, surrendered the field to her, and once more descended to the noble and inspiring Company of the Bottle.

To sit soberly amid a circle of one's inebriated acquaintances is more, however, than flesh and blood can endure. I was not going to get drunk on compulsion, and there was but one other alternative therefore possible, which was to go to bed! I retired accordingly to my chamber, the one absolutely sober man I believe in that august company, even the servants being most of them by this time nearly as drunk as their masters. Whether sobriety is or is not a virtue, I leave others to decide. That it is not one that invariably rewards its votaries, and that it did not reward me upon that occasion is at least certain. While every other man of the party in due course sang, swore, hiccoughed his way cheerfully to bed, I alone lay betwixt the sheets, a prey to the liveliest sensations of mortification. Why had I been such a fool as to come? I asked myself. Why, for that matter, had I been such a fool as to let my affections stray in a direction where they were plainly neither encouraged nor desired? The demure yet mocking countenance of my Mistress as she sat between her two Countesses upon that detestable red-plush ottoman, hung like a vision before my eyes, and for a long time effectually banished sleep.

CHAPTER III

DAME GOSSIP

OPPRESSED though I was by these thoughts, my dear Theodore, I at last did contrive to fall asleep, although not until the small hours of the morning ; and it was in much the same mood that I awoke and went down to breakfast, at which meal, despite the potations of the preceding evening, most of the company were by this time assembled.

Having described the guests as they appeared to me overnight, I need not go over the list again. I suppose it was what would be called a very distinguished gathering, quite the cream of society, as society reckons itself. Indeed, with a little decent exaggeration, I could, no doubt, make you believe that so brilliant or so influential a company never before met under a single roof ; that the whole affairs of Europe were placed by it upon an entirely new footing, the internal administration of Great Britain set right, the Irish rebels crushed, the Invaders repelled, every possible combination of our enemies foreseen and provided for ; and that I, your modest informant, was the centre and pivot of all these brilliant machinations !

So history is written, my dear Theodore, and quite good enough history I'll be bound, for those who

have to read it. As I am not making history, however, I will confess to you that, apart from my own private observations, the whole entertainment seemed to me tedious to a degree; nor was there, I vow, a word uttered by any one of the company that appeared to be worth either the hearing or the recording.

We were an extremely patriotic set, of that there could be no question. Nothing was talked of during breakfast-time but the chances of Invasion, and the spirit of the whole party, especially of the ladies, was enough to make 'the young man called Buonaparte' cower into the shelter of his riding-boots.

By way of proof of our exemplary patriotism, the new taxes were, I found, accepted by all with the utmost amount of philosophy. The only one I even heard criticized was that on tea costing over eight shillings a pound, since who, as the ladies truly remarked, could drink it at less? As for the new window-tax, it appeared to be absolutely popular. Upon someone relating how a gentleman with a large house in town had blocked up thirty of his windows, in order to avoid paying it, the information was received with loud shrieks of anger and disapproval on the part of the ladies.

'What!' cries my Lady Barmouth. 'Could I find out where so unworthy a fellow lived, I would go myself and break everyone of 'em for him with my own hands. Would not you, dearest Lavinia?'

'That would I, Madam,' replied my Mistress promptly, 'ay, and his heart too, if he possessed one, and I had the chance.' This with a momentary glance in my direction.

Like every similar gathering within my experi-

ence, news, news, nothing but news, was what we all craved for. Observing after breakfast that Sir Fosberry Dilke had his nose buried in the latest news-sheet, the ladies gathered round him, and began eagerly questioning him with regard to its contents.

‘Well, Sir Fosberry—well, what news?’ they cried.

‘Anything new about the French?’ says one.

‘Anything new about the Irish rebels?’ asks another.

‘Anything new about Turin?’ exclaims a third.

‘Anything new about anything?’ cried they all.

‘Nothing, mem; nothing, your Ladyship; nothing at all; nothing, I assure you, ladies,’ he replied, in a tone of obvious embarrassment.

‘Then what in the name of fortune were you studying so intently, Sir Fosberry?’ cried they all.

‘Well, ladies, if you insist upon knowing, I was looking to see which way a certain main of cocks had gone. It was to be fought out yesterday forenoon.’

‘A main of cocks, indeed! Shameful, shameful!’ And, breakfast being over, the ladies dispersed in high dudgeon.

About noon a tremendous reinforcement came to our parched and thirsting curiosity in the form of the mail-bags, carried by my Lord’s own courier. An instantaneous rush took place from all parts of the house; the ladies especially precipitating themselves upon the bags; and you heard nothing but one continual ‘buz, buz, buz’ of excited or horror-stricken comment.

Horace Cornwallis and myself happened to be standing together in the porch, waiting for our turn to hear the news.

'I conclude, from those groans, that these must be some fresh proceedings on the part of your friends, the rebels, Horace,' said I.

'Damme, Jack, you know more about that matter than I do,' he replied rather sulkily. 'My belief, as I told you last night, is that the rascals will have collapsed entirely before I arrive, in which case there will be nothing left to be done but the cheerful task of stringing up the survivors.'

It turned out that the courier's bag was stuffed with quite other matter than that which I had anticipated. Your peninsula, my poor Theodore, provided the greater portion of its contents. Heavens! what disaster that unlucky Grand Dukery of yours seems destined to undergo. This last news is rather worse, it seems, upon further information than was at first reported. With Genoa a republic, Lombardy in the like case, Venice divided, and the Papal States seized, the circle must be narrowing pretty closely around you, and I greatly fear that the next thing I shall learn is that the fate of your Grand Duke has also been sealed. Pray Heaven, ere that day arrive, you and my Uncle may have made your way to the coast! You will think it but an indecent way of contemplating a serious subject, but for the life of me I cannot help being visited by momentary pictures of our stately Uncle Dorchester, with that ambassadorial strut, that air of glorified self-respect with which his nephews are so familiar, hastening away from the gates of Florence; a profane French sentry, armed with a bayonet, following inconveniently at his rear!

Forgive my levity! It does not interfere, believe

me, with an extremely brisk brotherly solicitude on your behalf, or even with a more distant nepotal solicitude on behalf of His Excellency himself. The fact is, my dear fellow, we are living in times of such rapid mutation, that in sheer self-defence it is impossible to dwell too seriously upon each fresh crisis as it arises. As you will see, if you have patience to read the end of this narrative, I, even I, *moi qui vous parle*, have had my own share of adventure, my own small and innocent whiff of those perils to which the entire world seems just now exposed. After all, it is an experience like another. Nay, even the detested Corsican may, I think, be credited with having lent a certain fillip to existences which, without his aid, would have merely rusted themselves away in one dull round of flavourless monotony. Periods like those—the dull and flavourless ones—are only too certain to return. Let us make the most, therefore, of the others while we have them. Moreover, be the romantic fate what it may that destiny has in store for you, remember, beloved Theodore, that Miles Bottomley—and, so far as I am aware, Miles Bottomley alone—is reserved for me!

CHAPTER IV

AMONG THE ROSES

To all waiting there comes an end at last, and so it was in my case. Five interminable days I spent under my Lord R——'s roof; for five days I lolled, yawned, hoped, sighed; all in vain. I was growing hopeless. The next day I must depart; my word was pledged to Sir Peter; the distance between Surrey and West Mayo is not exactly an afternoon stroll; I had to go, yet apparently not a whit the nearer was I to the object which had brought me all this way out of my road. Not one chance had come to me for a word in private with my Mistress. No sweet little stolen *tête-à-têtes*; no solitary walks *à deux*; no happy little words apart had been mine; barely an extra pressure of the hand at our formal morning and evening greetings.

It had come actually to the very last day. My dear Theodore, I was in despair! In vain I turned over expedient after expedient. Nothing could I light on. The round of deadly formality, or of still more deadly conviviality, was not to be invaded. By mere fortune, or rather by a blessed interposition of Providence, it happened, however, that my Lady Barmouth had been seized, soon after breakfast-time on that very morning, with a horticultural fervour,

and begged for the felicity of viewing my Lord's newly-erected grape-houses, of whose merits, it seemed, she had heard much. To gratify her, Lady Lavinia accordingly put on her sun-bonnet, and followed by myself and a few others of the party, set out in a procession of two by two along the broad gravel path leading to those preserves.

For some time, the line of couples kept together, and despair once more settled like lead upon my soul. Happily, the path, after a while, grew narrower, as we left the neighbourhood of the house, and whether by accident, or as I would devoutly hope by design, my Mistress lingered for a moment to snip off a rose-blossom which hung from a bush hard by.

My chance had come! 'Now or never, Jack,' said I to myself. 'Show thyself a man, or never again hope to be befriended by the divinities of Victory!'

The rest of the party had turned a fortunate corner. We were further screened from them by a double row of juniper bushes. Not a creature, not even a gardener, was in sight. In an instant I had reached my Mistress' side; the next I was upon one knee on the gravel, and had possessed myself of the hand which held the garden scissors.

Lady Lavinia gave a little jump, but did not utter any exclamation, certainly none loud enough to attract the attention of those beyond.

'Bless me, sir, how you startled me,' she cried in a tone of mild indignation. 'What now, if you please? What means this sudden audacity?'

'It means, Lady Lavinia,' said I, 'that you have, as you know very well, a lover, and moreover a despairing one.'

'Despairing, sir,' cried she, with a rippling laugh.

'I was not aware that there were such things as despairing lovers in these days. And is it, may I ask, with my poor garden scissors that you propose to perform your acts of desperation?'

'No, Lady Lavinia,' said I, 'nor is this tone of levity, allow me to say, worthy of you or of those emotions which you have inspired in my breast. My time is short. I leave for Ireland at once, and Heaven alone knows when I may have the happiness of seeing you again.'

'Well, sir, and if you are going to Ireland, what then?' retorted she. 'Ireland is not Mesopotamia! Other people can go to Ireland as well as you—other people, say I—and moreover can return thence alive again. I have even myself some slight thoughts of visiting Ireland this autumn. I have a friend there who——'

'Lady Lavinia,' said I, interrupting her, 'forgive me; but you are trifling with my anxiety. The precious moments are flying. At any moment we may be intruded upon. Will you not give me some little assurance before I leave you? Will you not renew those promises by which you once made me the happiest of men? One assurance, one little little assurance is all I ask?'

'Assurances, sir!' said she, with a pout, 'I love not these assurances. There is something far too binding about the word to be pleasant. Moreover, there seems to me to be somewhat too much of assurances in all this already,' she added. 'Yes, indeed, and of assurance too!'

'Very well, Lady Lavinia,' I said, rising and speaking in a tone of decision. 'I am to understand then, it seems, that everything is at an end between

us. I have been indulging myself plainly in a dream, a beautiful but treacherous dream. That being the case, I will now take leave of your Ladyship. Forgive my presumption, my "assurance," as you say. For the future you will be rid of my importunities altogether, and will at least have the satisfaction of knowing, cruel girl, that I leave you, a broken-hearted and despairing man.'

'Broken-hearted! Despairing! Oh fie, fie, fie!' cried she, with another laugh, though a less genuine one, I thought, than the first. 'Broken hearts and desperate deeds are equally out of place, believe me, in these days. I will go bail that your heart will be as sound as ever it was before you have performed the first stage of your journey.'

For answer, Theodore, I merely bowed profoundly, and turned away.

'Moreover,' she added, as I was in the act of going—'moreover, supposing even that I were to give you those assurances you demand. Even supposing that I were foolish enough and weak enough to be willing to bind myself, how, I should like to know, would you propose that I should also bind my papa?'

'Enough, Madam,' I said. 'I perceive that I have trespassed too long upon your goodness. Farewell, Madam. May you be happy.' I moved away; then turned again. 'As for my Lord R——' I added, somewhat feebly, 'everyone knows that he has never thwarted your Ladyship in anything.'

'Perfectly true,' cried she, 'but is not that just the best of all reasons why he would probably take the opportunity of doing so now?'

There was some relenting in all this, Theodore,

as you will observe; but I felt that it was now the more incumbent upon me to show myself firm. I therefore moved steadily away, and had gone at least six paces along the walk, when turning, not in my direction, but in exactly the opposite one, my tormentor cried out 'John!'

Need I say that I was back upon the instant, and once more beside her upon the gravel.

'You called me, dearest Madam,' I cried joyfully.

'Called you? Dear me, sir, no indeed!' she replied in her most demure tones. 'You entirely mistake. It happens that the gardener's name is John, and I was merely summoning him in order that he might assist me in supporting these roses.'

This time, Theodore, I felt that the road to action was clear!

'Then if the gardener's name is John,' cried I, 'the name of the gardener's love is Lavinia, and this is how he proposes to support her roses.'

At that, Theodore, without more ado, I caught the dear tormenting creature in my arms, and pressed a thousand kisses upon her cheeks!

She pushed me away, but not with great vigour, and my happiness might have lasted for several seconds longer had not there come, unfortunately, a sound of crunching steps upon the gravel, at some small distance from us. Disengaging herself hastily, Lady Lavinia fled like a fawn in the direction of the grape-house, dropping in her haste one of the roses which she had lingered in the first instance to pluck.

Pouncing upon it, I stood still for a minute, considering whether I had better follow her or not. Upon the whole, I came to the conclusion that it was just one of those cases in which wisdom coun-

elled a retreat. Better to leave unimpaired the impression I had made, than to risk destroying it by an inferior one. Accordingly, I hurried back to the house; penned a few words of respectful farewell to my Lord R——, regretting that a matter of urgent import made it indispensable for me to depart in haste; ordered my chaise to be at the door in half an hour; flung myself into it the moment it appeared; and before the rest of the party had returned from their inspection of the grape-houses, I was already some distance along the road to London.

CHAPTER V

IN THE ISLAND OF TROUBLE

WELL, sir, I reached town in the course of that same afternoon, and before night contrived to get through my business, though not without considerable difficulty, the very clerks at the office where I at last received my passport being so saturated with military glory that they found it irksome to attend to the wants of a mere humble civilian like myself.

Much as I had heard of the fervour of the metropolis consequent upon the news from France, I own I was unprepared for the blaze of excitement that I found consuming it. The whole town seemed to have gone mad since my last visit. The voluntary subscription, at first so poorly responded to, had now awakened an enthusiasm beyond all precedent. Apart from the new loan and the assessed taxes, the free gifts offered vastly exceeded all expectations. His Majesty's gift of twenty thousand pounds from his privy purse opened the list. The Bank of England followed with over a hundred thousand. All the wealthy men in the kingdom poured out the contents of their purses like water. Ministers were resigning a fifth of their salaries, managers of the theatres giving benefit entertainments; the very

servant-maids and link-boys, I was told, were coming forward with donations out of their savings.

The most curious effect of the excitement to my mind was that the ordinary all-consuming terror of footpads and highwaymen appeared for the moment to have entirely disappeared. People who a few months ago would hardly venture to cross Fleet Street alone, now affected the courage of Spartans, offering themselves heroically to serve in the ranks and to brave death as members of the City Volunteers. I could not but laugh, my dear Theodore, nor could you have helped doing so, at the aspect of some of these novel Defenders of our Soil. Ye gods! to see these Marlboroughs of the Stock Exchange, these Hannibals of the Bank, going through their evolutions; stuffing their aldermanic persons into the tightest of uniforms; shouldering their muskets; larding the lean earth, I'll be bound, as they strutted; and every one of them evidently convinced that he alone might be trusted to put General Buonaparte and the entire French forces to flight by his own unaided exertions!

Meanwhile I had to turn my back upon all this military glory, repress my own ardour, and cramp my vaulting patriotism into the miserable enclosure of a post-chaise. Even this poor measure of comfort I was presently forced to forego, for after St. Albans no horses were to be had, and I was forced, thereupon, to take my place for the remainder of the journey in the 'Flying Waggon,' an evil-smelling old shandrydan, dragged along by three horses at an average rate of some four miles an hour.

Truly the cruelty inflicted upon the public by these infamous conveyances is beyond all bearing!

After Towcester, where we slept, I found myself for my sins wedged into the interior of the coach among seven of the fattest human beings it has ever been my lot to encounter. Has it, do you suppose, ever so much as occurred to the makers of these truly infernal machines that man is an animal provided with legs? In vain did I endeavour to pull my own unfortunate pair out of harm's way. In vain, I sat, first with them doubled under me, next cross-legged like a Turk, finally with one actually held aloft till the blood coagulated and sheer torture obliged me to set it down again. As for getting at my pocket-handkerchief, I might as well have tried to attain the moon! Arms and legs appeared to be alike set in the stocks. Nay, I feel sure, though I have not yet tried the experiment, that the stocks would prove to be a luxurious and commodious contrivance, compared with the interior of the 'Flying Waggon.'

Poor Johnston, who is, as you know, not the thinnest of retainers, seemingly suffered even more atrociously than I, for at our next halting-place he had the appearance of a body released from the ingenious torments of the torture chamber. Even these miseries were trifles compared to what we had to endure when we got amongst the mountains of North Wales. The roads there were simply strewn with great rocks, recently fallen from the crags overhead. Twice were we forced to make a dead stop and wait whilst the bare-legged natives of the locality were summoned to extricate us. You may imagine, though I cannot describe, the oaths and yells, in mingled Welsh and English, that accompanied this business; the noise and clatter, the

cracking of whips; the shrieks of the lady passengers; every sound being reverberated from the craggy sides of the mountains.

At last we got free and went on again through that inhospitable region, wretched, weary, our coach groaning and swaying from side to side like a ship in a storm. I had looked forward to being upon the sea, even though mountains high, with eagerness; but two days and a night in an abominable little sailing-packet reduced me to miseries compared with which the worst horrors of the land seemed heaven. I endured, however, and lived, only to find on reaching Dunleary, the landing-place for Dublin, that the tide was out, and that we must get to shore as best we could by means of crazy little wherries. My evil fate consigned me to the most crazy and leaky, I verily believe, of the entire lot, rowed by a huge, uncouth fellow in a pair of patched breeches and with a filthy orange cockade stuck like a mustard-poultice upon his ragged shirt; a monster who, having me entirely at his mercy, forthwith declared himself to be a Protestant, and, so recommended, did me the favour of demanding eleven shillings instead of four as his landing-fee.

But what of all this? I can hear you exclaim. Why trouble me with trifling talk about post-chaises, sailing-packets, leaky boats, ragged shirts, and an overcharge of seven shillings? Has not the fellow just landed in a country given over to the flames of civil war? A country rife with all the horrors of rebellion, of burnings, torturings, cruelty, murder? A country wherein no man's life, according to report, was worth more than a few hours' purchase?

Really, my dear Theodore, I can only reply that

your questions prove how much more portentous things are apt to appear at a distance than when one is actually in the thick of them. Here I was, as you say, just arrived in Dublin, a city about whose fate we had all been trembling for the last six weeks; a place described in the newspapers as red with fire and slaughter, and given over to all the horrors of an Irish Jacquerie. And, upon my word, excepting that there was a prodigious amount of hurrahing in the streets, and that the window of my inn room was darkened by a huge orange flag hanging over it outside, there was nothing remarkable, assuredly nothing particularly horrible to be noticed.

I am speaking, of course, only of my own immediate surroundings, for no doubt there were plenty of exciting events happening in other parts of the country. But so it is often in many countries—so it doubtless is in France, for example, even at the present time—a gentleman who is merely innocently travelling in such countries for amusement, or for his own private affairs, seldom has occasion to feel concern or even to endure any personal inconvenience. The Dublin gaols, for instance, were packed at that moment with political prisoners awaiting their trials. In the Wicklow hills, some outlying portions of which could actually be seen from the town, a considerable force of rebels was still holding out, and only the day before my arrival a pretty brisk encounter had taken place between it and the King's troops. As for the loss of life on both sides, to say nothing of the destruction of private property, certainly it must have been enormous. But all this, as I say, was hidden away in the background, and did not catch

anyone's attention, unless one actually went to look for it.

Another surprise awaited me, and will probably seize you on reading these lines. From the accounts I had read in the journals as well as in private letters, I had drawn an impression that every well-to-do house in Dublin was closed; that the packet-boats had been crammed with fugitives; and that all who could escape from town, especially all the ladies, had done so. Nothing of the sort, my dear Theodore. To use an Irishism, the town seemed to be fuller than full, and at least twice as gay. No doubt a good many ladies (and not a few, too, of their lords) did escape at the same time as her late Excellency, Lady Camden; but even of these some had since returned, and now in company with every other loyal person in the city were intent on celebrating the news of the final defeat of the Wexford rebels with a variety of jiggings and junketings.

By way of proving my assertion I need only tell you that on the very day of my arrival I was met by a liveried servant, ornamented like everyone else with an enormous orange cockade, who placed in my hands an envelope containing an invitation to assist at a rout given by one Lady Gloriana O'Shea, and no later than that same evening.

I had never heard of the gentlewoman in my life, so could only conclude that someone had interceded with her on my behalf. Thinking that it would be a good opportunity of learning something at first hand of what was going on, I promptly accepted her invitation, and at the proper hour sent for a chair, and had myself set down at her Ladyship's door.

CHAPTER VI

I VISIT THE LADY GLORIANA

I FOUND Lady Gloriana's rooms thronged with the crowd usual at such assemblies—Secretaries, Politicians, Lawyers, Professional gentlemen, to say nothing of the wives and daughters of all these. Everyone seemed to be very gay, and certainly I must admit that the whole scene, notwithstanding a certain air of what may be called shabby-genteelism, tended more towards exhilaration than affairs of the kind habitually do in England. There was an ease and a freedom, a lack of convention, an all-pervading geniality, which I can imagine our London Society dames pronouncing to be excessively vulgar, but which I for one was disposed just then to find vastly to my taste. How unexpected it was, Theodore, for instance, to have Lady Gloriana herself (she happens to be fat, florid, and what a genteel friend of mine calls milk-maidy in her contours) receiving me with no greater formality than if I had been her son or nephew, welcoming me to Dublin in a delightful brogue, and, I aver, so benevolently that I fully expected her every moment to fold me to her capacious breast. Then there were the young ladies her daughters, two of them threatening eventually to rival their mother in the matter of portliness, the

third 'taking after dear papa,' so Lady Gloriana assured me, the said father being apparently a cadaverous-looking individual whom I saw in the distance, a lawyer, I believe, just then deep, no doubt, in the business of getting these poor devils of rebels duly hanged—how refreshing, I was about to remark, to find myself so completely at home at once with this estimable family that within five minutes we were all on terms of general as well as particular confidence. It was much the same with everyone else. All present overflowed with friendliness, and I found myself thinking that did fate permit me to spend a month in Dublin I should speedily be as good an Irishman as the best of them.

One matter, indeed, I noticed, to which I have already referred, and that was the complete absence of any concern regarding the state of the country. The crowded rooms, with their rather dusty-looking decorations and well-worn appointments, might have been a thousand miles distant from Wicklow and its horrors of rebellion. It was not that all were trying to forget those horrors—no one apparently seemed to think them worthy of a thought—and such references to them as I heard were in the nature of a jest. For example, I happened to overhear a large corpulent man, whose square face revealed the lawyer, relate to a group about him his experiences in Court at the trial of some rebels then going on. He might have been describing the performance of a comedy he had been witnessing, and indeed the laughter caused in the circle about him by means of his indiscriminate mimicry of judge, counsel and prisoner was as hearty as any I ever heard in Drury Lane. 'And what will be the end of it all'

Counsellor?' someone asked. 'A Rope-end, my dear sir,' answered he, and cheerfully tapped his snuff-box.

Among the company I was soon attracted by the figure of a young girl, tall, exceedingly graceful, and of that peculiar type of dark-haired, dark-eyed beauty ascribed frequently, though erroneously, I am induced to think, to Irish women. Around her was gathered a crowd of admirers, whose attentions she received with admirable composure. I was idly watching the demeanour of these, and hoping, I admit, that I might presently have the privilege of being presented to the lady, when someone tapped me on the shoulder, and, turning, I saw none other than my friend, Horace Cornwallis. He looked flushed, being still faithful, it would appear, in the service of his latest charmer, and greeted me rather vaguely, though with an amount of effusiveness which the depth of our intimacy hardly warranted.

'So it is really you, my dear Bunbury!' he cried. 'Faith, and this is an unexpected pleasure, a very great pleasure! And what brings you to Ireland, may I inquire?'

'Politics! Politics!' I answered with a shrug. 'Surely, now that we have both come here, the affairs of this unfortunate country will shortly be settled satisfactorily.'

'Why, yes, of course. Yes, yes. Ha, ha!' laughed Horace. 'Politics indeed! Faith, an excellent jest!' Then growing solemn of a sudden, as is the wont of men in his agreeable condition, he raised a fore-finger and whispered, 'Egad, Jack, if you knew the nature of my mission here you would stare. Hush! Not a word. Presently——' With that, Horace gave me a portentous wink and broke into gaiety

again. 'And what do you think of Dublin, eh, Jack?' With that, and without waiting for an answer, he proceeded to pour upon me a deluge of questions, such as where was I lodging, had I seen So-and-so, and So-and-so, and when did I think of returning to England, and above all what was my opinion of Irish women? Here he assumed another of his solemn expressions, and, drawing me mysteriously aside, asked if I did not think Miss Talbot the loveliest creature in the world.

'Miss Talbot?' said I, frowning. 'I am not aware that I have ever seen such a person.'

'Why, tut-tut, man, nonsense! I saw you watching her not five minutes ago! Is she not a splendid creature? Pardon me, though,' he went on with a would-be knowing smile, and putting a hand on my arm, 'I forgot—I forgot. There is for you but one divinity in the world. Tell me, is it true, what I hear, that your Mistress also contemplates a visit to Ireland?'

The question surprised me, as you may guess; but I kept my countenance and answered rather stiffly that what my Mistress was or was not going to do did not immediately concern us.

'Does it not?' said Horace, with a bemused lifting of his eyebrows. 'You tell me it does not? Well then, damme, Jack, I suppose it does not, and I apologize. But look you—what was I about to say? Ah yes, it concerned the beauty yonder. Is she not a devilish fine girl? Look at her colour, sir, her eyes, her bewitching glance, her figure, her air of command—and but nineteen or thereabouts! Confound me, Jack, were I only a free man I should soon make a clearance of those young jackanapes

around her. 'What? You have not yet been presented, you say?' And with that Horace, leaving me, darted away down the room towards Lady Gloriana.

It was, I presume, through his good representations that I presently had the felicity of finding myself *tête-à-tête* with Miss Talbot in that secluded part of the room sacred to dowagers and their kind. She was indeed charming in every respect, and without any of those coquettries assumed so frequently, and to my mind often so disastrously, by your Society demoiselle. So delightfully natural was her mien and speech, with just a trace of brogue in her voice and more than a suspicion of roguishness in her black or deep brown eyes, that I believe she could, and she would, have drawn from me the closest secrets of my life. As it was, before long I found myself not only revealing to her a variety of details with regard to our own recent movements, but also divulging the reasons that had induced my visit to Ireland.

'You seem to me to have been sent on what may be called rather a Wild-geese chase, if I may say so, Mr. Bunbury,' said she when I had told her about our sister Kate and Sir Peter's fears as to her safety. 'As for danger, really Ireland is not such a very terrible place as you had imagined it to be from report, now is it?'

'Certainly it is not, so far as I can see,' I replied. 'In fact, I own to being not a little amazed at the absolute indifference to danger shown by everyone here. You yourself, Miss Talbot, have no fears, I think?'

'Of these wretched rebels, do you mean?' said she. 'Certainly not. It is with me as with the rest of

the company you see here. Possibly though, when you have got through your journey and have reached my own part of the country, you may not find matters quite so simple or agreeable. The French, if ever they do come, are likely to prove rather more formidable than a set of half-naked peasants, armed with nothing better than fowling-pieces and pikes.'

'Possibly, and it is just on that chance that I have come over in order to see if I can be of any use. But *your* country, you say, Miss Talbot—do you then reside in the neighbourhood of Castle Byrne?'

'Occasionally, or not so very far off. I am acquainted with your sister, Mr. Bunbury. In fact'—here she paused, then laughed, and glanced at me—'Lady Byrne has never referred to me in her letters?' she asked.

'Not within my knowledge,' I answered. 'You are a friend, then, of hers?'

'I should hardly go so far as to say a friend, but a neighbour—a neighbour at a distance.'

Then she laughed again and said: 'But has not anybody else—someone you know very intimately indeed—spoken to you of me?'

'I vow, Miss Talbot, that until this evening it has never been my good-fortune to hear so much as your name,' I answered, more frankly perhaps than politely. 'But this someone I know so intimately—may I inquire who he is?'

'*He!*' she cried, laughing again. 'Need I be more explicit, Mr. Bunbury, than to say that not *he*, but very much *she*, is someone who will, and before very long, I believe, brave the dangers of this barbarous country of mine?'

That she could only be referring to Lavinia was obvious. Furthermore, there was that other refer-

ence made a little while before, by Horace Cornwallis. Could it be that Lavinia really was coming to Ireland, and, if so, why and when? I must have looked painfully embarrassed, I expect, for when next I glanced at Miss Talbot she was regarding me rather quizzically, and not altogether, I thought, without a touch of malice.

‘You refer to——’

‘Oh, now stay, stay!’ she interrupted. ‘No names, please—and pray, Mr. Bunbury, forget my ill-considered question.’

‘But why, Miss Talbot?’

‘Why—because it has evidently distressed you.’

‘Not in the least, I assure you. I was merely surprised a little. Because—well, I will be frank with you, and confess that I was not aware, until some minutes ago, that—that someone who must be nameless intended visiting Ireland.’

‘Indeed?’ The lady’s voice, not less than her eyes, expressed her astonishment. ‘You did not, Mr. Bunbury? Oh, then indeed I have blundered sadly.’

‘In what way, Miss Talbot?’

‘Why in revealing what is, it seems, a secret.’

‘But why should it be a secret?’

‘Ah, that is the whole matter! For if I know, and Mr.——’

‘Cornwallis,’ I suggested.

‘Yes—and Mr. Cornwallis also knows—and you, Mr. Bunbury, do not know, why then it does seem mysterious, does it not?’

I hardly knew what to answer. I felt suddenly brought face to face with an exceedingly perplexing and disturbing problem. Why was Lavinia coming to Ireland? and if she intended doing so, why had she not informed me? How did it happen that

Horace Cornwallis knew, and this tantalizing Miss Talbot also, and what was the cause of that lady's change of manner? A minute ago all charming frankness, now darkly mysterious, and with something in her voice and eyes that made me suspect she was all the while inwardly enjoying my embarrassment.

'How does Horace Cornwallis come into the matter, I should very much like to know?' I at length moodily inquired.

'Oh fie!' said she, laughing openly. 'Would you have me admitted into the gentleman's confidence, and then ready to betray it? You are his friend—see, there he is—why not inquire of himself?'

Turning, I saw Horace a little way down the room, standing by himself and looking our way. His face also, I thought, wore an air of amusement as he kept his eyes fixed upon Miss Talbot and myself. Presently he openly smiled, or more accurately grinned, in response, as I saw, to a signal from that lady.

Plainly there was some understanding between them—some plot in which they and, as it seemed, Lavinia also were concerned! What was it? A sudden desire to cross the room and belabour my grinning friend rushed over me. I felt, moreover, a fear that, were I to continue longer in Miss Talbot's company, I might be tempted to do or say something unmannerly.

Rising, therefore, I made my formal excuses, saying that I had had a long journey, and felt excessively tired. With that I bade the young lady adieu, gave Horace a curt nod as I was passing him, and was presently taking my leave of Lady Gloriana.

CHAPTER VII

BENEATH THE HARROW

MY final start from Dublin was made in a whirl of confusion. Only two riding horses could be procured, and it presently appeared that the little I had in my valises failed to fit into the saddle-bags. Johnston, bathed in perspiration, endeavoured, with the assistance of the red-wigged waiter of the inn, to get some of my necessaries into them. Separately and unitedly the two stuffed and perspired. The red-wigged man pulled off his wig, and, to my astonishment, his hair was black below it; a little more effort and another wig was pulled off, and lo, his head was grey! This time at least, I thought, he must have reached his natural hair; but no, apparently there was yet another to come. How many more layers of wigs there may have been I cannot say, for at this point I fled from the field of combat, and took refuge downstairs in the coffee-room.

When at the end of about half an hour I returned, they were still packing, and now the waiter's head was perfectly bald, while Johnston's face was scarlet, and he was muttering oaths under his breath.

'Well, Johnston,' said I cheerfully. 'Are the saddle-bags not filled yet?'

'Filled, sir? Busting, sir—busting!' he exclaimed. 'But just look at these!'

These, my dear Theodore, were everything that a man most needs in life—boots, coats, breeches, stockings, etc.—all scattered about in wild confusion over the bed and chairs, with a considerable residue littering the floor.

‘Well, Johnston,’ said I, still in the same cheerful and irresponsible tone, ‘it is unfortunate, but I must have some clothes to wear, you know. There will be company, I presume, at my Lady Byrne’s, and I have a character for decency to preserve. At the same time, the horses must not be overloaded. We have a long way to go, my good fellow, and sore backs are serious things. However, do your best, Johnston. I leave the matter entirely to you. Only for God’s sake lose no time, for we must start in an hour at the latest.’

With these judicious remarks I again retired, this time rather precipitately. For, although Johnston is an invaluable servant, and usually a very respectful one, still I preferred to let him pour out his fine old crusted stock of trooper’s epithets on to the waiter’s bald head rather than to risk them upon my own.

When next I returned to the room the bags were packed; the waiter had resumed his red wig, and Johnston wore the look of a conqueror.

‘Good,’ I said. ‘Everything in, Johnston?’

‘No, sir,’ he answered. ‘But mostly, sir—mostly everything.’

A glance round the room hardly confirmed the reply; but I saw that the saddle-bags were indeed bursting, and I accordingly ordered a start.

By ten o’clock I was on horseback and was trotting leisurely onward, Johnston following in the rear, the swollen saddle-bags bumping up on either side of

him. No adventures came to us. The morning was gloriously fine. I enjoyed the distant prospect of the Dublin mountains, although I must confess that my enjoyment was considerably marred by thoughts now and then with regard to Lavinia. Was she really coming to Ireland? And if so, when and wherefore? I rode along in a profound meditation, trying to resolve these questions.

Some little way outside the city my mood of reverie was broken in upon by a sound of hoofs behind me, and, turning, I saw three horsemen, in the foremost of whom I was not a little pleased to recognize the person of Mr. Vansittart Nugent, a Catholic gentleman of good family, distantly related, I believe, to the Earl of Westmeath, and one whose acquaintance I had already made in the house of Lady Gloriana O'Shea.

Overtaking me, he slackened his pace, which gave me an opportunity to bow. He did the same, though with rather an averted air, I thought, as if preferring to avoid an encounter; then apparently remembering something that disposed him in my favour, he turned towards me, and made some civil remark about the weather.

I took advantage of this to ask him a question or two about my road, to which he again replied courteously, explaining that he himself branched off after the first halting-place, towards his own property in West Meath.

'That is a bad hearing for me,' cried I, 'for to tell you the truth I was thinking how greatly the tedium of my journey westward would be shortened, had I the good luck to find that Mr. Nugent was making some part of it in my company.'

He bowed again, by way of response to my civility, but shook his head.

'I am afraid, sir,' he said rather coldly, 'that, so far from finding my company an advantage, you would probably find it to be productive of very serious annoyance.'

'You surprise me,' I cried. 'How could a stranger like myself possibly fail to be the better for the companionship of an Irish gentleman of such distinguished honour and loyalty as yourself?'

'You are extremely obliging, sir,' replied he. 'Unfortunately in these days, no amount of loyalty in the least avails the man who is also equally loyal to the faith of his ancestors.' He rode along silently after this remark for a little way, then resumed: 'Shall I tell you the circumstance which is at present hastening my return home?'

'Pray do,' I replied.

'I have just heard,' said he, 'that the house of a tenant of mine, a man to the full as loyal as myself, has been burnt to the ground by the militia, with all the hay and straw in his yard, also his stables, containing several young blood horses which he had in training.'

'Good Heavens!' I exclaimed. 'And what reason was there for such an outrage?'

'None that I am aware of, except that the party of militia in question was engaged at the time in burning chapels, and that the priest of one of them was believed to have taken refuge with my tenant.'

'But, my dear sir,' said I, checking my horse, and speaking with much earnestness. 'In that case why, may I ask, are you turning your back upon Dublin? Why not return there at once, and place

the matter before the proper authorities—nay, before His Excellency himself? He, as all the world knows, is a man of the strictest sense of justice, and assuredly will have the culprits dealt with according to their deserts.'

Mr. Nugent merely sighed and shook his head, a grave smile lightening the severity of his face.

'Your eagerness, my dear young man, does you the utmost honour,' he said. 'I am sorry to add, however, that it only shows how very little you know of the manner in which this unhappy country of mine is at present governed. To do as you suggest would merely be to expose myself to additional mortification.' He was again silent for a minute; then he looked at me. 'Shall I tell you who, so I hear, was the leader of the party of militia in question?'

'Please do,' I answered.

'A gentleman of the name of Puddock, who has already acquired considerable distinction under the sobriquet of "Burn-Chapel Puddock," and who is the brother-in-law of no less a personage than the Lord Chancellor of Ireland.'

I remained silent, feeling that I was indeed incapable of understanding the ways and methods of government in this peculiar country.

'Since you are so frank with me,' continued Mr. Nugent, 'I will be no less frank with you. I confess to feeling bitterly aggrieved at the treatment which, in common with most of my equally loyal co-religionists, I have received and am still receiving from the authorities. Put yourself for one moment in my place,' he continued, turning towards me and speaking in a tone of vehement, although contained

emotion. 'If for more than a century your ancestors had—on the admission of their opponents—been absolutely, nay, conspicuously loyal; if you had not only paid every imposed tax,—but had gone out of your way to subscribe for public purposes when no such necessity was imposed; if upon the outbreak of this rebellion (a Protestant rebellion in the first instance, remember—organized, and for the most part officered, by Protestants) you had put yourself and all you possessed at the disposal of the Government; if, moreover, you had done everything in your power to restrain the people in your neighbourhood, and the Bishops of your Church had exerted all their authority in the same direction; if, notwithstanding all this, you find (simply because a number of ignorant creatures who had committed various crimes in quite another part of the country profess the same creed as yourself) that you are suspected and placed under a ban; if you found your property, your very life, left at the mercy of every drunken, malicious animal who chooses to call himself a Protestant; how, as a candid man, I ask you, would you feel under such circumstances?'

'Upon my word, sir,' I cried, 'I hardly know how to answer your question. The situation as you describe it appears to me one of the hardest and most unjust I ever heard of. If it has any explanation, it is, I suppose, that this Government, like most other Governments, is more or less at the mercy of its own supporters, and has to consider, not their opinions alone, but also their prejudices. From such observations as I have been able to make since my arrival in this country it appears to me that those of the dominant faction are in a condition into which

reason hardly enters; they seem to act upon the principle that they can best show their patriotism—rather, I should say, the extent of their fears—by an exhibition of sheer unreasoning ferocity.'

In reply to these observations of mine, Mr. Nugent merely bowed politely and sighed. The sudden burst of energy with which he had poured out the tale of his wrongs, seemed to have departed as suddenly as it came. His head sank upon his breast, and he rode on beside me silently, so lost in a train of melancholy reflections as, apparently, hardly to be aware of what was passing around him.

Our road lay for a considerable distance between level fields, for the most part large pastures rich in deep grass, interspersed with occasional plots of ploughed land, equally fertile, but often weedy and indifferently cultured. Hardly any travellers were to be seen, the few we met being mostly armed to the teeth, and passing us by with averted eyes as if in furious haste. It had changed to a depressing afternoon, damp and sunless, and my companion's melancholy mood naturally did not add to the gaiety of the occasion. I made one or two attempts to re-engage him in conversation, but nothing I said appeared to chime in with his thoughts, whatever they were, or to distract his melancholy; and it was for the most part therefore in unbroken silence that we jogged along, until about six o'clock in the evening, when we came to the small town of Kilcock, and drew rein at the door of an inn.

CHAPTER VIII

AN ORANGE CHAMPION

ALTHOUGH a fair-sized building on the outside, there proved to be no better accommodation available at this inn than a bare, whitewashed room for ourselves, with another similar one for our servants. The former happened to be vacant at the moment, and, having ordered dinner, we sat down therefore before the fire to dry our clothes and await its arrival.

We had not been seated more than a quarter of an hour before the door opened and there entered a big, coarse-looking fellow, decorated with the customary huge orange cockade. He was dressed in an extremely dirty suit of greenish corduroy, carried a large riding-whip, and displayed a pair of huge pistols at his belt.

He walked straight over to the hearth, and, with a glance at my companion—one in which malicious recognition showed plainly—planted himself squarely before the fire, so as to monopolize the whole of it; swished first one coat-tail over an arm, then the other; cocked his hat aggressively forward; and, as if all this were not enough, suddenly stooped and stared Mr. Nugent openly and offensively in the face.

An uglier brute you never saw in your life

Theodore, nor was there the slightest doubt in my mind as to his station. In his case there could not be a question of even pretended gentility. The fellow, clearly, was some sort of an underling, probably a farm bailiff or small factor, possibly a gamekeeper. In any case, obviously a creature whose very clothes reeked of his commonness.

Such being our intruder's fashion, you may imagine my astonishment at seeing Mr. Nugent—a gentleman, mind you, belonging to one of the oldest families in Ireland, and a man of tried courage and honour—quietly endure such outrageous conduct, nay, positively yielding to it, for without so much as a single word of protest, he moved his seat to one side, and left the possession of the hearth to his aggressor!

You will acquit me, I know, Theodore, of any love for asserting my own particular brand of gentility, or of desiring to use it so as to mortify my social inferiors? Nevertheless, there are occasions when a gentleman is bound to assert himself, and that promptly, under penalty of forfeiting his own self-respect. Moreover, the fact that Mr. Nugent, from motives of his own, should choose to endure such insolence, was obviously no reason why I, who had no such motives, need sit and see him thus publicly insulted.

Anyhow my blood was up, and anger as you know needs no defence.

'Excuse me, sir,' said I, rising to my feet, and speaking with extreme curtness. 'It appears to me that you have made a mistake about your room.'

The fellow gave a sudden jump, much as if I had

actually struck him; then turned and stood gaping at me.

‘You hear me,’ I said, making a step forward, my eyes fixed menacingly upon his.

He drew back a little, shuffled with his feet, looked first to this side and then to that.

‘What the——’ he stammered. ‘And who the devil may you be?’

‘I repeat, sir, that you have made a slight mistake in coming in here,’ I replied. ‘This room is reserved, I am informed, for the use of gentlemen. If you will have the goodness to walk out of that door and open the one to the right, you will find a room in which you may possibly be permitted to sit down, and a society somewhat more befitting your appearance and manners.’

You should have seen the fellow’s face, Theodore! It positively swelled out visibly with rage, the expression upon it being the most malignant I have ever seen. Thrusting his head forward, he stood staring at me, his bloodshot eyes glaring, his hands fumbling at the butts of his pistols.

‘Who the——’ he spluttered. ‘Who—are you, sir? I should like to know, and what business is this of yours?’

‘There is the door,’ I said, pointing.

Still he hesitated. Had I flinched in the slightest degree, he would have drawn his pistols. I made a step forward.

‘Out, you dog!’ I ordered; and at that the fellow, not a little, I must privately own, to my surprise, still scowling and mumbling, took himself slowly away from the fireplace, and slunk off through the doorway.

No sooner had he gone than Mr. Nugent came over to me, looking a little abashed, I thought, and with his hand half extended.

'Permit me to thank you for your service, Mr. Bunbury,' he said, speaking with evident difficulty. 'I am constrained to——' He stopped short, then after a minute continued. 'As you no doubt saw, that fellow is known to me. He is, or lately was, steward to my neighbour, Lord S——. Now he is acting, I believe, as a tool or agent in service of the priest-baiters. Seeing you in my company, he doubtless concluded that you also were a Catholic, and that he might, therefore, safely indulge his insolence.' Mr. Nugent stopped again, flushing painfully, his hand still half extended towards me.

I took it, but with no great eagerness. I felt chilled and uncomfortable—I might almost say, personally ashamed. I could not understand how any circumstances, not even the admittedly distressing circumstances of a violent religious persecution, could make any man (much less any gentleman) so utterly lost to the primary instincts of ordinary self-respect.

Mr. Nugent evidently suspected the existence of some such feeling on my part, for a little later, over our wretched meal of bacon, cabbage, and potatoes, he expatiated to me at considerable length upon the impossibility of resenting every petty insult to which a gentleman of his creed was exposed at the present time in Ireland. It was the more necessary, he added, to practise self-restraint, because any natural show of resentment merely served to give justification to those whose only claim to consideration was their Protestantism, and who, since the

outbreak of this deplorable rebellion, had simply swarmed over the country like a cloud of vermin.

Naturally I agreed with all that he said. Nevertheless, that feeling of discomfort upon my part remained. It was what, I suppose, would be called instinctive, for I entirely failed to rid myself of it, and the result was that it was not altogether a matter of regret to me when, next day—after a night of wakeful tossing betwixt filthy blankets—we reached the point where our roads diverged, and there parted, with many expressions of regard and good-will upon both sides.

CHAPTER IX

I VANQUISH TWO SWASHBUCKLERS

IT being no part of my purpose that you should fling this narrative aside in disgust, I will not delay, my dear Theodore, to relate in detail the various other incidents of that eventful ride. One of these I will indeed recount, by way of illustrating further, and perhaps still more vividly, the state of the country through which I rode. The scene of it was a place called Kinnigad, a wretched village, containing only a row of mud cabins, a pot-house calling itself an inn, and the usual sprinkling of human beings, animals, and fowls.

Dismounting at the door of the inn, I made my horse over to Johnston, and walked into a room which opened immediately beside the entrance. Hardly had I crossed the threshold when two men, who had been drinking together over the fire, sprang up, one of them holding a pistol, the other tugging at a sword, both protesting noisily and with many oaths that they would make mutton of anyone daring to trespass upon their privacy.

The landlord, who meanwhile had come forward from some back regions to receive me, thereupon retreated in evident terror, pulling vigorously at my arm as he did so.

'Come away with me, then, he whispered appre-

hensively. 'Don't be disturbing the gentlemen. 'Tisn't ere a one but their own selves they'll have in the room with them. Easy, sir, easy. Sure 'tis the real out and out holy terrors they are.'

At this I glanced round the room, thinking that possibly I had made a mistake. But no. It was evidently the common coffee-room, though a singularly uninviting one. A large turf fire blazed on the hearth, and, it having rained steadily most of the afternoon, I was both wet and cold, so that my desire to claim a share of its comfort was naturally strong.

Ridding myself of the importunate landlord, I went boldly forward towards the men. 'Really, gentlemen,' I said, 'I fail to see the reason for this very uncalled-for excitement upon your part. As this is a house of public entertainment surely I have as much right to the use of this room as yourselves.'

'Rights, is it? You'd be talkin' about rights to us, would you, me fine gentleman! By God an' I'll show you your rights!' It was the bigger of the two fellows who spoke, a red-faced ruffian with a bottle-nose and a brogue of portentous richness. Swelling with insolence, he advanced unsteadily upon me, his sword in his hand. I stepped backwards towards the wall and stood prepared. Effectually to defend myself was, however, under the circumstances, quite impossible, while to summon Johnston to my aid might have been, I was aware, an impolitic proceeding, the more so as my opponent, like his companion, was dressed in an ill-fitting militia uniform, and probably claimed to be some sort of an officer.

Before anything further could happen, the poor landlord rushed forward, fell on his knees before

my assailant, and, raising his hands, poured out a torrent of expostulation.

'For the love of God, Captain dear! Och, for the love of Heaven, don't be killing the poor gentleman,' he cried, almost in tears. 'Is it in my house? Och, easy now, easy, for God's sake be easy! 'Tis an Englishman he is, an Englishman I tell you! His horses and servants does be outside there in the street this minute to prove it. Would you be doin' murder in my house, and me an honest man, and——'

Here his torrent of words suddenly ceased, for without more ado the bottle-nosed gentleman struck the unfortunate man with the flat of his sword, and knocking him prostrate, stood over him, pricking with the point of it unsteadily at his breast.

Meanwhile, the second man had advanced from the fireplace. This was a slouching-looking fellow, not a whit more soldierly in appearance than the other, but, fortunately, as it appeared, several degrees less drunk.

'Drop that, Dan,' he said. 'Drop it, I say, and let Phelim O'Rooney get up. Lift your sword, I tell you.' Thereupon the individual called Dan lifted his weapon, put its point to the floor, and leaning upon it, with a foot still on the poor landlord's breast, stood blinking solemnly.

His companion had meanwhile turned to me. 'Tell me, sir,' he questioned. 'English or no English; is it honest you are?'

'Honest!' replied I indignantly. 'What do you mean, fellow?'

'Is it a Protestant your honour is? That's what the captain wants to know,' put in the landlord from the floor.

'You hear what he says,' said I, addressing the captain. 'Is that what you mean?'

'An' what else?' he answered sullenly.

'Certainly, I am a Protestant,' I replied haughtily. 'But if I am, what then?'

At this the belligerent captain's mien changed perceptibly. He made me a slight bow, and moved away from the fireplace. The man with the sword still, however, stood glaring at me, and presently fell to flourishing that weapon about in a manner that was more or less menacing.

Again, Theodore, I found that an assumption of authority—however little justified, God knows, by circumstances—was the only available resource. Fixing my eyes firmly upon the fellow, I commanded him, with an air of hauteur, to desist. The effect was instantaneous! He faltered. The two worthies exchanged glances; the captain whispered something to the gentleman of the sword, who thereupon took his foot off poor Phelim O'Rooney's body, and both silently returned to their potations by the fireplace, leaving me in possession of the field.

Having won my victory, I had no particular desire to remain encamped upon the theatre of it. Accordingly I informed the landlord that I wished to have a bedroom prepared, and a meal served in it as quickly as possible. To this refuge, therefore, I presently mounted, preceded by Phelim O'Rooney himself, carrying a tallow candle in a huge and very dirty tin sconce. He showed me into the room, fumbled at the shutters, placed the candle on the mantel, went to the door, came back on tiptoe and finally whispered, 'By the powers, sir, you did that grand—grand!'

The rain by this time was coming down in torrents.

The wind beat at the windows and roared in the chimney. The room itself felt damp, chilly, and desperately uninviting. Presently a maiden, showing a pair of fat red legs and bare feet beneath her short red skirt, came paddling in to light the fire. No sooner had she done so, than a volume of peat smoke began pouring into the room. Thicker and faster it rolled, till in a few minutes the whole room was choked with the reeking volume, through which the candle gleamed on the mantelpiece like some harbour light in the thickness of a sea-fog.

All but smothered, I groped my way to where the girl still knelt passively before the grate, and bade her, for Heaven's sake, do something to allay the nuisance. 'It does be allus this way, and worse when the wind is blowing west. Be aisy, 'twill maybe clear,' was all she answered.

I made a dash towards the window, only to find that, with the exception of a small hole in one of the panes, made apparently by the thrust of a sword-cane, no means of admitting air through it was possible.

Thereupon I rushed to the door, which opened directly upon the stairs, and shouted loudly for the landlord. What with the hubbub below, the clash of tongues, the banging of doors, the clinking of glasses and the stamping of feet, it was some time before I could make myself heard. When at last Phelim O'Rooney did reappear, it was only to express his profound astonishment and unbounded indignation at the condition of things. He fell to abusing the girl, as if that would help matters. Finally, I lost patience.

'Show me into another bedroom at once,' I exclaimed peremptorily.

'I will, your honour. Sure and I will, my lord.

Why, of course I will.' He remained, however, where he was, bobbing and rubbing his hands. 'Only I was thinking that—well, I was thinking that maybe your honour's worship would be liking to sleep in a room to yourself.'

'Do you mean to tell me that there is no other empty bedroom available in your house?' I cried aghast.

'Then there is not ne'er a one, your honour,' he answered. 'I wouldn't be tellin' you a lie, my lord, but it's God's truth that there's not the colour of another room, good or bad, 'cept it might be the little one above the chicken-loft, and sure Anna Maria Mary does be sleeping there most nights.'

Who Anna Maria Mary might be I did not stop to inquire. Possibly my barefooted housemaid, or some other equally attractive domestic. In any case, I had no wish, as you may imagine, to disturb her in the seclusion of her refuge above the chicken-loft! By way of making the best of matters, therefore, I ventured back into the smoke with Phelim O'Rooney, and together we succeeded in opening the window by forcing its upper sash outwards. Even so, the smoke hung about, while the cold and wet grew momentarily more unendurable. To attempt to eat in such a place was plainly out of the question. At some expense therefore of my personal dignity, and much, I fear, to the excellent Johnston's discomfort, I accordingly gave orders to have my evening meal got ready for me in his company in the kitchen, whither I presently descended. Poor Johnston! Rarely have I seen a mortal look more perturbed and uncomfortable than he did on that occasion. But, after all, my dear Theodore, every traveller has to put up with something!

CHAPTER X

A CONNAUGHT WELCOME

THESE samples will, I think, suffice to give you some idea of my experiences on the road; and I hasten now to bring them to an end by describing the manner of my arrival at Castle Byrne.

I had been told at the villiage of Newport that three hours' riding would bring us to the Castle; but either we mistook the way, or were misinformed; at any rate we missed it hopelessly. For not three, but five mortal hours, Johnston and I jogged along at a foot's pace, over an interminable waste of stone and bog, and under a pitiless deluge of rain. Within half an hour of leaving Newport, I was soaked to the skin. My riding-cloak hung like lead about my shoulders; my hands were numbed; my hat dripped into my eyes. Worse still, both our horses fell lame, mine so badly that it was incapable of more than a shambling walk. Where we were neither of us had the smallest notion. In every direction the same dreary waste of bog stretched back to the same group of lumpy hills. Never had I imagined an aspect so savage and inhospitable.

Thus situated and in such a plight, I came as near despair probably as any traveller ever did. It was getting rapidly dark. The brown foreground changed to black. The rain pelted. The wind raged. We

floundered along. No house was to be seen or any sign of human habitation. With our horses in such condition it was impossible to continue much farther.

At last I drew rein. 'This is pleasant, Johnston!' said I, turning to look back at him over my shoulder.

For answer Johnston's hand went mechanically to his forehead, as it is apt to do when his feelings become too strong for utterance. For some reason that respectful salute of his always gives me a feeling of profound irritation. It acts like a mute reproach. It says, 'I am here in pursuance of my duty. That duty is to obey and follow you, on however foolish an enterprise. Very well, sir. You have brought yourself, worse still have brought *me*, into this dilemma. As the party responsible, have the goodness, therefore, to get us both out of it as you best can.'

All this, Theodore, I read in that respectful salute. Well, thought I, if such were Johnston's views, and the fellow declined to assist me, at least I was still his master!

'Here, hold my horse,' I cried to him. He began rather deliberately to dismount. 'Quicker, if you please; I have no wish to be kept here all night!' It was too dark for me to see his face, but I felt sure that Johnston smiled. It was not the first time by many that I had hectorred him, merely, as he well knew, as a means of asserting myself in the face of his dignified attitude of irresponsibility!

Flinging my rein to him, I went stumbling through the darkness, and by good chance struck presently on a narrow track which led to a low sheiling that suddenly rose before me, like some gigantic ant-hill, out of the morass.

With great difficulty I floundered my way at last to this hovel ; found its door, and rapped at it with my riding-whip. Instantly a sound of commotion arose within. I heard whisperings at the cracks of the door. Suddenly it opened, and a crowd of figures loomed in the smoke before the background of a large peat fire. At sight of me a wave of fear or of some such emotion went through them. They kept silent, and stood peering out at me, one behind the other, men, women, and children—dozens of them, it seemed—and amongst them numerous poultry and pigs.

Without crossing the threshold, I endeavoured to convey to a tall white-bearded old man, who acted as spokesman, and I suppose as interpreter, that I was no enemy of his house, but merely a traveller who had lost his way. He eyed me as he answered with an obvious appearance of suspicion.

‘And where is it you might be travelling to, then?’ he asked in a slow sing-song voice.

‘To Castle Byrne,’ said I, ‘where my sister, Lady Byrne, lives.’

‘And glory be to God, is it that you are?’ shouted the man, whilst in the hovel arose cries of excitement and welcome. The crowd surged wildly. A way opened to the hearth, and I was begged to come in and dry myself by the fire. I went in and sat down ; drank some milk from a wooden bowl and ate a little bit of hard oaten bread. All the time I was doing so, wild sounds in the Irish language raged around my ears.

Returning to my immediate necessities, I asked the elderly spokesman whether he could direct me to Castle Byrne ; whereupon he informed me that I should never find the way, but if my honour would

be good enough to write a 'shmall shlip to Himself,' one of the childer would run with it to the castle in half a jiffy.

'Can I not go with him?' I asked.

'You'd sink to the eyes,' he answered.

'Well, put me on the proper road, if the castle is so near.'

'I darn't, sir; not any way. Sure his honour would be mad!'

I yielded, Theodore; after all, this was a foreign country.

Accordingly, I tore a leaf out of my notebook, and on it wrote a hasty line to Owen. Handing the 'shlip' to the old man, he promptly transferred it to a shock-headed, red-shanked urchin, who at once raced away with it through the darkness and rain.

This done, I returned to Johnston and explained the position of affairs to him. He listened to me in silence. I asked him if he would care to shelter in the cabin, to which he replied that he preferred to remain where he was. Being myself either less stoical, or reduced in mind and body to a condition of passive acceptance, I went back into the smoke again, and sat upon a stool before the fire.

An hour passed; then two hours, and still the messenger had not returned. 'He'll be back in a jiffy, your honour,' I was assured a hundred times. 'Maybe Himself has company, or does be from home. Run out, Maurya, and see if Paddy would be coming.'

I felt that Paddy would never come; and sometimes almost grew indifferent as to whether he ever did. The cabin, despite its open door and chimney, was insufferably hot and reeked of humanity. How

so small a habitation could contain so many living creatures seemed nothing short of a miracle. What with the smoke and the absence of any light save that from the fire, I could form no idea as to how or in what places they were accommodated, neither as to the abode itself, other than that it had a clay floor, a large hearth-stone, an entrance like that to a cave, and a hole in the roof whence issued some of the smoke and entered much of the rain. At intervals I made an effort to engage in conversation ; but either the people were too overwhelmed by my appearance to speak, or were too ignorant of English to follow me, in any case the attempt was a failure, and I speedily desisted from it.

I was still crouching half asleep upon my stool before the fire, when a sudden commotion in the cabin made me spring erect, and hastening out with the rest of the company into the darkness, I witnessed a novel scene. Far off, how far I could not at first make out, a swarm of lights was scattered apparently over the whole bog, but all evidently converging in our direction. As they came nearer I was able to perceive that the lights were torches, and that quite a crowd of people bore them. So numerous were they in fact, that had I seen them a few hours earlier I should probably have taken them for a body of rebels on the march—though even Irish rebels, I suppose, would hardly have marched in quite so disorderly a fashion. They numbered at least sixty, most of them young men and boys, with a few older men, and even a woman or two hurrying breathlessly in the rear. They came closer, until I could hear their voices distinctly. They swarmed in before the cabin, bearing the torches aloft, and

broke into loud shrill cheers at the sight of me. Then I saw for the first time that there was a horse among them, led by a red-headed groom. All this, Theodore, was the response to my 'shmall shlip,' of a note!

I stood wondering, not a little bewildered. The groom led up the horse, however, inviting me to mount, and in reply to my questions explained that Himself had said I was to be taken by some by-path across the bog, Johnston and my own horses following by a more circuitous route.

I still delayed a little. The situation, you will perceive, was not without embarrassment. Still the shouts were distinctly encouraging, and the aspect of the crowd, if wild, was unmistakably friendly, so after a few minutes' hesitation I gave way, and, having taken leave of my friends of the cabin, who invoked every blessing of Heaven upon me in return for a very moderate donation, I mounted, and set forth through the darkness.

It really was one of the oddest of adventures! Close around me was my bodyguard of torch-bearers! Behind followed an indiscriminate rear-guard; in front a couple of bare-legged tatterdemalions led the way, indicating it with shouts and wavings of their brands. The jabbering in unintelligible Irish never ceased for a moment. In the centre of the procession rode myself, passive, but a good deal bewildered.

How we got across that waste of bog will always be a mystery to me. Twice, at least, my horse floundered upon its knees, and was lifted bodily up, and set upon its feet again by the united efforts of my bare-legged bodyguard. We splashed across

enormous pools, showing under the torchlight the colour of blood. We scrambled along crumbling turf banks, upon which was barely room for the horse to set both hoofs at once. At one moment I was down in a hollow with the torches above me; the next I was on an eminence, and the torches apparently under my feet. We kept on progressing, however; somehow, somewhere, through the darkness.

I had been travelling in this fashion for about half an hour when I felt instinctively that we must be approaching the coast; presently we reached it, and I saw the glare of the torches flung upon the waves breaking white along the shore. Suddenly we turned the corner of what I afterwards found to be a headland, whereupon a number of lights flashed out about two furlongs in front of us. At first sight these appeared to be high in the air; but, as we got nearer, something large and black began to arise, apparently out of the ground, with other lights scattered over the front of it. This, as I could hardly question, was Owen Byrne's castle at last, and how I had missed seeing it hours before seemed inexplicable, for its present aspect was so imposing that it might easily have been another Windsor or Arundel.

I was given no time for speculation, however. With one consent my bodyguard set up a warning shout. The horse began to trot more briskly. In a few minutes we reached the foot of a flight of steps, whereupon a hall-door above it was flung wide, and over the threshold a fresh torrent of people poured down towards me.

Of these, the foremost, so far as I could make out, were servants, most of them in some sort of livery.

Suddenly a loud cry of 'The Masther' arose, at which the crowd upon the steps divided, and down to me from the door of his castle stepped Owen Byrne himself, his head bare, his face all smiles, his scarlet coat flung back, and one hand brandishing a dinner-napkin.

I am sorry, Theodore, to have to spoil this hospitable picture by adding that Owen was also hopelessly drunk. He fell upon my shoulder and embraced me with the utmost effusion; literally fell, for whether he was already helpless, or was merely overcome at contact with the open air, certain it is that it was the weary traveller that had to offer a prompt support to his affectionate host! Close after Owen's heels followed a number of other gentlemen, mostly in hunting-clothes, though a few were in uniform, and one was in clerical black; all of them, without exception, being in more or less the same condition as their leader. By each of these gentlemen I was greeted affectionately, none of them failing to express the utmost joy at seeing me, manifestations which, however gratifying, caused me some embarrassment, seeing that I had never in my life set eyes upon a single one of them before.

This ordeal over, my friendly retinue of torch-bearers was dismissed to regale themselves in the kitchen whilst I was hauled by the revellers into the house. Here I found our good little sister Kate waiting to receive me in the outer hall, but hardly had I embraced the dear creature before I was again dragged away from her into the dining-room.

This was very large, and appeared to open directly out of the hall. Down its centre ran an enormously long table, covered from end to end with drinking vessels of every kind and description.

At this table more guests were assembled, most of them either in hunting-coats or in uniform. In a great chair at the top presided an enormously stout old gentleman—the Archdeacon of somewhere—who was introduced to me as Owen's maternal great-uncle. I was pushed into a chair. Drink was offered to me. Glasses were filled anew. Toasts passed. The orgie went satisfactorily on!

You and I, Theodore, have occasionally groaned over the conviviality of Miles Bottomley in times of festivity; but that was child's play, mere child's play, sir, compared with the prodigious conviviality that I then, for the first time, witnessed at this remote end of the world. The actual size of the bottles upon the table; the huge jugs of claret; the great square decanters of port; above all, the enormous bowls of punch—in any one of which an infant could have comfortably taken its morning bath—all stood evidence as to the extent of the potations. Soon, what with the effect of the heat, the clamour, the confusion, the vociferous hospitality, the Gargantuan revelling—coupled, no doubt, with the exhaustion of my long day's journey—I found myself reduced to a state of inanity that was in itself almost equal to intoxication. Pleading fatigue, I begged leave, therefore, to retire.

Not without considerable difficulty I was excused by the president and the company; was made over at last to the care of Kate, and was by her conducted in person to an upstairs chamber. Here—Johnston and my baggage not having yet arrived—I was provided out of Owen's wardrobe with necessities for the night, and here presently I fell into a deep and dreamless slumber.

CHAPTER XI

THE BYRNES OF CASTLE BYRNE

ON awaking next morning, my first impression was that I was again at sea in that villainous little packet-boat which had brought me to Dublin. I heard the roar of the wind; sea-gulls darted above me with shrill cries; all around the waves rolled, and I could feel, or so it seemed to me, the thud of them under my head. A little more awake and my illusion changed. I thought myself in a cave, a smugglers' cave by preference, much overgrown with encompassing greenery. Then, having rubbed my eyes and arranged my thoughts, that impression also vanished, and I found myself in a bedroom, but a bedroom so little like any I had ever seen before that I cannot withhold some description of it.

Its windows, to begin with, were set very low in the wall and were dimmed by masses of ivy hanging to the ledges. The walls themselves were high, and of an exceeding roughness. The floor was extremely uneven, with a rise and fall in it like that of the sands upon a seashore. The fireplace was a big gaping orifice, already generously filled with a mass of blazing peat—just the very fireplace at which any intelligent smuggler or pirate might be expected to roast his dinner, or, if necessary, his prisoners. My

bed, to continue the inventory, was also huge in its proportions, and was hung with a faded greenish stuff, much of the hue and aspect of seaweed. Lastly, the door, which seemed hewn out of a solid piece of oak, bore great hinges, bolts, and lock, and was scarred all over with holes made apparently by the pike or bludgeon of some previous occupant whilst enduring a state of siege!

I am thus particular in describing the aspect of my bedroom because, as I afterwards discovered, its style was fully in keeping with the rest of Castle Byrne. Rough, uncouth, barbaric—apply to it any epithet you like—it has, nevertheless, a certain impressiveness of its own, this same Irish palazzo of our sister Kate; perched as it is upon the top of its cliff; storm-beaten, rain-swept, and obviously large enough to contain six such snug and compact modern domiciles as Miles Bottomley.

Having made the survey of my bedroom and dressed myself, I opened the window; parted the thick screen of ivy, and leant for awhile upon the sill. A glorious morning had come after the deluge of the night, one full of wind and sunshine. The sky was high and blue, with great fleecy clouds moving across it. The air felt deliciously fresh Westwards lay the sea, rolling continually shorewards its huge white-crested billows, to crash tumultuously against the rampart of cliffs. Northwards a line of mountains; eastwards that detestable waste of bog-land across which I had, not many hours before, adventured my person.

From this wide and solitary landscape I presently looked down into a windy, neglected-looking courtyard, covered just then with pools left by the recent

rain, around which the castle and its offices were built. At that moment it was deserted, but while I was still looking down at it, from a small dark aperture, opening, it seemed, into a cave or dungeon under the pile of masonry, issued almost on all fours as a dog might, an old, bent, grey-headed man, who slowly raised himself erect, looked here and there about him, and then, with an arm across his back, went shuffling away across the courtyard, and disappeared through the doorway of what might have been a bothie or stable. Naturally this old man's appearance awakened my surprise. Who was he, I wondered, and what could have been his business in that dark hole? Will you believe me, Theodore, and will it help you to an understanding of the odd conditions still existing in Ireland, and in a place so comparatively civilized as Castle Byrne, if I tell you that this was no vagabond, no half-witted prowling native, who came creeping so mysteriously out of his lair, but quite an important member of the castle household, its porter or watchman, no less, one Malachy Blake by name? Add to this the additional facts that he slept every night of his life in this cave, and had done so for many years; that, so far from being dissatisfied with his quarters, he would regard any attempt at changing them as a personal affront; that were he to die or leave the castle service there would, moreover, be dozens of applicants for his vacant place. Consider all these odd facts, I say, and you will be able to form some faint idea of how far I had by this time travelled from Miles Bottomley!

Hardly had the old watchman shuffled through the doorway before I made a second discovery. Happen-

ing to look up, I saw a figure behind the parapet of a square tower that rose at the further corner of the courtyard on its landward side. It was that of a tall man, bareheaded, and dressed in black, who stood with his hands behind him looking towards the sea. Soon he fell to pacing leisurely up and down behind the parapet, with the air of one performing an accustomed exercise, and, looking closer at him, I perceived him to be, what indeed I had already guessed—namely, a Roman Catholic priest. This discovery rather startled me. Kate and Owen being both Protestants—why was this man in their house? Was it probable that they would maintain a domestic chaplain for the benefit of their servants? I felt puzzled, and at a complete loss for an explanation, and when, a few minutes later, a lady, also in black, with a lace shawl over her head, and, judging from her face and figure, a foreigner, joined the priest in his perambulations, you will understand that my feelings of amazement were by no means diminished.

With these matters in my mind, I persuaded Kate in the course of the same morning to accompany me for a short walk along the cliffs. At first we talked chiefly of our own affairs. She has changed a good deal in the course of the eight years since Owen Byrne carried her away to this barbaric castle of his; has lost some of her first freshness and bloom, but carries herself with a certain air of matronly dignity, which is not unbecoming.

‘You are looking uncommonly well, Mistress Kate,’ I said, smiling. ‘These western breezes of yours appear to suit you.’

‘Yes, Jack,’ she answered. ‘I suppose they do.’

And at that she also smiled, but not so merrily as was her wont—coldly and rather constrainedly, I thought.

‘They are certainly sufficiently in evidence,’ I continued. ‘Sometimes they can be unpleasantly riotous, eh? I had some experience of them last evening. It can be monotonous here too, Kate, on occasion?’

‘Oh yes,’ she answered, with another faint smile. ‘On occasion.’

‘Perhaps even dreary?’ I added. ‘You would think then sometimes regretfully even of the social capabilities of Miles Bottomley?’

‘Possibly,’ said Kate; then fell grave for a minute, and looked up at me. ‘What of our father? Tell me about him, Jack. Is he as—as difficult as ever?’

I laughed. ‘Quite as difficult, my dear. What is he doing now, I wonder? Swearing at poor old Tarbox, or nursing his gout, or wondering if the monsters of French have yet eaten you up? He was in a desperate fright about you, Kate, undoubtedly. So far as I can see, you hardly share his fears?’

‘Certainly not,’ she answered, and shook her head emphatically.

‘You have no terror of any rising?’

‘Certainly not,’ she repeated.

‘Or of any French Invasion?’

‘Oh dear, no.’

‘It is very odd,’ I said. ‘At a distance everyone is convinced of the reality of the peril, but here at hand apparently no one. Does Owen not foresee any danger?’

‘Did it seem to you last evening as if he did?’

I shrugged my shoulders. 'Assuredly not. But then sober mornings occasionally follow even evenings such as those!'

Kate, however, merely kept her face to the sea, and appeared hardly to hear me. Accordingly, I changed the subject, and endeavoured to regale her with such details as seemed likely to be of interest. She questioned me about my experiences on the journey, and I related a few of them, not a little to her amusement. Afterwards I drew from her information about old Malachy the cave-dweller. Finally, I added, as casually as I could—'And that gentleman in black whom I saw walking about upon the parapet this morning, who is he?'

'A gentleman in black?' she repeated. 'Oh yes, that was the Abbé Philippe, no doubt.'

'And who is the Abbé Philippe?'

'The chaplain of Lady Alionora.'

'Lady Alionora? Who the devil—excuse me, Kate—who, may I inquire, is Lady Alionora? Was she, by the way, the lady whom I saw join the gentleman in black in his airing upon the parapet?'

'Oh no, not possibly. That was the Baroness, I am sure—an *émigrée*—the Baroness de Noailles—a distant connection of Lady Alionora, and now living with her as companion. You are bewildered, Jack, with all these family complications? Let us sit down for a few minutes, and I will try to enlighten you a little.'

Of all that Kate then told me, Theodore, I do not remember more than half, nor would even that half interest you. As much, however, as is necessary for the proper understanding of my further narrative I will set down here in my own words for your benefit.

To make matters clearer, it is necessary to travel a little way back in the history of the Byrne family. It seems, then, that these Byrnes, or O'Byrnes of Castle Byrne, have, for at least two centuries, kept high state in this their remote corner of the world. Kate says that originally they came from the county of Wicklow, but, whatever their origin, black Papists they always were to a man, and still more, I imagine, to a woman—the very blackest. After the last, and, let us hope, final conquest of Ireland, Protestantism got the upper hand, and thereafter, as you know, the lot of those Catholics who persisted in their faith was far from enviable. Accordingly the habit (if I may so term it) grew up among well-born Catholic Irish families of at least one son, in each generation, betaking himself to France, Spain or Austria, there to render such services against the common enemy as might prove acceptable. 'A highly treasonable proceeding!' you will say. Possibly, yet hardly a very unnatural one in a country where a gentleman simply lost caste if he continued loyal to his own ancestral creed.

At last it seems that a Byrne arose, in the person of Owen's grandfather, who regarded the state of affairs from a more practical standpoint. Having carefully balanced his creed against his mundane advantages, he perceived that in order to secure the one he had better abandon the other. No sooner perceived than done. How far his conversion was genuine I leave you to decide. Suffice to say that it was remarkably convenient for himself. He went through the prescribed forms, 'relinquished the errors of the Church of Rome to embrace those of the Protestant religion'—as some wit in an Irish

newspaper once expressed it—and promptly found himself in a new and a highly improved position, not nearly so high an one doubtless as he desired, yet offering considerable possibilities for the future.

Even in Ireland a younger brother, as this particular Byrne happened to be, does not, by adopting Protestantism, thereby step straightway into his elder brother's shoes. In this case, however, circumstances aided the convert. His elder brother had married a daughter of the Marquis of Castlebar, the chief Catholic nobleman of these parts, and by her had two sons. He seems to have been always a sickly man, and a few years later he died, leaving as the natural heir to the family estates his eldest son.

It chanced, however, that this eldest son had been imbecile from his birth, and it was through this circumstance that Owen's grandfather founded his fortunes. How he managed to get possession of the estates I leave to the devil and the lawyers to explain. According to custom, the second son had been sent early to France, to be educated by his grandmother, Lady Alionora's mother, who, it appears, had been a Montmorency, and therefore of the oldest and bluest French blood. When the imbecile owner died, his energetic uncle and guardian had no difficulty in proving that the only person who stood between himself and the ownership of Castle Byrne was an alien, and as such had forfeited any claim to consideration. Between ourselves, the transaction was probably as dirty a one as it well could be, but doubtless it was an easy matter for our convert to convince those in authority that a visible Protestant was a better owner any day than an invisible Papist. Be this as it may, Sir Owen, as he shortly afterwards

became, seems to have attained all his desires at a single bound. Firmly established in Castle Byrne, he was elected a member of Parliament, was made in due course a Baronet, and in all probability would have attained to the full-blown honours of a peerage had he not died at the comparatively early age of sixty.

So well, however, had he established his position in Castle Byrne, that to him his son duly succeeded, and to that son his grandson, apparently without demur on the part of anyone. Indeed, until I heard Kate's story that morning upon the cliffs, I was myself quite unaware that any claimant to Owen's estate so much as existed. Nor, I will venture to swear, have you, my dear Theodore, until this moment of perusal ever received the smallest hint of anything of the kind.

Thus far the history of the Byrnes, or O'Byrnes, is not, I dare say, unlike the history of many another Irish family. At this point, however, we come to a detail which I think invests the story with a peculiar interest. Throughout the whole period of possession by these interloping Byrnes, so to describe them, their deadliest foe was naturally the mother of the injured heir, the now venerable Lady Alionora O'Byrne. Nevertheless, will you believe me, Theodore, that at this hour in which I am writing that remarkable old lady is still actually living under Owen Byrne's roof; is still actually enjoying the hospitality—if hospitality it can be called—of the third in succession of her son's supplanters!

Thirty years have elapsed since her husband's death, and the transference of his property to the younger branch of the house. Yet during the whole

of that period, and under the successive rule of three detested interlopers, she has never ceased to occupy her own suite of apartments in that square tower facing my bedroom window. Whether her occupation is the result of a lack of sufficient means otherwise to support her dignity—which, I am told, is immense—or whether she holds it, and has continued to do so, by way of asserting her son's rights to his hereditary dominions, is more than I can say. I simply give you the tale as I heard it from Kate. There the old lady at any rate is, and there she will unquestionably remain until the day of her death. Apart from the exceptional circumstances of the case, her position as the widow of a former proprietor is, of course, a strong one, and even were Owen and Kate anxious to oust her, I doubt whether they would succeed in so doing. She is, I gather, a highly formidable personage. She has seen live and die no fewer than five owners of Castle Byrne—her father-in-law, her husband, her son, her enemy the first Sir Owen, her second enemy Sir Hyacinth, and now is waiting, probably, for an end to the rule of her third enemy, poor Owen himself. Grim and inflexible, she makes no secret of her hostility to those whose roof shelters her. She has her own small retinue, and brooks no interference. That square tower is literally never entered without her special permission by any member of the family, not even by the master of the house. Oddest of all, for reasons known to themselves, but so far unfathomed by me, this highly preposterous situation is endured by the owners of Castle Byrne with an amount of placidity that no one seems to consider even exceptional!

Tell me, Theodore, in the wildest pages of romance have you ever seen described a more utterly absurd situation? Can you, by any stretch of imagination, conceive our good little practical sister becoming so changed, moreover, by her immersion in Irish ways that she accepts this domination of Lady Alionora with absolute equanimity? For my part I failed entirely to conceal my astonishment.

'But, my dear girl,' I exclaimed, when she had at last finished her narrative, 'I never heard of anything so amazing in my life. To think of that terrible old lady sitting up there eternally in her tower, spying down upon you like an owl through those slits—and to tell me that you are obliged to put up with it? You, Kate!'

She glanced at me. 'But she has *always* been there; she was there long before Owen was born.'

'And if she has,' returned I, 'that only makes matters worse, it seems to me. And you actually assert that, as mistress of the house, you have never yourself set foot in that tower?'

'No, never. Owen would be displeased if I did. It belongs to Lady Alionora.'

'Belongs to her!' I exclaimed. 'You mean that she has an actual legal right to it?'

Kate laughed in that rather timid way of hers which you may remember. 'Well, no,' said she, 'I don't mean she has exactly what you call a legal right. But she has lived there so long that it comes to much the same thing.'

It was now my turn to laugh. 'Forgive me, my dear girl, for remarking that it does not come at all to the same thing.'

She shook her head. 'Everyone thinks so,' she said positively.

'Everyone? Who is everyone, pray?'

'Everyone here—in Ireland.'

'Oh! In Ireland!' I waved my hands comprehensively. 'Possibly I too may come, by degrees, to have a better understanding of the ways of this remarkable country of yours. Meantime I presume that Lady Alionora, being unable to allow you to visit her part of the castle, never has the smallest inclination to visit you in yours?'

'Not now. She has grown a little feeble, I think. At first—shortly after my marriage—she used to come down to dinner every day. At present only the Baroness comes.'

'The *émigrée* lady who acts as companion?—the one whom I saw taking the air with the Abbé Philippe this morning? And that reverend gentleman, is he also part of this astonishing old lady's establishment?'

'Yes, he is her chaplain, as I told you.'

'And accompanies the Baroness down to dinner?'

'No,' she answered. 'He has not been here long, and knows very little English, so prefers having his meals upstairs. Before he came there was a dear old man, the Abbé Grignant. He always dined with us, and was a great friend of mine. He tried to teach me Latin.'

'Perhaps the dear old man tried also to teach you to be a little Papist, eh, Kate?' said I.

'No, Jack,' she answered quite simply. 'He never tried to do that. It would have been useless. Owen would not have permitted such a thing.'

'I see,' I said, with a smile. 'And in addition to

the Baroness and the Abbé there are other members of the old lady's establishment, no doubt—servants, retainers, so on—a whole entourage ?

'Oh yes,' she answered, 'she has her servants, of course.'

'And Owen, I suppose, pays for everything and everybody—servants, confessor, lady-in-waiting, and all ?'

At this Kate turned slowly round at me, her eyes very wide and full of reproach. 'Why, John, how can you ask such a thing?' she cried. 'Certainly Owen does. Matters being as I have explained to you, that is little enough surely to expect him to do?'

I sat silent, rebuked, but unconvinced. It seemed to me amazing that Kate, as an Englishwoman, should persist in clinging to so utterly unreasonable a point of view. In former days I am certain she would not have done so. What subtle influence had worked such a change in her? I speculated.

'Since you put it like that, perhaps it is not too much to expect,' I at last replied dubiously. 'At the same time permit me to say that the whole arrangement is, in my judgment, utterly monstrous and extraordinary. To take only one trifling detail, have you realized, Kate, that this old Lady Alionora must detest you nearly as much as she detests Owen?'

'I suppose she does, poor thing,' she answered. 'Not that Owen is to blame at all. He was not even born at the time.'

'You mean that Owen sympathizes with Lady Alionora over this matter?' I asked.

'Oh, yes—a good deal. Of course he would much rather——' Kate stopped.

‘Rather she wasn’t there,’ I ventured.

‘Y-e-s. Perhaps so. But he feels for her.’

‘And naturally Lady Alionora knows how he feels?’

‘Yes—I have no doubt she does,’ replied Kate.

‘And presumes upon her knowledge?’

‘Yes, if you persist in putting it in that way, Jack.’

‘Forgive me, my dear girl,’ I returned. ‘I may be putting it a little brutally, I am quite aware. In the meantime we have strayed from my point. How does Lady Alionora regard yourself?’

‘Myself?’ Kate glanced at me again. ‘Oh, as for me, I don’t think she really regards me at all.’

‘Indeed! Yet she must know you share Owen’s sympathetic feelings towards her?’

‘I can’t tell—I’m not sure,’ she answered. ‘We have no relations.’

‘You must have had some relations when she sat at your own table?’

‘Not much. Now and then she used to ask the Baroness in a whisper who I was; but I think she generally forgot, for she used to ask the same question again a few days later.’

‘Well, of all the remarkable family arrangements in this highly remarkable world,’ I cried, ‘yours, my dear Kate, must, I vow, be the strangest! To have one’s hereditary enemy sitting at one’s own dinner-table, and asking every few days who one was! Forgive my laughter. The whole affair is really beyond my comprehension. Remember, please, that I have only been a few weeks in Ireland.’

With that I rose, gave Kate my hand, and we walked back towards the castle. As we drew near

to it, we caught sight of the Abbé Philippe, standing upon his tower-terrace, with his hands still behind him, and his face turned seawards.

‘What is he spying out there, I wonder?’ I asked. ‘There seems to be nothing to be seen except gulls and billows. Or stay, Kate, an idea occurs to me. He may be watching for the French ships?’

‘The French ships?’ she answered, stopping and staring at me. ‘What French ships?’

‘Those that are reported to be bringing an army of invasion shortly to these shores. They may be upon their way at this very moment, or have already passed us by, and be landing their troops!’

‘Nonsense, Jack,’ cried Kate. ‘Impossible!’

‘Does that gentleman on the housetop there, I wonder, think it also nonsense?’ I questioned, with an upward glance at the Abbé. ‘And Lady Alionora, what does she think and know? She would welcome the French, surely, would she not?’

‘I suppose so—yes, probably she would.’

‘She would be very unlike the Lady Alionora you have described to me if she would not,’ I retorted. ‘Think what it would mean to her?—also to her lady-in-waiting, to her Chaplain, and to the whole fandango? The very hope, the mere dream of such a consummation, let alone the reality, must cause them to dance like coney upon their tower-top there.’

‘It will never come to a reality.’

‘You are sure?’

‘Quite sure—at least almost.’

‘And Owen also is quite sure—almost?’

‘More than I am. He says that he has been hearing of French Invasions ever since he was born.’

‘Very likely, but that does not prove that what

has been long expected may not some day or other come to pass. Moreover, there has never been a General Buonaparte, you must please to remember, until the other day. Genius creates its own circumstances, and brings a great many unlooked-for things to pass. In any case, your situation here is already so extraordinary, that I hardly feel as if any new combination could make it much more so. By the way, I was thinking of something while you were talking. Could you not appeal to the lawyers or to the Government to relieve you of this appalling old incubus of yours?’

‘Appeal to the lawyers! to the Government! Appeal to them about Lady Alionora? Oh, Jack, Jack, you never, never *will* understand, I suppose, how we feel about such matters as these over here!’ Kate exclaimed despairingly.

CHAPTER XII

'THE FRENCH ARE ON THE SEA'

WELL, I stayed on, Theodore, at Castle Byrne; and, save for certain personal troubles which I will presently relate to you, life was far from unpleasant. In that retired spot, remote from everything that the world calls essential, lost amongst its bogs and swamps, upon the edge of a bleak and melancholy ocean, not a care of any sort seemed to exist. We slept, ate, drank, idled, day after day. We rode, sailed, walked abroad, and visited the few residences in the neighbourhood, not including, by the way, that of the Talbots, which is a mere cottage, I am told, and at present entirely empty. Owen and Kate ruled as princes in their dominion, receiving the homage and respect due to princes. They kept open house: squire or beggar, everyone got a share of their hospitality. How such an establishment was maintained kept me in constant wonder—the prodigality of meat and drink; the crowd of servants; the number of persons entertained at their table; the swarms of dependents within and without; the innumerable necessities of the household, to say nothing of the necessities of those in the tower. Whence, I constantly asked myself, came a revenue sufficient to maintain such harum-scarum magnificence? Yet, after all, why question, seeing that

no one else troubled to do so? The reckoning was with Owen; my business, and the business of every other guest, was to accept what was offered us, and to enjoy. A plague take all forebodings! *Carpe diem*, my boys! Pass the bottle, and the devil seize milksops and pettifogging economists!

In the meanwhile rumours of various kinds had, I must tell you, been flying about the country, some of which had penetrated to Castle Byrne, but had been received for the most part by its inmates and guests in much the same manner as indicated by me when recording my conversation with Kate. They were repeated by one or another informant, that is to say, but only to be airily denied, or received with general laughter. Suddenly a more definite piece of news reached our ears. It became known that a French fleet had actually sailed, although when, or for what destination, no one knew, or at first affected to care. Even when positive tidings came that this fleet had succeeded in evading Lord St. Vincent and his ships in the Channel, and that at a date sufficiently remote to give it plenty of time to have reached Ireland—even then it was a considerable period before anybody at Castle Byrne betrayed the faintest practical sense of the importance of the information. Lord St. Vincent, it was loudly asserted, had merely allowed the French fleet to sail into a trap. Moreover, the provisions made by Lord Cornwallis and the army were amply sufficient to make it absolutely certain, in any case, that no landing could or would be effected.

All at once the scene, and with it our whole mental attitude and standpoint, changed, much as a drop-

scene is shifted in the theatre! From a condition of absolute scepticism and indifference, we passed at a bound—as is, I believe, not unusual in such circumstances—to one of equally blind and unhesitating acceptance of any and every rumour which chanced to be flying about. Of these rumours the number just then was legion, and each that reached us seemed to be more formidable and more menacing than the last. The French fleet, we now heard, had unquestionably arrived, bringing with it a large army, and a descent had actually been accomplished at Killala Bay. Thirty thousand troops, commanded, according to one account, by General Buonaparte in person, had already effected a landing, and others were expected to follow immediately. Those that had first established themselves had already seized upon Westport and Castlebar; had raised the country, defeated the King's troops with great slaughter, and were now in full march upon the capital. Such were a few and only a few of the earliest flock of rumours that swept in upon us, while close upon their heels followed others, all equally circumstantial, and all, as it fortunately turned out, equally unfounded. The Protestants of Killala, including Bishop Stock and his eleven sons and daughters, had been put to the sword. Galway, Roscommon, and Mayo had risen in arms. Forty thousand rebels had joined the camp of the invaders. Five thousand Wicklow insurgents, under the command of General Holt, had advanced by forced marches from their mountains, where they had hitherto held out against the Government, and were expected to arrive immediately before Castlebar.

I am merely culling for you, you will understand, a few samples of the latest reports of the invasion, and of the rumours with which our ears were now daily regaled. It was only by degrees that from among the multitude of such reports, a little matter-of-fact truth finally emerged. Three frigates and one brig had, it appeared, really sailed into the harbour of Killala, containing some eleven hundred French troops, rank and file, with an unusual proportion of officers, and three pieces of cannon, all of which had been duly landed. After a feeble defence by a handful of Yeomanry and a few Leicestershire Fencibles, Killala had been taken, but there had been no wholesale butchery of its Protestants, and no barbarities practised upon Bishop Stock and his family. Two of the prelate's sons had, indeed, been captured upon one of the French ships, which in all innocence they had rowed out to inspect. Even they, however, were soon released, and so far from the Bishop being ill-used or persecuted, he was, we learnt, acting as a sort of host to the French General and his officers. To these proportions, Theodore, had the long-dreaded, and now actually accomplished, invasion been reduced! A single regiment of troops, the necessary officers, and a few pieces of artillery!

Meanwhile, whether few or many, the French actually were in Killala, that much was certain, and since they might be only the advance-guard of a larger force, and seeing, moreover, that the effect they might have upon the natives could not be foreseen, it was obviously necessary that they should be annihilated as speedily as possible. Accordingly, everyone at Castle Byrne made an instant response

to the call of duty. With one consent our drunkards rose from their potations, becoming apparently in a trice as sober as so many judges, and then and there departed, the guests to their homes, the officers to their regiments, Owen himself to the local corps of which he was a captain. All this took place so rapidly that within a few hours of the first receipt of authentic tidings, not a soul remained at Castle Byrne with the exception of Kate, her baby, your humble correspondent, the servants, and the occupants of the square tower.

Thus left in command, the only man belonging to the family in the castle, and the full charge of it and of everyone in it having been imposed upon me by Owen before he departed, it behoved me at once to take all the defensive measures possible. Being comparatively near to the scene of operations, it seemed only too likely that the castle itself might be attacked, the more so that in the immediate neighbourhood of it not a human being was left capable of checking the advance of the enemy for a single hour. To attempt a serious defence of it against a force armed probably with cannon, would have been ridiculous under any circumstances, and was the more so in view of the fact that we had neither effective arms nor sufficient ammunition. I decided, therefore, that should the French present themselves in any numbers I would at once surrender and claim their protection. Mere marauding parties of rebels, however, armed probably only with pikes and shillelaghs, might, it seemed to me, be held at bay for a time, even if met by no greater resistance than that of the castle walls and doors, and it was in view of such

an eventuality that my scheme of defence was conceived.

In the conception of that scheme and in its further realization, the help of Johnston proved to be invaluable. As a *ci-devant* soldier, and one who had seen active service, he had picked up a certain amount of practical knowledge and experience, not possessed by your unwarlike if otherwise brilliant brother. To him, therefore, I assigned the position of second in command of the fortress, and he proved to be entirely worthy of my confidence. Our small and eminently inefficient garrison was speedily brought by him under some form of military discipline. Kate, not a little to her amusement, witnessed on various occasions the tyranny of drill which he enforced in the courtyard—an exhibition which was also witnessed and fully appreciated, I felt sure, by the inmates of the tower above. Arms, consisting mainly of rusty swords, horse-pistols, and fowling-pieces, were served out. Ammunition collected. Guards set. Each man had his post, even every woman her duty assigned to her. So provided against attack, I was able to assure Kate that she might sleep in peace.

Johnston and myself, however, slept little, not so much from lack of confidence in our plans, as because it soon became evident that the most serious peril threatening us lay inside rather than outside of our fortress walls. From the moment of receiving news of the invasion, and despite the preparations going on in the courtyard and elsewhere, all had been excitement at the top of the square tower. There were continual comings and goings. None of the occupants, indeed, showed them-

selves openly, and all communication with our part of the castle had ceased. That some of the party were in constant communication with the outside world was, however, obvious both to Johnston and to myself, while Johnston further held strong suspicions that secret attempts were being made to suborn our garrison. Under such circumstances it appeared to be my manifest duty, as commander of the castle, to take preventive measures, and I accordingly issued instructions to Johnston to place the tower under strict military surveillance. To these arrangements Kate, however, objected, forbidding him to carry out any such orders, and informing me that she would permit no interference whatever with Lady Alionora. In vain I argued and pleaded, pointing out to her that it was not a question of discourtesy, but of sheer necessity, seeing that all our lives were at stake—

—‘I don’t care, I won’t have it,’ she answered.

‘But, my dear Kate, I tell you treachery is afoot,’ I said. ‘These people are your enemies. I believe they would hand us over to the rebels or the invaders to-morrow without the smallest compunction. I believe, and so does Johnston, that they are even now making every effort to do so.’

‘I don’t care, I won’t have Lady Alionora interfered with,’ she repeated. ‘You and Johnston are too full of suspicions.’

‘Very probably,’ said I, ‘seeing that such suspicions are based upon excellent evidence. Come, Kate, be reasonable, my dear girl. Leave all this to me.’

‘No, no, no,’ she cried, this time with a stamp of her foot. ‘This is my house, Jack. They are our guests. Owen would never permit it.’

'Would Owen permit you to be quietly murdered in your bed, do you suppose?' I asked. 'Remember that he has consigned you to my care. Suppose that the very servants who wait upon you are contemplating treachery?'

But Kate only continued obstinately to shake her head, and to repeat that she was mistress of the house.

The statement being undeniable, I was bound to accept it as final. I therefore argued no more, but at the same time Johnston and I secretly kept the tower under the closest observation that we could possibly contrive.

In this fashion, and fortunately without any mishap, matters continued until the beginning of the second week of our voluntary imprisonment—August 26, 1798. I am not likely to forget that day nor its happenings.

CHAPTER XIII

I ENCOUNTER A STRANGER

It was, as it chanced, a day of drenching rain. From my window I looked out upon a scene of inexpressible greyness and gloom. There was a strange oppressive warmth, too, in the air, which seemed to come as if in great waves from the sea. The wind beat. Along the shore the waves made a continual rumbling and roaring, crunching slowly in upon the rocks as if with the vicious determination of grinding them relentlessly to atoms.

This external condition of gloom was not calculated to diminish an internal one which was just then weighing upon me oppressively. It was a trouble all but wholly disconnected from any of our local circumstances, arising from quite other causes, to some of which I have already alluded, but which I will now proceed to relate to you in a little fuller detail.

You must know, then, that from the date of my leaving England, throughout my stay in Dublin, and for a considerable period after my arrival at Castle Byrne, not a single communication of any sort or kind had been vouchsafed to me by Lady Lavinia. In vain I had despatched letter after letter, imploring for even the briefest recognition in response. Not so much as one solitary little scrap

of a notelet did I receive! What a silence so absolute, and, I must add, so unusual, could portend, I was at a loss to conceive, but exhausted myself with every sort of explanation probable and improbable to account for it. At last—as it happened just before the first definite news of the French landing reached us—a letter in the beloved handwriting did appear upon the family breakfast-table. That I seized upon it with a mute internal outburst of gratitude, concealed it hastily, and retired as speedily as possible to peruse it in seclusion, I need hardly inform my sympathetic correspondent! Alas, Theodore, I might have spared any such raptures, any such gratitude. Far from being a source of new happiness it proved to offer the sharpest and the most penetrating of wounds I have ever received. It was a blister, sir, a positively excoriating blister, instead of a balm! My mistress had evidently sat herself down to write—when at last she did condescend to do so—in the most shrewish and tormenting mood which tyranny could contrive to afflict a poor adorer. Every line seemed a fresh sting, every sentence a new stab to my poor harmless vanity! She had received my letter of such a date, and was relieved to ascertain from it that my journey to Ireland had been accomplished without any of those formidable dangers and vicissitudes which I had expected to encounter upon our last meeting. Further information as regards my proceedings, she made bold to inform me, had also reached her from other sources. She had been informed of the heroism with which I had confronted the unknown perils and pitfalls of a Dublin drawing-room; the gallantry with which I

had there advanced to the charge, the conspicuous and unparalleled audacity which I had displayed at the supper-table! Now, she understood, I was enjoying the hospitality of my brother-in-law, Sir Owen Byrne, of which report extolled the large and bacchanalian character, a character which would make it quite impossible, she feared, for any of my humbler friends to satisfy my requirements upon my return.

In short, Theodore, and without attempting to give you any further extracts, the entire letter breathed such a spirit of mockery, abounded in so many quips, stings, prods, darts, and arrows of malice as would have caused even the least sensitive of lovers to smart, and coming as it did when a whole set of other circumstances were combining to wound my self-love, it inflicted upon me an amount of humiliation which I feel certain that the writer herself would have been the first to deplore, could she have foreseen the result of her lively, and no doubt largely thoughtless, persiflage.

For it happened that before this communication reached me I had been more or less consciously writhing under the discomfort of having to compare my personal position with that of every other man of my own status in the neighbourhood. It was all very fine to talk of myself as the guardian and protector of my sister and her infant son. Such a vocation might be well enough in peaceful times, but now—when the very air seemed to vibrate with the clang of arms; when every man who could bestride a horse or shoulder a gun was rushing to the combat; when a sort of side-issue or by-play of that gigantic drama which had so long convulsed Europe was

being played out actually within a few miles of me—that I—I alone, sir—should be left out of it all, I alone should remain one of a community of non-combatants; the mock defender of an unattacked castle; the nominal commander of a garrison of old men, grooms, peasants and maid-servants! I had not even the poor consolation of knowing that all who had thus gone forth to fight were soldiers themselves. Nothing of the sort! These purple-nosed squires, these three-bottle fox-hunters, what more of soldiering did they know than I did? Yet off they had gone to the fight, every man-Jack of them! The very parson himself had gone. I alone remained, looking helplessly out at the rain, in the midst of a collection of ineffectives and underlings!

Such thoughts, you will understand, especially after they had been reinforced by so vigorous an artillery of mockery from the hand to me of all hands the dearest, were not calculated to lessen that feeling of gloom to which I have referred; one which seemed to increase with every passing hour. On this particular day it was even more acute and present to my mind than usual. In vain I endeavoured to fulfil my various duties in connection with the defence of the castle; in vain I tried to occupy myself with a variety of more or less invented occupations. Finding at last that it was quite impossible to remain longer indoors, I sallied out, regardless of the state of the weather, and having crossed the courtyard below the castle, presently entered the garden by a narrow side-gate in the wall, and found myself in an alley of tall yew-trees, which here extend across the greater part of it.

I walked rapidly to and fro within this alley of

yews for a considerable time, sheltered to some degree by the thickness of their foliage from the fury of the blasts, and endeavouring by the mere rapidity of my movements to escape from that sense of personal, no less than of general *malaise* which had so strongly assailed me. I may have been walking here for perhaps three-quarters of an hour when my ear was caught by a sound that sent my thoughts rapidly flying in a new direction. It was the sound of approaching footsteps, the firmly-set, assured footsteps of a full-grown man, and was accompanied by a jingling of spurs. Pausing in my peregrinations I peered cautiously through a break in the yews, and perceived a tall man coming quickly towards me from the direction of the sea. He walked with a military carriage, and wore a large blue cloak, which entirely enveloped him from head to foot. His path ran parallel with mine, at only a few yards distance, and was one which led him straight towards the castle.

I was still watching him, with a natural wonder as to who he was and what his business there could be, when, of a sudden, old Malachy Blake issued from a clump of trees, and stood confronting the stranger upon the path. The latter halted. For perhaps half a minute the two stood regarding each other in silence. Then the stranger spoke. What he said I could not hear, but whatever his words were they had a curiously strong effect upon old Malachy. With an indescribable cry, something between a shriek of fear and a howl of welcome, the old man flung himself upon his knees before the stranger, literally grovelling in the mud, and attempting, I thought, to kiss his feet, all the while giving

utterance to the strangest medley of sounds and words that I have ever heard.

'Och, glory, glory, glory! Och, wirra, wirra, that it's myself should live to see this day! Why then—why then—och, my God, and is it your own self that I see! Great King of glory! Maura, Queen of heaven, is it your own self, your very own self! At the last, at the long, long last! Och, what will I do, at all, at all? Your honour—your own self! Och, my God, that I should live to see this day! Then, it's welcome you are, your honour, ten thousand million welcomes. Och, then—och, what can poor old Malachy do? Och, wirra, wirra, what can I do at all, at all, for your honour?'

These, or words like these, interspersed with phrases in Gaelic, which I could not, of course, understand, Malachy poured out, and all in a tone of mingled delight and submission, such as I have never heard from any human being before. His whole proceedings, in fact, seemed to me hardly that of a human creature, rather like that of some faithful dog, grovelling at the feet of a master whom he had lost and found again. There in the mud and rain he knelt, fawning, mumbling, kissing the stranger's hand, actually rubbing his bare white head against the stranger's knees. Upon his side the man in the cloak stood motionless and silent, enduring all Malachy's adoration with the same sort of good-natured tolerance that might be shown towards some faithful hound. It was undoubtedly a very strange scene! Who was this man, and by what charm did he extort from old Malachy such grovelling submission, such abject adoration? I asked myself.

Absorbed by the drama, I must, I suppose, in

my eagerness have made some sound, for suddenly the stranger started, wheeled about, and stared fixedly at the boughs that hid me; then he turned away again; passed old Malachy, and walked rapidly towards the castle.

I did not immediately follow him. For some minutes longer I remained amongst the yews, trying to collect my thoughts, and decide upon what was best to be done. Who could he be? I once more asked myself. Whence had he come, and what was the business that had brought him to Castle Byrne? That he knew Malachy and that Malachy knew him was sufficiently obvious. This demonstration that I had just witnessed was plainly not made by the old watchman without good cause. But who was he, this intruder? Was he on his way to see Kate, or had he a mission to someone in the tower? I turned, and walked towards the castle, meaning to challenge, and if necessary to have him arrested; then I stopped, retraced my steps, and, still pondering, marched up and down for yet a little longer in the alley. That the stranger was connected with our present invaders was clear, but, judging by what I had just witnessed, the task of having him arrested would obviously be a difficult one. If his coming had produced the effect I had seen upon Malachy, what of its effect upon the other members of our garrison? Would they also be ready to grovel at his feet? Had they perhaps been grovelling there already? Meanwhile, here was I all but single-handed in the midst of them; Kate too, and her child, and Johnston, all of us more or less at the mercy of this man who had so suddenly and mysteriously come within our gates.

Full of these thoughts, and feeling impelled to arrive at some decision, I was hurrying towards the stables in the hope of finding Johnston, when at an abrupt turn in my path I caught sight of two groups standing between the hedges of beech that bordered it. In the larger group were three persons, two of whom I recognized to be the Abbé Philippe and the Baroness de Noailles, the third appearing to be a servant. The second group consisted of two people, a man in whom I recognized our mysterious stranger, while the other I at once perceived could be no less a personage than the venerable Lady Alionora Byrne, occupier and quasi-owner of the square north tower.

It was with some difficulty that I believed the evidence of my own eyes! Since my coming that remarkable old lady had never been outside the castle, and according to Kate's report her state of health was so feeble as to prevent her from even coming downstairs. Yet here she was—unmistakable even to one who, like myself, had never before seen her—small and lean, wrinkled, stricken in years, yet evidently still sufficiently vigorous to endure the rigours of all this wind and rain. And the stranger? Seeing him now with a closer scrutiny, I perceived him to be a tall powerful man, with piercingly dark eyes, set unusually near together, strongly marked features, and a complexion of unusual swarthiness. His military cloak had been partially flung aside, so that I saw, not alone his sword and pistols, but also the uniform which he wore. There was no mistaking this. It was the uniform of a French officer. Further, I knew the man himself, or rather I knew his prototype. It was

the same face precisely in feature and expression that had watched me so often as I sat at table day after day amongst the revellers. Only the presence of Lady Alionora at his side had been needed to make the identity of the two faces absolutely certain.

Upon first observing the two groups I had stopped, meaning, if possible, to avoid what might prove to be an untimely encounter. My appearance had been observed, however, and I could not therefore retreat. The hedges on either hand prevented any turning aside, consequently there was nothing for it but to put a composed face on the matter, advance boldly, and hope to get past the party with a bow.

If was not until I had come to the first of the two groups that Lady Alionora perceived me. At once her whole demeanour changed. She started. Over her wrinkled face there flashed an expression of mingled terror and fury. I thought for a moment that she would have sprung upon me. Instead, she flung herself in front of the French officer, as if to conceal him; then, with a quickness and a violence that seemed impossible in one of her years, she suddenly took him by an arm, and pointing at me exclaimed:

'Tuez le, Henri! Mais tuez le, vite, mon fils!'

Thereupon I stopped, and stood confronting the pair as calmly as I might, my hands clasped behind me. A moment of absolute silence ensued. I was conscious of the fire of observations both in front and behind me—also, somewhat absurdly you will say—of the rain-drops which kept slowly trickling down from my hat-brim upon my boots. Apparently the intentions of 'Henri' were different

from those of his mother. Regarding me fixedly with his narrow dark eyes, he smiled coldly, made a formal bow—a salutation which I returned with equal formality—and moved slightly, as though to let me pass on.

Not so evidently would Lady Alionora have had our interview to end. I was one of the enemy, I already knew what might be dangerous to her son's safety; to be rid of me, therefore, was her one desire. With the utmost violence of voice and gesture, her thin old arms raised from the black lace of her long ruffled sleeves, her voice shrilling almost to the point of anguish, she implored 'Henri' to make an end of me.

He answered merely with a smile of much gentleness. '*Calme toi! calme toi, ma mère!*' he said soothingly.

'*Non, non, non,*' she cried. '*Tuez le, mon fils! Pour l'amour de Dieu. Tuez le!*'

'*Calme toi,*' he repeated, in a tone of more authority. Turning to me, he added in English, 'Should this gentleman be merely taking a walk for pleasure, there seems to me to be no reason to interfere with his exercise. The country is quite large enough to contain us both.'

I bowed. 'Monsieur is very good,' I answered in French. 'Should Madame, however, prefer it otherwise, I can easily procure a weapon.'

He looked at me steadily and smiled again. 'Not now,' he said. 'Perhaps at some future time.'

'That may well be,' I responded. 'But what if I contest your right to be here now and at the present time?'

'My right?' he repeated, raising his eyebrows, and

giving his voice an inflexion of anger. 'Did Monsieur say my right?'

'I did,' I answered. 'It is your right to be here that I question assuredly. Allow me to inform you that I have had the charge of this place and castle consigned to me.'

'So!' he replied. Then stood silent for a time, while I met his gaze without flinching. Lady Alionora had meanwhile again seized his arm, had drawn him down towards her, and was whispering instructions into his ear. Whatever she counselled, and doubtless it was nothing particularly favourable to myself, it did not seem to be to his mind. Drawing himself erect again, he inclined his head to me.

'It is quite obvious that neither place nor castle, sir, could be in better hands!' he observed drily. 'Permit me to congratulate you on the fashion in which you discharge your duties.' So saying, he motioned to me to pass on.

The unmistakable irony of his voice nettled me, and I was about to make some response, when Lady Alionora once more interposed, and whispered eagerly in his ear. Again, however, he refused her counsel, whatever it may have been.

'No, Madame, no,' he said decisively. 'Since, notwithstanding your exposing yourself to the inclemency of the weather, you have failed to escape the observation of this vigilant gentleman, it will be better—with his permission, of course—that you should now, I think, return to your apartment. Come, Madame.'

With that he again bowed to me, took Lady Alionora's arm in his, and regardless of her protests, led her towards the castle; Madame la Baronne, the woman-servant, and the Abbé Philippe following.

CHAPTER XIV

NEW DANGERS

THE situation, you will observe, Theodore, stood out now fully revealed! There was no longer any question as to who or what our intruder was. That the long-absent son of Lady Alionora might likely enough take advantage of the present French descent to return to Ireland and appear within the gates of his lost inheritance, was a possibility which had already once or twice crossed my mind. Now that possibility had become a certainty. He was here, and the only point to consider was what steps had better be taken in consequence.

To seize and eject our intruder forcibly was plainly out of the question. To even enter the north tower, demand explanations, and insist upon his departure, would simply be to play into his hands. Did I send him a challenge he would in all probability ignore it. If, on the other hand, I took no action, the whole invading force might be not far behind him, and our very lives in a short time at its mercy. Look at the situation as I might, it was a sufficiently uncomfortable and complicated one, and the more I considered it the more complicated it seemed to grow.

I was still turning these matters over in my mind

when the dinner-bell clanged out, and with that instinctive adherence to habit which survives all excitements, I turned towards the house.

In the hall I encountered poor Kate, who had just come downstairs, with our nephew in her arms. She looked pale and excited, and her hands, as I noticed, were visibly trembling. From the few words we exchanged I gathered that she had met the little procession upon the stairs leading to the north tower, and was still under the shock of that encounter.

It was now three o'clock, and the servants were waiting for us behind the table in the dining-room—a room which, as already explained, opened directly out of the hall. Further talk of a confidential kind was just then consequently impossible. To get rid of the servants and be able to converse in private with Kate was my most immediate desire. Hardly had we reached the dining-room, however, before a side-door leading to the north tower opened, and there entered, not only the Baroness de Noailles, but, to my intense astonishment, also Monsieur l'Abbé Philippe, and the stranger in uniform.

The two former came slowly forward, but the latter, pausing for a moment in the archway, the low top of which nearly brushed his head, looked about him with a quick hawk-like glance. Then, bowing to Kate, he advanced across the room to where, pale and trembling, she sat watching him. Stopping before her, he bowed again with an air of perfect composure.

He trusted, he said, that she would excuse the intrusion, but Lady Alionora upon regaining her apartment had appeared so indisposed that it was impossible for her to undergo the excitement of a

meal in company. With the Baroness' encouragement he had, therefore, decided to throw himself upon Lady Byrne's forbearance, and would ask to be permitted to dine in the company of herself and Monsieur—'whom,' he added with a stately inclination of his head towards myself—'it has already been my privilege to meet.'

This little speech, you must understand, Theodore, was uttered with such a dignity, and at the same time such an admirably courteous address and deportment, that, despite the extreme awkwardness of the situation, my heart could not help warming towards the man. In addition to this, like all supremely good manners, his had the effect of bridging over a gulf which might at first sight have seemed impassable, the result being that before long we settled down all five of us to dinner, exactly as if it had been the most natural thing in the world.

That we were entirely at our ease during that meal is, however, more than I can truthfully aver. As a lover of the odd and unexpected, I ought, I suppose, to have enjoyed the situation, and, as a matter of fact, I did rather enjoy it, if not at the time, at least afterwards. Certainly the circumstances were sufficiently dramatic! There, at the foot of the table, in Owen's own place, sat our swarthy-hued formidable guest—if guest he could be called. Opposite to him sat our good little Saxon-faced Kate, striving evidently for composure, a flush upon her pink cheeks, her round eyes considerably rounder than usual. Beside her, in his little chair, was seated her boy, the infant heir of the house, as yet happily unaware of the fate threatening both himself and it. Upon the other side of the table you may

in fancy behold myself, preserving, it is to be hoped, an aspect of some serenity, the chattering Baroness at my right elbow, Monsieur l'Abbé, very sleek, very discreet, very silent, very observant, sitting beyond. Yes, the situation was certainly dramatic, and I really did enjoy it—in the retrospect!

There was one object in the room which attracted all our eyes, an object to which I have already made some slight reference. This was a portrait of Lady Alionora's father-in-law, which hung above the dining-room fireplace. As a work of art it was not impressive, yet, like many other indifferent portraits, it gave the impression of being singularly like the person it represented. The age of that person at the time of his sitting for it had been apparently forty or thereabouts, about the same age, presumably, as that attained by the individual now seated in Owen's place. No one could possibly look from one to the other of these two men—the man on the wall, and the man at the table—without being at once struck by the extraordinary likeness between them. Try as one would to think of some other subject, the impulse to look at the two again and again, to look and to compare, became irresistible.

Conversation under such circumstances could hardly flourish, although here again the stranger's admirable manners came to the rescue. Finding that I was moderately acquainted with the French tongue, he addressed some civil remarks to me in that language, thereby including in our talk Monsieur l'Abbé, whose knowledge of English seemed to be all but *nil*. The Baroness, on the other hand, chattered away, now in French, now in broken English; but to her it seemed to be unnecessary to

give more than a casually polite attention. As for Kate, she, poor girl, was evidently unable to utter two consecutive words. Her condition was really pitiable. Continually her eyes kept wandering from the stranger at the table to the portrait upon the wall, and with each glance her eyes, if possible, grew rounder and her expression of dismay more and more accentuated. The servants, too, were in such a state of perturbation that they could scarcely attend to their duties. Every time the tall stranger spoke, or even turned his head, they grew so confused that I fully expected to see the chickens and mutton-cutlets strewn the table, or dropping into our laps.

The meal over, our three guests rose with ceremonious salutations, and retired by the same door through which they had entered. No sooner had they departed than Kate hastily drew me upstairs to her own room; made over her child to the care of its nurse; closed the door carefully behind her, and then came rushing across to where I stood beside the open window.

'John,' she cried, her eyes almost starting out of her head with excitement, 'do you—can you guess who this—this gentleman is?'

'Well, yes, my dear Kate,' I said, smiling. 'I think I have some suspicion. He is, if I mistake not, a French officer, a member probably of that force which has of late invaded us.'

'Yes, yes, yes,' she cried. 'But he is more—a great deal more than that! Can't you see? Oh, can't you see!'

'Certainly I see,' I responded. 'That he is a pretty near relation of the man whose portrait hangs

above the dining-room fireplace, I should indeed be blind if I failed to perceive. That he is also somewhat intimately connected with your old lady upstairs I am also fully aware, seeing that she twice addressed him as her son during our interview in the garden.'

'Of course he is her son!' Kate cried excitedly. 'And therefore—can't you see, John?—therefore, really the master of this house.'

I stood looking at her for a minute or two in some amazement. 'The master of this house!' I repeated. 'You mean, I suppose, that whenever, with the help of his foreign companions, he has cut all our throats, or flung us into the sea, that then he will be the master of it?'

'I mean nothing of the kind, John! How can you pretend to misunderstand me so? I mean really the master—the master of it by rights. Haven't I told you?' she went on, looking up at me with her troubled eyes. 'Haven't I told you that Lady Alionora's husband was the eldest brother, and that Owen's grandfather was only the second one. Consequently——'

'Consequently it seems to me that you are making a wholly unnecessary excursion into very ancient history,' I interrupted, smiling. 'Really, my dear Kate, I must beg you to be serious.'

'But I am perfectly serious,' she protested.

'Then I must further beg of you not to be so foolish,' I retorted. 'No, no, listen to me for one moment, please,' I went on. 'You are at present a great deal too excited, and not in a fit condition to judge. Are you prepared, may I ask, to yield up Owen's place to this man? Are you

willing to go upstairs now and present him with the keys which you hold as mistress of Owen's house ?'

'No, no—not that. Of course I didn't quite mean that,' Kate exclaimed breathlessly. 'But—but think of his feelings, John.'

'Confound his feelings !' said I. 'He has mighty little consideration, it seems to me, for those of other people.'

'Oh, but you don't understand, you really don't,' she persisted. 'You see, he knows that by right he ought to be master here. So does Lady Alionora. So does everyone.'

'Everyone ? Upon my soul, this is too absurd ! Who is everyone ?'

'Everyone here—everyone in this country—everywhere around us,' she answered.

'Excuse me, Kate, but you really vex me with your extravagance,' I replied. 'Are you going to yield to the nonsensical sentiments of a pack of ignoramuses ? Need I tell you that, by the laws of England, Owen's grandfather was constituted the owner here ? consequently the owner he became, and his son likewise, and his son's son after him.'

'Perhaps according to the law,' Kate said hesitatingly, 'but certainly not according to Irish ideas.'

'Not according to rebels' ideas, you mean ?'

'Rebels ?' she cried impatiently. 'You know that is nonsense, John ! There was no question of rebels or rebellions then. I have already twice explained to you all the circumstances. How Lady Alionora's eldest son was weak in his intellect ; how Owen's grandfather became a Protestant—and——'

'I know, Kate, I know. You told me all that long

ago. I daresay it was a somewhat dirty business. Nevertheless——'

'It was a wicked business—a cruel, cruel, wrong and a shame,' she exclaimed. 'We all know that. Everybody knows it.'

I really felt like breaking out into laughter. Picture the incongruity of the situation, Theodore! Here was Kate, brimming over with all these locally-inculcated ideas of hers, actually pleading the cause of this intruder against herself and Owen, against their son, and against all their own interests—while I, on my side, was vainly endeavouring to bring her to reason upon these various points.

'Very well,' I said at last, 'if that is how the matter stands, and that is what everyone thinks, the best way for you, my dear Kate, is to abdicate at once. By doing so you will at least ease your own conscience. One little point I should like, however, to point out to you before you yield up the keys. Should the present French invasion succeed, there will obviously be no need to consider the antecedent claims of our friend in yonder north tower, seeing that he will be able to take your property away from you by force, or have it bestowed upon him by right of conquest. If, on the other hand, the invaders are defeated—as naturally they will be sooner or later—then there would be still less need for you to trouble yourself about the gentleman's claims, seeing that he would in that case undoubtedly meet with the fate of a rebel.'

'With the fate of a rebel?' Kate repeated my words as though trying to discover their exact meaning. 'What—what do you mean by that, John?' she asked.

'Simply that if taken alive and recognized as a British subject—which he is—he would at once be hanged like a dog.'

Kate's eyes again grew round at my answer—which I admit was put rather brutally, but the occasion was really not one for mincing matters.

'Hanged!' she exclaimed. 'Lady Alionora's son hanged!'

'Certainly,' said I, 'and without any delay either. Whether, in consideration of his rank in the French army, he might be conceded the privilege of being shot I cannot say, but I should greatly doubt it.'

Kate looked about her; at the walls, the windows, the trees outside, and the sea beyond, her aspect becoming so white and dismayed that it gave me a feeling of positive alarm. Suddenly she clutched my arm violently.

'John,' she cried, 'John, we must not allow it. Never—never! It would be horrible. He must be saved. Hanged—hanged like a dog! Oh, no, no, no! We must do something, and at once! Owen must be told. You must go, John. You must find Owen. You must explain everything to him! Make him see Lord Cornwallis. Let him move heaven and earth! John, my dear, dear John, you will go instantly, will you not? Think of the dishonour; think of the shame! Owen would never be able to hold up his face in the country again. Even our little boy would be disgraced. This man's blood would be upon all our heads. Oh, John, John, never—never!'

All this and a great deal more Kate then and there poured out, with a vehemence, a passion, that left me gasping. It was all so absolutely incongruous, so remote from anything that the Kate

of our earlier experience would ever have thought of uttering.

'Kate, Kate,' I remonstrated, 'you really must be reasonable. This excitement is absurd, and upon my word, I fail to see the slightest possible occasion for it. That man is nothing to you. On the contrary, he is your most implacable enemy. Why, in the name of reason, you should show this extraordinary eagerness to spare him from a fate which he, in my opinion, has richly deserved, is something that I entirely fail to understand.'

'Naturally you do!' she replied passionately. 'How can you be expected to understand it? And yet surely, John, you must to some extent see Owen's position, and, as a consequence, mine? We are here as supplanters; we are made to feel it every day of our lives. If anything were to happen to him—to this man, I mean—the disgrace of it would come upon *us*. We should feel that it brought a judgment upon us, and so would everyone else in the country—everyone. I know it would be so. We should read it in all their faces! No, John, no; it cannot, it must not be.'

I began some further protest.

'Oh, you don't understand, John,' she interrupted. 'You never will! I did not myself for a long time. It was only since the boy was born that my eyes have been fully opened. His nurse, Bridget O'Shaughnessy, has talked to me about it, and she knows exactly what the people about here feel and say. She adores the boy, and would do anything for him or for me, but she thinks we have no real right to be here, and would simply call it God's judgment if the legitimate owner were to come and turn us out.'

So would everyone, even our own servants ; all the poor people—everyone. They never forget ; no one here ever forgets anything. At present they are looking, I am certain, to seeing this man return—and now he has come, he is here. . . . But, John,' she cried, clutching at me suddenly again with both hands, her poor little face convulsed with sobbing, 'think, think, only think what they would say and feel, what we should all feel, if what you just now spoke of were to happen ! You will go, you will, won't you ? You will do everything possible to save this man, remembering that it is also to save me, and to save Owen, and our boy ? John, John, you will help me ? You won't refuse. You would break my heart if you did—indeed, indeed you would !'

She clung to me as she spoke with a grasp so wildly passionate that I nearly grew tearful myself from sheer sympathy !

'There, there, dear girl,' I said, stroking her hair. 'Of course I will go. Only let us be a little reasonable. Let us consider the whole matter over first. How, for one thing, am I to leave you here alone ? You forget that this enemy of yours is actually in the house. Remember, too, that the state of the country may, at any moment, become acutely dangerous. The servants, moreover, I feel sure, are some of them at all events disloyal. How can you ask me to desert my charge and leave you ? What would Owen say if he saw me arriving, and knew that I had deserted you and the boy ?'

'No matter,' said Kate. 'I shall be quite safe here. Tell Owen that I shall be perfectly safe. The servants, he knows, would never hurt me or the boy, neither would any of our own people. You can leave

Johnston behind if you like. Only go yourself,' she cried. 'Go at once—to-night.'

'To-night? Come, come, be reasonable, Kate.'

'Yes, yes, you must go at once. Take Micky Glynn, the groom; he can be trusted, and he knows the way. Ride straight to Castlebar. Find Owen. Tell him everything. Make him understand. Make him see that something must be done instantly. Be quick, John dear! Go to your room and get ready at once, and I will ring and order the horses. Please, John—please, please, please!' And with that, gently but firmly, Kate pushed me towards the door.

Thus, my dear Theodore, for the second time within a few weeks, and again without the slightest volition of my own, I found myself thrust—literally, you will observe, thrust—into the thick of events. From this time onward you will have to think of your placidly-disposed brother as tossed hither and thither like a leaf in a storm, or like a log, if you prefer the simile, in the vortex of some monstrous whirlpool. A prisoner amongst invaders; again a prisoner amongst rebels; a hostage; in peril of death, now at the hands of his enemies, now at those of his own friends; exposed to hunger, thirst, cold, to one and all of the indignities and discomforts which are the lot of those who find themselves in the thick of civil war—when, from my present comparatively secure vantage-ground, I look back over the events of the past six or eight weeks, they really appear to me to be much more in keeping with the career of some dare-devil adventurer, inured to combats and indifferent to bloodshed, rather than to the hitherto very sober experiences of such a humdrum individual as the one that has the honour of addressing you!

CHAPTER XV

THE RACE OF CASTLEBAR

LONG before the horses that were ordered by Kate could be got ready, the man who was the cause of all this emotion had gone. Mysteriously he had come, and mysteriously he went. Subsequently we discovered that his errand was not entirely one of filial duty to his mother. Hitherto the people on Owen Byrne's estate had been, if not loyal, at least quiescent. Some of the younger men had even enrolled themselves in the corps to which their master belonged; the rest were for the most part harmless and peaceably-disposed peasants. What they would prove to be after having received incitement to rebellion from one of their old masters, appearing suddenly in the character of a French officer, was obviously, however, quite another matter. Certainly there was nothing to prevent their taking part with the invaders. So completely had that part of Connaught been denuded of troops, that had its inhabitants shown the same spirit of ferocity which characterized the rebels in Wicklow and Wexford, our throats might all have been cut without the intervention of a single armed man.

The first point for me to decide was in what direction I was to proceed. This did not require much

thought, there being no doubt as to where Owen Byrne was to be found.

Although our sources of information had for the last fortnight been scanty, news had reached us that General Lake was shortly expected to take over the entire command of the troops in Connaught from General Hutchinson. Further, it was reported that His Excellency Lord Cornwallis was himself engaged in collecting every man in Ireland who could carry a gun, his project being to bar the passage across the Shannon at Athlone, should the handful of invaders show any disposition to advance upon Dublin. We also knew definitely that every Militia regiment in Connaught, and most of the Regulars, had by this time been concentrated around Castlebar; consequently in or near that town lay the West Mayo Fencibles, the distinguished corps in which Sir Owen Byrne had the honour to rank as captain.

My course was, therefore, clear. Castlebar, I ascertained, was not more than some twenty-five miles away as the crow flies. As soon as a horse could be found for my guide and the saddlebags packed, I mounted King William, and we rode away.

It was still raining, but the wind had sunk considerably. None the less, the afternoon was a detestable one for travelling. After skirting the seashore for some distance we turned to the right, and struck across that brown forlorn waste of bogland I had passed on the evening of my arrival.

Bogs, as I think you already know, have never appealed to my sense of the beautiful in Nature, and this particular one had from the first impressed me as having many specially objection-

able features of its own. Far as the eye could reach it lay bleak and desolate under the downpour. Brown ridges covered with scraggy heather were divided by squelching hollows, which in turn were linked by long, narrow gashes, having the appearance of gaping wounds that the earth was endeavouring to conceal. By way of accentuating the ugliness of the place a gleam of sunshine presently glanced across it for a moment, with the effect of turning all those gashes to the colour of blood. Then with equal suddenness the gleam vanished, and, like a deluge, the rain descended upon us again. It was a dreary beginning, but since there was now no turning back I set my teeth, bent low over King William's neck, and, drawing my cloak tighter about me, tried to occupy my mind with such philosophic reflections as would arise.

Sometimes at one side, sometimes in front, but generally at my rear, rode Micky Glynn, occupied also, I suppose, with some sort of reflections of his own. Although as a guide he was everything that was excellent, his companionable qualities were exceedingly few. A tall, lean, hatchet-faced fellow, wearing a slouched hat, leggings, and a long livery overcoat, he was taciturn and morose to a degree. More than once, for the sake of relieving the monotony of our journey, I endeavoured to engage him in conversation, but always he responded to my advances with a grunt, a mumbled monosyllable, or at most a few grudging words, and next minute he would be plodding on silently again some paces behind me, as indifferent, seemingly, to the weather as to the possibility of those dangers towards which we were then advancing.

'Is it often as bad as this?' I remarked at last, reining in King William and turning to him.

'Deed yes,' he answered.

'You must be drenched?' I continued.

'Deed yes,' he answered again, his eyes fixed steadily upon his horse's ears.

'Do you think there is prospect of the weather clearing?' was my next effort.

'Dunno,' he replied. Upon which I perforce took refuge also in silence.

In this fashion we progressed for some time; then, the track becoming firmer, I made one more effort to lure Glynn into talk.

'The people, I suppose, are pleased,' said I, 'that the French have landed?'

'Maybe'—very gruffly.

'Come, come,' I said. 'Surely you must know what they are saying?'

He looked at me, grinned, and answered, 'Ah!'

'Suppose the French marched down here to-morrow, would you not all join them?'

He pondered a while; then, 'What's that at all?' he asked.

I repeated my question in other and clearer words; whereupon Micky pondered again for some minutes, and as result of his pondering inquired, 'How would I be joining them if maybe I'm somewhere else?'

'True,' I answered with a laugh. 'Still you are only one of many, Glynn. What about the others?'

'What others?' said he.

'Everyone in the country—the farmers, labourers, and so on,' I replied.

'Ah,' said he. 'By Jebus, I dunno!'

Again we rode in grim silence. Presently, however, I thought of another question, and finding an opportunity I put it to Micky.

'What do the servants think of it, Glynn?' I asked.

'Them?' said he. 'By Jibus, I dunno!'

'Don't you, indeed?' I said, laughing. 'Well, at least you must know what they think about this sudden return of their old master?'

He looked frowningly at me, took off his hat, beat the rain-drops from its brim upon his knee, and replaced it carefully; then asked, 'What old master?'

'Lady Alionora's son; the one that went as a boy to France long ago, and was in the castle to-day. Old Malachy saw him. So did the servants. So, no doubt, did you also.'

'Ach,' he answered, quite unperturbed. 'Maybe I did, and maybe I didn't. But th' only master I do be knowing is the one that's out after the French, and himself isn't so tremendous old neither.'

That was a sufficiently long speech for Micky, and seemed to be conclusive.

'You know nothing, then, clearly about anything?' I exclaimed in some exasperation.

'Divil a much,' he responded, 'cept that if so be as we get into the inside of these bogs it'll soon stop the chat in us.'

Thereupon I gave King William the spur, and rode on in dead silence for another mile or two.

Having escaped from the region of bogs, and passed without incident through a few small villages, we arrived at Newport, and here for the first time I noticed some signs of excitement among the inhabi-

tants. Up and down the single street of the town a band of ragged, shock-headed youths were parading with cries of 'To hell with the Government!' 'To hell with the damned Orangemen!' and similar ejaculations. Even these excited politicians, however, appeared to have no purpose beyond the innocent one of sheer amusement. As for the remainder of the townsfolk, they simply stood about at their doorways, enjoying the rain, exchanging remarks in Irish, and apparently relishing the doings of the youths, but not otherwise interested. I made some inquiries concerning the nearest way to Castlebar, was answered civilly, and thereupon jogged along as quietly as though there had not been such a thing as a rebel or a Frenchman within a hundred miles of us.

By the time we left Newport the evening was already far advanced, and ere we had covered another four or five miles darkness began to come on. To mend matters the rain now fell in torrents. It drove across the country from the sea in sheets, drenching us hopelessly, and making more dismal still the desolate expanses around us, with their endless succession of rain-swept pools and a long line of dim formless mountains rising one behind the other in the distance. I must own that I felt remarkably wretched. It was impossible under such conditions to continue much longer, and each mile made the prospect of reaching Castlebar that night appear more dubious. Our horses stumbled incessantly. On and on the miry road stretched its interminable length, bordered upon either side with open ditches or low stone walls. Not a soul was to be seen, and no sign of a habitation anywhere. At last, and not a moment too soon as it seemed to me, we came to

a small cabin set back a little way from the road, and showing a low, open doorway from which issued a volume of smoke.

Instinctively both horses came to a dead stop before this doorway. A number of faces peered out at us through the smoke, with other faces and other vague shapes looming behind them in the subdued glare of a fire. No one spoke. Finally, of an old man with lint-white hair, whose figure I discerned at the threshold, I inquired how many miles it was to Castlebar.

Neither he nor anyone else in the cabin, I suppose, apparently understood English, for the response to my question was a flood of Gaelic, whereupon I requested Micky Glynn to act as interpreter. His Gaelic seemed to be very much more fluent than his English, but the outcome of his inquiries proved, in translation, to be unaccountably vague. Ten miles it might be to Castlebar—fifteen miles—any number of miles—impossible, apparently, to get more accurate information. Fifteen miles farther in such weather along such a road and with our horses in such a plight was not practicable. I therefore bade Micky inquire whether any decent shelter might be had in the neighbourhood. Sorrow another roof could we find if we travelled miles, he was informed. Was there a stable, then, or a barn where we might take shelter? Not so much as a pigsty. Might we rest a while in the cabin, then? This query was put reluctantly, you may be sure, but to it he quickly made answer that we were welcome to stay there as long as we chose. Dismounting, therefore, and leaving Glynn to find shelter for the horses, I went into the hovel.

It proved to be much like the one I had waited in whilst journeying to Castle Byrne. The smoke was equally blinding, the atmosphere insufferably foul and hot, and the clay floor reeked with moisture. A large fire burnt on the hearth, with pots and a kettle swinging above it from a crook, and before this fire I sat, steaming vigorously upon a three-legged stool. Apparently mine was the only seat, for the rest of the company had distributed themselves promiscuously about the floor, squatting upon their heels in a manner habitual with the natives of that part of Ireland. They talked incessantly, most of their remarks having doubtless more or less direct reference to myself. For a while my position there, enthroned upon my three-legged stool and the centre of so much observation and comment, caused me some slight embarrassment. Gradually, however, the oppressiveness of the place lulled me into a condition of drowsiness, and I fell asleep.

Awaking, after I know not how long a period, I found myself seated upon the floor with my head now resting upon the stool. My limbs ached horribly, my brow was throbbing, and I had acute sensations of nausea. Accordingly I rose up, staggered across the floor and out through the doorway. The rain had now ceased. A full moon was shining. I felt revived. Then, as much by way of relieving my tortured limbs as of escaping from the cabin and its surroundings, I began walking along the road in the direction, as I judged, of Castlebar.

Before long I had sight of a low hill lying in front of me at a distance perhaps of two or three miles, with houses covering its face, and a steeple rising amidst them, whilst below were tents and more

buildings. Clambering upon a wall, I stood gazing. Here, then, almost certainly, within a few miles of me lay the hitherto undiscoverable Castlebar—a place, it was clear, I might quite easily have attained, had it not been for the mendacious reports of my guide. There it was straight before me; and here stood I, baffled and aching from head to foot!

I had turned and was hastening back towards the cabin, with the intention of promptly finding Micky Glynn and the horses, when I was arrested by a distant sound of firing. I wheeled round and listened. Again the sound came—now as a concentrated volley of musketry, now as a succession of shots that died away and then began again.

What was happening? I asked myself. So far as I could judge, the sound of firing came from somewhere in the town. Was an attack upon it by the French actually in progress, and were these the shots of its defenders? If so, how did it happen that neither sign nor sound of any advance was apparent?

No satisfactory answer to either of these questions was forthcoming. One thing, though, was clear to me. Whatever the object of the firing, any attempt to enter Castlebar in my present condition, and with military operations of some kind in actual progress, would be a piece of folly. My mission was not a warlike one. I could be of no possible service to anyone except Owen Byrne. Of what avail, then, to get myself casually shot by one or other of the combatants?

Having reluctantly resigned myself, therefore, to the necessity of remaining where I was for the present, I clambered into a cart which had been thrust by way of gate into an opening in the road

wall. It was at least dry there, if not exactly comfortable. I felt weary and faint, and gradually sank into that state of half-consciousness where one perceives and thinks as in a dream, and where nothing, not even the most imperative needs and duties of existence, seem to be of any great moment. Vaguely I knew that I was in a desolate place, without a creature near me; that not far off men were fighting; that I needed both food and sleep; that at any moment I might be run through the body, or possibly have a bullet in my head. So indifferent was I, however, to all this that not even a rebel, pike in hand, would, I believe, just then have roused me. After about an hour the moon began to sink, and I therefore got down from the cart and went back slowly towards the cabin. On drawing near it I saw Micky Glynn in the doorway of a lean-to building, built of mud and covered with rough thatch, that adjoined the dwelling-place. Presuming that this was where our poor horses were stabled, I gave him a nod in response to his salutation and entered. It proved to be a primitive kind of cowhouse, nearly pitch dark and very close; but I was able to see that the horses had been groomed and littered, and that near the door was a pile of clean straw and upon it my saddlebags.

'You've made things more comfortable for yourself?' said I.

'What's that, your honour?' he answered. Then, tossing his head in the direction of Castlebar: 'They're at it,' said he.

'How do you know that?'

'Isn't it after hearing them I am,' he answered. 'Whisht! There goes another crack.'

'It must be a remarkably loud crack to carry fifteen miles,' I said pointedly. 'You've been asleep?' I continued, glancing at the pile of straw.

'Divil a wink then, and divil a bite have I put into my mouth neither,' he answered.

'Well, there is food in those saddlebags. Have it and sleep, too, if you can. Wake me at six o'clock.' With that I sank down upon the straw, ate a little of the bread and meat which Kate had packed for me, swallowed a dram of raw whisky, and, lying back, soon dropped asleep.

I woke to find Glynn vigorously shaking me by the shoulder. Still half asleep I lay, looking at the flanks of our horses; blinking dreamily at the level rays of sunlight; realizing slowly where I was, but making no effort to rouse myself. So great, indeed, was my need of sleep that again and again Glynn had to shake me. 'Your honour,' he shouted—'your honour! 'Tis at it they are sure and certain! Listen to them. At it again, thunder and turf!'

I sat up. 'Who are at what?' I inquired.

'The soldiery—over beyont—listen to them. 'Tis the divil's own whillaloo they're making. Whisht to that! Cannon, by God! Battering down the world they're after, no less!'

I was now wide awake. I sat up in the straw listening. The rattle of musketry came to me and with it the heavy intermittent boom of artillery. Yes, assuredly they were at it, battering down the world, as Micky said, and this time undoubtedly in dead earnest.

'Get ready the horses,' I cried, and sprang swiftly up from my lair. Micky led them out, and began quickly saddling them. In three minutes I was

equipped—having, of course, slept in my clothes—and was ready to mount.

It was a brilliant morning. In the space before the cabin its inhabitants were all gathered in a cluster. They seemed to be terror-stricken. Two of the women were on their knees, with scared children huddled around them, and at each boom of a gun these broke into pitiful wailings and ejaculations to all the Saints. The men in their rags stood passively listening, as sheep might do in a thunderstorm, whilst a little apart was the old man with the lint-white hair, bareheaded, gaping, his eyes fixed with an expression of stupefaction in the direction of Castlebar. Approaching him, I pressed some silver into his hand. He did not speak, merely stared at me in blank wonderment, the money lying just as I had placed it in his half-open hand. The whole scene impressed me oddly. Often my thoughts recurred to it afterwards and I questioned myself as to the fate of these poor, guileless people.

We mounted and rode off. I felt unexpectedly refreshed and vigorous, with none of those qualms that some hours before had so troubled me. Yet we were now really riding into danger, and the considerations that had influenced me then might well, I suppose, have still withheld me. They did not do so, however—a fact which I make no attempt to explain.

Under the influence of the sunlight everything was so changed that I had some difficulty in believing it was the same country through which I had dragged myself so hopelessly the previous night, and over which my eyes had wandered so

disconsolately in the moonlight as I sat in the cart. Far and wide spread the heather-clad moorland, starred at intervals with rush-fringed ponds and small lakes; pastures spread beyond, with low hills and many white cottages. Larks sprang up and trilled overhead. Dogs barked somewhere, and I could even hear the sounds of cattle and pigs. The air felt deliciously fresh; the sky wonderfully clear and blue. That at such a time I should have noticed these things and derived pleasure from them may seem odd, and I can only suggest that excitement had quickened my senses to such a degree that every sight and sound seemed to make a special and vivid appeal to them. Even Micky Glynn rode along now in a state of evidently pleasurable agitation. He sat perched up on the saddle, his arms outstretched, his hatchet-face alive with fierce eagerness.

'By Jebus! 'tis all hell they're raising beyond there,' he cried. 'And 'tis ourselves 'll be in the thick of it shortly, so we will!'

'Afraid, Micky?' I asked.

'Is it afraid?' He looked at me sideways with his small bright eyes. 'Divil a drop of fear in the whole of me then,' he avowed. ''Tis mad I am to get within stock of it.'

As we drew near Castlebar I saw that the guns were firing from a low hill which rose a little to the west of it. How many guns were posted there I could not tell, but I counted flash after flash piercing the bursts of smoke to the number of eight or nine. The rattle of musketry, coming also, I thought, from the base of the same hill and the more level spaces beyond it, was fierce and con-

tinuous ; and with this blent a confusion of other sounds, cries, shouts, tramlings, I knew not what, coming from the town itself, or across and beyond it. Slowly the huge pall of smoke, all the blacker by force of contrast with the clear sky, drifted eastwards before the wind, while another thinner cloud of smoke at the base of the hill melted away still more quickly. We pushed on at full speed, getting nearer and nearer to the scene of action. I felt excited, reckless, all but intoxicated with the contagion of the struggle.

Of a sudden there came a startling change. The rattle of musketry slackened, then died away. Upon the hill-top the guns still thundered, but gradually the fire of these lessened also, and at last ceased. In the lull I could distinctly hear an uproar of voices, shouts as of triumph, cries as of panic ; then, mingling with all these, another sound, tumultuous, terrifying—the sound as of a multitude rushing in confusion.

We drew rein and waited. Clearer still and nearer came that noise of rushing and of turmoil. In God's name, what had happened, and what was happening ? I asked myself. I soon knew. Out of the town and down from it towards us began to stream a crowd of men. Soon the whole slope was seen to be alive with them, pouring in narrow streams, running in masses, breaking into groups over the hillsides, or spreading singly out this way and that. Hundreds of them, nay thousands it seemed, and all alike in the wildest disorder, and all rushing towards us at headlong pace.

It needed some little courage, I can assure you, Theodore, or shall I say some little self-possession, to keep quiet there on the roadway and to witness

this panic-stricken rabble rushing down upon us. Glynn, I think, would have preferred to give way, but I held my ground, and he remained doggedly beside me. What did it mean? I again asked myself. Were these men whom I saw in front of me the defeated French? Were they flying townfolk? Were they rebels, perhaps escaping from an assault? It was Glynn who first cleared up the point.

'By thunder,' he shouted, standing upright in his stirrups, 'they're bet—they're bet—they're bet!'

'What do you mean?' I asked him. 'Who are bet?'

'Look at them,' he answered excitedly, 'only look at them! The guns—the bayonets—the regimentals—look at them! They're bet, I tell you. Yeos—Militia—Regulars—damn me, 'tis the whole army!'

Yeomen, Militia, Regulars? I could not and would not believe it for a single moment; the thing was clearly impossible! That rabble of runaways, that panic-stricken mob, part of our hitherto indomitable army? Never! Yet how was I to deny the evidence of my senses? Every moment that passed made the damning truth more evident. On they came, pell-mell—Militia, Yeomanry, Fencibles, Regulars—all racing in one shameless rout—stampeding like a herd of cattle—rushing blindly along the road to save their miserable craven lives!

One thing I wish to state here, Theodore, and I confide it to you, remember, in strict confidence. The official despatches recently published speak of this affair at Castlebar as a retreat. Powers of misrepresentation! As well describe as a retreat the escape of a parcel of schoolgirls before the charge of an infuriated bull. It was flight, sir, sheer unmitigated degrading flight. I saw men fling away

their weapons, their accoutrements, even portions of their uniform. I saw them falling, picking themselves up, glancing back over their shoulder in fear of a pursuer, and then racing on again. I saw them fighting like wild beasts in gaps and gateways, and trampling upon their own fallen comrades in a mad desire of escape. I saw them tumbling over walls, breaking through hedges, floundering in ditches and streams, panting down the roadway like so many hunted hares. A retreat, Theodore, forsooth!

One, though only a perfectly minor incident of the rout I will endeavour to describe. Near the spot where we had halted, the road from Castlebar branched off towards Tuam, and, fortunately for us, it was along this Tuam road that the mass of the fugitives fled. Many even of these, however, broke over the fences and scattered through the fields. As it happened, the country thereabouts is marshy and broken with ponds, and over the edge of one of these ponds which lay near me a dozen or more militiamen plunged recklessly. All contrived to scramble forth except one, who, finding himself shortly beyond his depth, fell to splashing about helplessly, and shouting for help. To his appeals not one of his comrades gave the slightest heed, and as the man obviously was drowning, Glynn and myself, moved by a common instinct of humanity, hurried to his assistance. Dismounting on the edge of the pond, I lay down and, clutching him by the hair, succeeded with Glynn's help in dragging him to land. No sooner was he safely on his feet, than—perceiving me to be a stranger and concluding, probably, that I meant to take him prisoner—the fellow plucked his bayonet from its sheath and struck out viciously

at me. I sprang aside just in time, and so escaped more serious hurt than a scratch on the arm, but had not Glynn felled the scoundrel with a crashing blow between the eyes his next attack would probably have been more deadly.

By this time the fugitives were swarming in hundreds about us. Among them I now observed many officers, and although not a few of these appeared as eager to escape as were their men, others did their utmost to stop the rout. One gallant young fellow, whose face and figure seemed familiar to me, came up at full gallop, and rode through a mob of flying militiamen wearing uniforms like his own. Wheeling round, he appealed to them to stand, entreated, threatened; at last burst in among them, and cut down two of them with his sword. All in vain. Panic had full possession of the cowards. Breaking past him, they continued their flight along the road, some of them, so I afterwards learnt, running the whole thirty miles to Tuam—nay, continued from there and, still racing for their lives, ran till they had actually reached Athlone, some sixty-three miles distant. Sixty-three miles in twenty-seven hours! This is the affair spoken of in official despatches as a retreat!

The unfortunate young officer made no further attempt to stay the course of the panic. With his sword hanging and his head bent he sat motionless in the saddle, overcome, evidently, by sheer humiliation. Who was he? That I had met him somewhere, and not long before, seemed to me to be certain. With the intention of offering him some expression of sympathy, if not of renewing our acquaintance, I was making towards him, when an

exclamation from Glynn caused me to look towards Castlebar. Then it was that for the first time I caught sight of our invaders. Out of what proved to be the single street of that town they came, their levelled bayonets gleaming in the sun, advancing at a steady trot, and driving the remnant of their opponents before them. In perfect order they advanced towards us. I saw the bayonets glance and gleam, finding victims no doubt at every thrust. Then upon the western hillock, where not long before the guns had thundered, and between it and the town, I saw other flashes of steel, and at that I realized—what perhaps my state of excitement had kept me from realizing sooner—namely, the perilous situation in which we ourselves stood. The mob of runaways had left us unscathed. But those levelled points now advancing upon us—from that deadly line we could only hope to escape by instant flight.

Bidding Glynn follow me, I led King William over the broken ground and out upon the road, issuing close to the place where the young officer still stayed. At sound of my coming, he turned his head towards me, and I immediately recognized him. It was the Earl of Ormonde, a promising young nobleman, to whom I had been presented some weeks before at Lady Gloriana's assembly in Dublin. In response to my salutation he merely raised his sword, then bent forward again with a hand grasping the pommel of his saddle. I thought he was wounded.

'My lord,' said I, 'you are not hurt?'

He looked down upon me, and shook his head.

'Only in my heart,' he answered. 'See!'—and he pointed with his sword at the flying rabble of soldiery.

'Truly,' I said, 'the sight is not a pleasant one. But what of yourself, my lord? Look there!' cried I, and my eyes turned again to the advancing French.

'What of those?' said he. 'I have already faced them. Let them come.'

'This is folly,' said I. 'Save yourself. In a few minutes they will be upon you.'

'And upon you also,' he answered. 'Mount, I advise you, if you value your life! We shall meet again, sir, I hope.'

With that he saluted me, and giving his horse the spur, dashed away along the Tuam road, a prominent mark, in his uniform, for all the bullets of the French. About me too bullets, I perceived, were now whistling, and towards me a small party was coming at a quick run. Shouting to Glynn to ride for the open country, I sprang into the saddle and wheeled about to follow him. Scarcely had King William gone a dozen strides, however, before a shot struck him. He quivered beneath me, stumbled, righted himself gallantly, then next moment collapsed. I fell with him, my head struck violently against the road, and I lost my senses.

CHAPTER XVI

PRISONER !

I CAME to myself in what appeared to be the kitchen of a small house. It was not a cabin, though, since on opening my eyes the first thing I saw was a whitewashed ceiling, and a half-opened door beyond which apparently was another and a larger room.

Little by little, as I lay on the floor with some straw beneath me, my thoughts grew clearer. All the incidents of the morning, up to the moment of my fall upon the road, came back to me with extraordinary vividness. I wondered what had happened to Glynn, and if Lord Ormonde had succeeded in escaping. Where was I, I also wondered, and how had I come there? Was I a prisoner? Was I in Castlebar? and if so what further misfortunes and adventures lay before me? My head ached painfully. I felt weak and bruised. But, as eventually turned out, no serious injury, happily, had resulted from my fall.

Raising myself on an elbow, I looked round the room. It was littered and very dirty. To my left was a ladder rising to a square opening in the ceiling, and an open fireplace with only a pile of grey ashes upon the hearth. To my right was a small window, its broken panes stuffed with rags,

and beside it a half-door closed in the bottom portion of a narrow doorway. The light, as you may imagine from this description, was poor, but presently I saw, outside and close to the door, the head and shoulders of a figure clad in blue, and carrying a musket with bayonet fixed. A French soldier unmistakably, and no doubt a sentry. Clearly, then, I was a prisoner!

Somehow that discovery did not cause me any great concern. Better, anyhow, have fallen into the hands of the French, I thought, than into those of their rebel allies. What troubled me most was the knowledge that now it would be impossible to fulfil my mission to Owen, a consideration which led me to further depths of anxiety as to Owen's fate and as to the fate, too, of poor Kate, left unprotected in Castle Byrne. Possibly Owen was dead, or a prisoner like myself, and Kate, for aught I knew to the contrary, utterly helpless, while Malachy and the retainers were rejoicing over the installation by force of their rightful lord!

From these reflections I was presently aroused by a sustained noise of turmoil rising somewhere beyond the doorway: hoarse yells of triumph; shrill cries of fear or terror; bursts of wild laughter; shouts and skirls; the trampling of many feet; and, mingled with all this, the sound of heavy objects being dragged about. The turmoil, whatever its cause, was clearly made by an Irish-speaking crowd; and as every moment it grew fiercer, while the cries of terror redoubled, I came to the conclusion that something of the nature of a sack was in progress.

Of a sudden a commanding voice issued an order; three musket-shots in quick succession rang out,

and thereupon such a stillness fell that a sound of low moaning caught my ear. At first I made certain that this sound came from someone outside, probably from one of the looters who had been struck down by a bullet, but I presently traced it to the room whose door stood ajar right before me. Instantly I sat upright, listening intently, a cold sweat on my face. Who, in God's name, lay inside there? Did I recognize that moaning voice? Was it, could it be Owen's? I asked myself; and the longer I listened the more certain I felt that it *was* Owen's voice.

Unable to endure longer this horrible torment of mind, I moved cautiously from the straw, and, keeping my eyes fixed upon the sentry, crept on hands and knees over to the door, pushed it a little wider open, and looked into the room. It was large, I saw, bare and comfortless, and was lighted by a single window. In the middle of it stood a long table littered with plates, glasses, and cutlery; and beyond I could distinguish the figure of a man lying upon the floor in what seemed to be a pool of blood. He was tall, I saw; fair, I thought; and I perceived, or, as it turned out, imagined, that he wore the uniform of the West Mayo Fencibles. Owen's regiment! The figure, too, seemed surely to be Owen's! I leaned against the doorpost, feeling all of a sudden overwhelmingly faint. Kate, my poor, poor Kate! That was the one thought that filled my mind.

Rousing myself, I hastened across the room and bent over the figure. Picture my relief when I discovered that it was not Owen, nor anyone I knew, nor anyone even resembling Owen. The man was neither particularly fair, nor yet tall, and the uniform

he wore was not that of the Mayo Fencibles. . . . Why then had I imagined otherwise? I cannot explain. Merely give you my impressions by way of showing the oddly unaccountable state of mind and body I was just then in.

The poor fellow's head was partially supported by a knapsack; a dreadful bayonet wound showed in his right breast, and from his lips that piteous moaning sound that I had already heard issued ceaselessly. I arranged his wound as well as I could, binding it roughly with my handkerchief, then bent to his ear and whispered:

'Trust me. I am a friend.'

His eyes opened slowly, and he stared at me.

'Who——? What——? Water,' he moaned, 'for the love of God, water!'

I ran to the table, found a jug containing water, and was hurrying back with it when the sentry, musket in hand, rushed in. For a moment he stood regarding us; then in a fury crossed, and threatening me with his bayonet, shouted: '*Sortez! mais sortez tout de suite! Cent mille cochons, sortez!*'

Had I made any show of resistance, the fellow, I believe, would have transfixed me. Fortunately my condition of weakness prevented my attempting to do more than remonstrate rather feebly. I had been simply attending to the wants of this wounded officer, I explained to him. If aid were not rendered he would for a certainty die. Might I not at least carry him some water?

The effect of hearing himself addressed in his own tongue was apparently so startling that the fellow stood gaping at me, his brown monkey-like face, with its mass of wrinkles and enormous moustaches,

showing an expression of almost laughable perplexity.

'*Le citoyen n'est pas donc militaire ?*' he inquired, with a glance at my riding-coat.

I said no; adding that I was simply travelling through Ireland for my own enjoyment, at which statement the fellow not unnaturally broke into such a broad grin that I felt encouraged to appeal to him again on behalf of the wounded officer. But he cut me short with '*C'est egal ! Sortez !*' and motioning me towards the door, marched me at the bayonet's point into the kitchen.

I sat down again upon the straw. The sentry stood leaning over the half-door. The moaning in the other room continued. Outside there broke out from time to time a confusion of strange and menacing noises. I felt drowsy and weak, but, odd to say, almost completely indifferent.

Suddenly a rattle of accoutrements aroused me. The sentry sprang alert, pulled open the door and saluted, as a French officer came in. He was a man of good height and figure, wearing a dark blue uniform with large gold epaulettes, and having his powdered hair tied in a small queue low down on his neck. His figure, too, was good and he bore himself to advantage, but his face was far from attractive; something furtive, especially in the small deep-set eyes, impressing me most unfavourably. Casting upon me a quick sidelong glance, he strode into the inner room, and sat down at the table with his back to the windows. After him came two other officers, one of whom I at once recognized. He was, as you will easily guess, the 'M. Henri' of my previous acquaintance; Lady Alionora's son, and the

very man whom by a strange irony of fate I had been despatched to save from the hangman! He too, in passing, flung a look at me, but without evincing any sign of recognition, nor did I do more than glance at him as he and his companion entered the other room. They were followed by three soldiers, carrying food and drink in flat-bottomed baskets. Then the door was shut, and I was left seated on the straw, occupied as I best could with my thoughts, and listening to the sound of a single imperious voice, which rose high above the clatter of the plates and cutlery being set out upon the table in the next room.

Presently a commotion in the street outside drew my attention, and I saw that now two sentries instead of one stood posted in the doorway, and that they were holding it in the face of a surging crowd of townspeople. Their lowered bayonets easily succeeded in keeping the crowd at bay, and the excited appeals made to them (of which they of course understood not one word) seemed only to cause them amusement. Every now and then a frieze-coated figure with a wild hairy face would appear in the entrance; then a quick movement with a bayonet would be followed by a howl of pain or a wild storm of execrations. I wondered, rather dreamily, what it was that the people wanted. Was it to interview the officers? To wreak revenge for having been prevented from looting? Possibly to get at one of the prisoners within? Whatever the reason, it was evident to me that even now all was not harmony between the victorious French and their grateful allies. For the moment, however, nothing further came of the excitement. The officers

within did not stir; the crowd was helpless before the prodding of the bayonets; and before long it went surging away elsewhere.

I had sat there on the straw for about half an hour when a crashing noise of glass and earthenware sounded from the next room. Almost immediately afterwards the door opened, a couple of soldiers came out, and one of the officers signalled to me to enter.

On doing so, my eyes at once sought the wounded man. He still lay where I had left him and in the same position, but the pool of blood about him had grown larger. The table—which apparently had been cleared by the simple process of tilting it—was now pushed nearer to the window; on it was spread out a large map, and behind that map sat the officer with the gold epaulettes, and near him ‘M. Henri’ and the other French officer. All three continued to study the map industriously for some minutes without speaking. Before the fireplace and facing the window I stood still and waited.

At last the General—for, as you will have already guessed, it was no other than the conquering Humbert himself—looked up, scrutinized me closely, and then, with a jerk of his thumb, motioned me to advance.

‘The *citoyen* speaks French?’ he inquired in a rough curt tone.

‘Fairly,’ I replied.

‘You are English?’

‘Yes.’

‘You took an active part in the operations of this morning?’

‘None at all. My part was merely that of a spectator.’

The General frowned, and his small eyes watched me intently.

‘You were armed? You are a prisoner?’

‘My arms were those usually carried by any gentleman who travels,’ I answered. ‘That I am a prisoner is obviously my misfortune.’

‘Due to a strangely inopportune arrival?’

‘Most inopportune.’

‘You had no mission in this neighbourhood?’

‘None,’ said I, this time with a glance at ‘M. Henri.’

‘But you are personally acquainted with the neighbourhood?’

‘I saw it this morning for the first time in my life.’

At that the General’s frown deepened, his face twitched, and he scrutinized me with a peculiarly cunning yet ferocious expression—the expression of a cat, so it seemed to me, preparing to spring upon its prey.

‘You were in company of an officer—an English officer—one who has escaped,’ he said, ‘and that immediately before your own capture?’

‘Yes.’

‘Explain.’

‘It was due to mere accident,’ I answered. ‘I had met the officer in question before in Dublin.’

‘Dublin? You travelled thence?’

‘Yes.’

‘Indicate your route,’ he commanded, and pushed the map towards me across the table.

I did so, picking out the names of certain towns I remembered, and joining them with a motion of my forefinger, but taking care to end my indication somewhere in the neighbourhood of Tuam.

'You crossed there?' Humbert placed a blunt finger-tip on the town of Athlone.

'It would seem so,' I answered.

'It was so,' he exclaimed, glaring at me.

'It must have been, no doubt.'

'The river—this Shannon—is it wide and deep?'

'I cannot say.'

'But you saw it. Answer!' he thundered.

'I was a traveller. It did not concern me. I cannot tell you.'

'It is defended—this town?'

'Again I must plead ignorance,' I answered. 'I am no soldier.'

'But you saw troops?' he continued with relentless persistence.

'In no very formidable numbers,' I replied.

'Where? How many? Indicate!' Again he pointed to the map.

'I really cannot,' I answered. 'Certain individuals I encountered at the inns. They did not interest me.'

'Officers?'

'Yes.'

'Where?'

'I do not at present remember the names of the places.'

'How many?'

'Not more than two that I can recall on any occasion.'

He rose, put his hands upon the table, and leant towards me, his small eyes glittering with ill-concealed fury.

'Listen to me. You know your own position?' he exclaimed menacingly.

'Perfectly,' I answered.

'I have but to command and you are shot like a dog.'

'I am in your hands.'

'I want the truth, the truth, the truth!' and he beat with both hands upon the table.

'You have had it,' I answered stiffly. 'Consider me to be a gentleman.'

At that he stood regarding me a moment; suddenly his face changed its expression, and he sat down.

'An English gentleman,' he said, a grim smile playing about his lips. 'Yes, yes, I know them; I have met them, those English gentlemen. Is it not so, *citoyens*?' he said, turning to the officers; then, without awaiting their answer, he returned once more to me.

'Your pardon,' he continued, with a would-be satirical suavity. 'I have to-day had the honour of entirely defeating your thrice-glorious English army—you saw, *hein*?' He waved his hand. 'It is further my intention now to march upon the capital of this country. Hence my questions. It is to me all equal, but even a traveller must make some little observations. For instance, the condition of the country through which you journeyed. It was disturbed—in arms, shall we say?'

'No,' I answered. 'On the contrary, it appeared to me to be singularly peaceful. Had it been otherwise, should I, as an Englishman, have escaped molestation so long?'

'So!' Humbert sat drumming his thick and not very clean fingers upon the map. 'A pretty answer,' he said presently. 'A very pretty answer.' At that moment sounds of renewed turmoil arose outside. '*Canaille!*' he muttered fiercely, his face flaring with sudden anger. Then to me: 'The country is prepared? These peasants—they will rise?'

'I cannot say—I made no inquiries—obviously I could not.'

'But you observed?'

'Only from the highway,' I answered. 'The peasants were harvesting in the fields. I held no communication with them. How could I do so, seeing that I do not understand their language?'

'Ha, their language, name of a dog!' General Humbert laughed out suddenly, and the other two officers laughed with him, but evidently not at all from pleasure. 'Your servant,' he added quickly to me, 'he, at least, would understand it?'

Evidently he referred to Glynn. Was he a prisoner also?

'Very likely he may have done so, and if so, as an Irishman, his sympathy would be with you and not with us, General,' I replied. Then I added: 'Pardon me, is he safe?'

'We shall see—presently,' he answered, with a scowl. 'But you say he is an Irishman?' he questioned, his eyes narrowed. 'Yet you are English—an English gentleman. How is that? Explain.'

'My own servant remained behind; he was required elsewhere,' I answered, and as I did so I met M. Henri's mocking gaze. 'Besides, he is no more acquainted with this country than I am.'

'Ah, this country, this beast of a country!' Humbert cried furiously. 'We have marched, we have conquered; nevertheless—we——' He paused, reviewing evidently that astonishing night march of his, fifteen hours long, across the mountains from Killala, with seven hundred men and two small cannon dragged by peasants; reviewing the equally

amazing end of the march, straight on to victory, without rest or faltering, up the heights of Castlebar. And now here before him stood a representative, however unmilitary, of this same detested race whose regiments he had that morning routed so triumphantly. 'Yes, yes, we have conquered,' he said, stroking down his moustache. 'All that, however, is but the beginning. Soon——' He made a large, sweeping gesture with an arm and rose. 'We shall see. This affair—what you call it?—this rebellion, how goes that?'

'The rebellion in Wicklow and Wexford? It has been suppressed,' I answered.

'Suppressed?' He gave me another of his fierce sidelong looks.

'That is so,' I answered. 'They were trying some of its leaders when I left Dublin weeks ago.'

'So!' he exclaimed. 'Ah, well, it matters nothing. We shall see.' He motioned towards the door. 'You can go, citizen.'

I bowed. 'Food and sleep would be acceptable,' I ventured to remark.

'To most of us,' he replied curtly.

I bowed again, and retired.

CHAPTER XVII

AN INTERVIEW

I WAS drowsing upon the straw when a soldier shook me, pointed to the narrow stair, and bade me mount. He followed me up. I found myself in a small attic, miserably lighted, uncarpeted, furnished with a wooden bedstead, a deal table, and two chairs. 'The citizen can eat,' said the soldier, pointing to some food upon the table; 'also sleep,' said he, pointing to the bed. I thanked him, and imagined, thereupon, that he would leave me. But instead, he drew one of the chairs close to the window and seated himself. Obviously it was decreed that I should have no chance of escaping. Why? It did not at first occur to me that in all probability M. Henri might, for reasons of his own, consider me to be a prisoner of importance.

I ate and drank; then partially undressed, and lay upon the bed. Almost at once I slept, and so profoundly that I did not wake until far into the morning of another day. I should have lain longer, but my guardian bade me rise, provided me with water for washing purposes in a wooden bowl, some coffee served in a cracked jug, with a few hard biscuits, and immediately I was ready conducted me down the stair-ladder.

In the kitchen were four or five soldiers, one guarding the entrance, a second leaning across the half-door and smoking, a third lying asleep on the straw where I had lain, a fourth seated with his back to the wall and also asleep, his arms crossed upon his raised knees and his forehead resting upon them. Outside was a small crowd of Irish, a few of them wearing French uniforms and carrying muskets, the rest armed with pikes. There were also some women amongst them; but these did little more than stare, and, both by their appearance and wild, guttural talk in Irish, gave the sentries occasion for various rather indecorous pleasantries. As for myself, I was permitted the freedom of pacing, somewhat after the manner of a caged bear, to and fro between hearth and door.

After a while M. Henri entered; gave me a frigid good-morning, and invited me to follow him into the other room. Ignoring his offer of a chair, I crossed over and stood looking down upon the figure on the floor. It was quite still now, the face a ghastly white, and all except the face was covered with a military cloak.

'You seem interested in this person. Was he a friend of yours?' inquired M. Henri, from the table, behind which he had seated himself in Humbert's place.

'He was no friend of mine, sir,' I replied, 'and he is now beyond my interest. It seems to me he has scarcely received Christian treatment.'

'Perhaps not. What would you have? War, as you know, cannot always be conducted upon Christian principles. Your—I may call him unknown acquaintance—was unlucky. Besides,' said

M. Henri, with a shrug and movement of his eyebrows, 'he had the misfortune, so I am informed, to kill—what shall I say?—one of the spiritual pastors of this town. Result of inadvertence, or possibly of panic. Anyhow the fact remains, so that perhaps on the whole it was as well for him that he fell into our hands rather than into those of the other Christians!' M. Henri smiled and spread his hands out comprehensively.

'You mean,' cried I, 'that they would have butchered him?'

'I do not assert anything, I merely speculate,' he answered, still smiling; then motioned me to a chair. 'Please be seated. We have had the felicity, sir, of meeting before—some days ago—and under circumstances that were more propitious for you,' he added, leaning back and addressing me with an air of the most punctilious courtesy.

I merely bowed.

'You were obliged then to consider me—indeed I may say to treat me—as an intruder—shall we even add as an enemy?' he went on in his cold measured way.

I bowed again.

'Ah, well, the circumstances have changed. Now I am here, and you, sir, are—there!' and M. Henri waved a hand towards me.

I could only acknowledge the force of his assertion with another bow.

'Monsieur is silent,' he continued. 'I observed that during your examination last evening by the Commandant you were extremely reticent concerning several matters. The full extent of your journey, shall we say? Its object, too? The disposal of

your servant? Furthermore, your own rank and name, I think?’

‘That is so,’ I answered. ‘My reasons for reticence are probably known to you, but I may possibly enlighten you further by giving you my name. It is Bunbury. My sister is Lady Byrne of Castle Byrne—the same Lady Byrne who entertained you on the occasion of your recent hurried visit to her house.’

‘Precisely.’ M. Henri smiled and inclined his head. ‘So I gathered on the occasion of that same hurried visit. And have you also come to any conclusions, Mr. Bunbury, as to my identity?’

‘A few, Mr. Byrne——’

‘Permit me—*Colonel O’Byrne*, if you please.’

‘My compliments, Colonel O’Byrne,’ I said. ‘May I add my congratulations on your return to your native land, and upon the manner of it.’

‘Why, certainly,’ he replied coldly. While speaking he drew towards him a long sheet of blue paper headed, as I saw, ‘*L’Armée d’Irlande à Castlebar*,’ in a large clerky hand; bent over it, as though about to write; then glanced at me. ‘Your observation,’ said he, ‘is in the nature of what the illustrious Shakespeare calls the “quip modest,” or is it the “counter-check quarrelsome”? However, that matter need not trouble either of us at present. I wish to make some records—purely official ones, Mr. Bunbury, as directed by the Commandant. Will you please to answer, and as fully as you conveniently can?’

With that he drew over an inkpot and pen, fell to questioning me, and to writing my replies on the long blue sheet—my full name, my age, my place of birth, the date of my arrival in Ireland, the object of my coming, the duration and course of my journey.

Concerning all these matters, and much else, he asked ; and as frankly as I could, having little indeed to hide, I answered him. Then, having apparently finished, he sat back in his chair and, with his eyes on the document, said : ' Good. Very good.' Suddenly he looked up. ' Your visit to Ireland then, Mr. Bunbury, had no other cause, as I understand, than a simple and natural anxiety as to the safety of Madame, your sister ?'

' None whatever.'

' And your reticence last evening ?'

' Fuller explanations were not necessary. It was my own affair solely, Colonel O'Byrne ; my own private affair.'

' But, pardon me, private no longer ?'

' No. It is now recorded. What would not concern your General has apparently an interest for you—an interest not exclusively official, may I add.'

' So,' said the Colonel, raising his black eyebrows, ' Monsieur is subtle.'

' Doubtless,' I retorted, ' but not so subtle that Monsieur the Colonel will fail to understand.'

He sat toying with his pen, a faint smile upon his face. It was a singularly handsome face, Theodore, for all its lack of softness alike in feature and expression, and as I watched it, so immovably composed, so—I might say—cruel in its composure, I thought of that other face upon the wall at Castle Byrne under which but a few days before he had sat in Owen's chair. Where was Owen ? I suddenly asked myself. What of my poor Kate too, waiting so anxiously in her deserted house ? What thoughts, moreover, affecting both of them were evidently at that moment stirring in the brain of this man—

their relentless enemy—who sat so silent and smiling before me?

‘Reassure yourself,’ he said at last, reading into my thoughts, or so one might imagine, ‘Madame your sister is not the less safe, let us hope, for the loss of her protector.’

I made no reply.

‘It would seem that her husband—Sir Owen Byrne, I think you call him?’ he continued, with an icy note in his voice as he slowly uttered Owen’s name and title—‘it seems he was actively engaged during the recent operations?’

‘You appear to know,’ I answered.

‘Why yes—that and much else,’ said he. ‘The servant who accompanied you from Castle Byrne, Mr. Bunbury, he also, you will remember, is a prisoner.’

‘Then why question me, Colonel O’Byrne? Naturally my servant has a vastly superior knowledge.’

‘Ah, but then the pleasure of questioning you is so much greater,’ he responded softly. ‘And also I would corroborate. It is, I presume, through an attempt to render your relative some service that you have come to such undeserved misfortune?’

‘That also my servant may possibly be able to tell you,’ I replied.

‘Yes, but obviously his information would be incomplete,’ said the Colonel, again smiling serenely. ‘And his intelligence also is not profound. However, it is all equal. We may still find your servant’s knowledge of the native tongue very useful. He is quite safe, I assure you, and is most amenable. As for your brother-in-law Sir Owen,’ the Colonel

continued with a wave of his hand, 'he doubtless is also unharmed. In all probability he has fled with the others, and is now, we may presume, on his way to his own house.'

You may imagine, Theodore, my desire to resent the contempt and studied insolence of this speech! A very little more, and I must have flung discretion to the winds and struck out at the disdainful face in front of me. Happily I restrained myself, and sat enduring his insults silently. After all, I reminded myself, he had a certain score to pay, and if he chose to pay it in such a fashion I must make the best of it. Later my opportunity would perhaps come.

'There remains one other matter,' Colonel O'Byrne continued, adopting now a graver and less offensive tone, 'and that is as regards the disposition of yourself. The explanation, I may say, that you have given us of your mission to Ireland is accepted, and we are convinced that the circumstance of your arrival here was in the nature of an accident, and had no connection with any of the military manœuvres of the British Government. Such being the case, Mr. Bunbury, and recognizing in you a simple civilian, General Humbert is anxious that you should receive all possible consideration. To set you at liberty is, however, as a man of your intelligence will at once perceive, impracticable; nor does the General consider it advisable that he should either retain you here as a prisoner for purpose of exchange, or yet deport you on board of the next French vessel that touches these shores. There is, however, one other course open, and since it is this that he has decided to adopt I will endeavour to explain it.'

With that he paused, and looked inquiringly at me,

as if in expectation of some expression of opinion. Receiving none from me, he stiffened himself in his chair, and went on :

‘It has been decided to send you under an escort to Killala, a village situated some twenty miles from here, and at present occupied by a portion of our force. You will there remain a prisoner upon parole in the house of the Protestant Bishop of the place—a certain Dr. Stock by name. He, it would seem, in addition to the measure of sanctity proper to his calling, is fortunately further dowered with a sufficient store of worldly wisdom. The arrival of our expedition has been accepted by him with a resignation worthy of an ancient philosopher, and you will find several of our officers established as guests in his house. Since he also happens to be the only person in that benighted region who is acquainted with the French tongue he has already proved himself of considerable use to us in the capacity of interpreter. The Bishop having, however, obviously duties to attend to which may at times require his attention, it has occurred to General Humbert that the presence in Killala of another gentleman possessing an equal knowledge of the French language would be a distinct advantage. In you, Mr. Bunbury, he has had the remarkable good-fortune to discover such a person.’

Again Colonel O’Byrne paused, and again looked inquiringly at me. I preserved, however, a stolid, and I trust not undignified silence.

‘My explanation is clear?’ he asked.

‘Perfectly,’ I replied.

‘And the dispositions I have mentioned are—agreeable?’ he pursued in his suavest tones.

'When do I start?' I inquired briefly.

'Immediately.'

'Will my servant be permitted to accompany me?'

'I fear not.'

'Before leaving I should be glad to speak with him.'

'It is not possible.'

'Then may I consign a written message, for delivery by him, in the event of his release, to Lady Byrne?'

'As regards that I can safely promise to inquire,' he replied. 'Meanwhile permit me to urge upon you, Mr. Bunbury, the necessity of absolute discretion alike now and hereafter. Any rash attempt at escape, for instance'—this was said with a shrug and a spread of his hands—'or any equally rash attempt to communicate with the enemy would necessitate prompt measures. To be precise, either action would force upon us a highly disagreeable duty. Am I clear?'

'Perfectly,' said I. 'Allow me to thank you, Colonel O'Byrne, for your extremely polite expression of a warning which I might choose to consider unnecessary. In return, may I venture to hint at a certain danger that threatens yourself.'

He sat staring at me. 'A danger which threatens *myself*?' he repeated. 'Danger always threatens a soldier, sir.'

'Why yes,' said I, 'but what I have in mind is another matter. So far I have withheld the reason which, as a matter of fact, led me to journey to Castlebar. With your permission, Citizen Colonel, I will now divulge it.'

'Ah,' said he, drawing the blue sheet towards him

and dipping his quill in the inkpot. 'Then I am to write?'

'As it pleases you,' I responded. 'But perhaps, on reflection, you will decide not to write. I came to Castlebar bearing an urgent message from Lady Byrne to her husband, Sir Owen.'

'So?' Colonel O'Byrne raised his black eyebrows. 'But a message from a lady to her lord,' he said coldly—'how does that concern me?'

'It concerns you very intimately, I think. Recognizing that in other circumstances your life would have been in grave peril, Lady Byrne commissioned me to find Sir Owen, and urge him to use his influence upon your behalf.'

He sat watching me intently for a brief while; then he smiled again in his cold way, and said, 'Madame Byrne—I crave her pardon—Lady Byrne is extremely good!'

'Absurdly good, to my manner of thinking,' said I. 'However, we need not now discuss the motives which induced Lady Byrne to show such extraordinary solicitude in your service. I fear you do not yet comprehend the matter fully, Colonel O'Byrne. Let us assume that the events of yesterday had resulted otherwise, and that in consequence you were now in my place, and answering the interrogations of a court of British officers. What then? I ask you.'

He met my question with imperturbable calmness. 'Well, sir, and what then?' he asked.

'Despite your rank in the Army of France,' I responded, rising and leaning towards him with my hands upon the table, 'you remain a British subject. As such you would, if taken prisoner,

have been in a position of grave peril—a position, let me say, not shared by any of your brother officers. Now do you understand?’

In response the Colonel rose and confronted me, a dark flush showing upon his face.

‘Sir,’ said he, ‘you are presuming. You forget where you are, and who I am.’

‘I do not forget, Colonel O’Byrne,’ I answered. ‘You have warned me, now I am warning you. What has happened on this occasion may not be repeated a second time, and then, should it be your fortune to escape a bullet, you may appreciate the efforts made to save you from a more ignoble fate.’

At that he gripped his sword-hilt, and his face blazed angrily.

‘Enough, sir,’ he cried. ‘Another word and I end your insolence.’

I bowed.

‘Pardon my indiscretion,’ said I. ‘Only remember this, Colonel O’Byrne. Should that time ever arrive you will still find Lady Byrne ready——’

‘It will not come,’ he interrupted. ‘And if it did—I am a soldier. As for Madame your sister, I shall remember her goodness. Yours also, Mr. Bunbury. And now enough. You will be prepared to march immediately.’

‘I am prepared,’ said I. ‘Permit me, however, to remind you of my request in regard to my servant.’

He pointed at the table and said ‘Write.’ Sitting down accordingly, I scrawled on a leaf of my pocket-book a few lines to Kate, assuring her of my safety, and expressing a hope that news of herself and of Owen might reach me at the Palace of Bishop Stock, Killala. I then folded the paper, and inscribed

it *To Lady Byrne at Castle Byrne, care of General Humbert, Commanding the French Army in Ireland,* and gave it to the Colonel.

He read it through, glanced at the inscription, and smiled.

'It may require some little revision,' said he. 'But I will commend it to the General. And should it happen that your servant cannot carry your message—well, we shall see.'

He then went to the door, opened it, gave an order to the sentries, and stood aside.

'*Au revoir, monsieur,*' he said with a bow as I passed out.

'*Au revoir, Colonel,*' said I.

And so, my dear Theodore, ended that little episode in the history of my adventures.

CHAPTER XVIII

I REACH KILLALA

A SHORT time afterwards, three cavalry soldiers, one of whom led a saddled horse, drew up outside the doorway, and I was at once marched out between two sentries, placed beside the spare horse, and invited to mount. That done, a rope was knotted about my waist, its ends secured to the arms of a soldier on either side of me, and with the third soldier riding close behind my escort, we started through Castlebar upon the journey to Killala. From their miserable little dwellings (some of which had suffered badly, I noticed, during the looting operations of the previous day) the townsfolk came out upon the side-walks to watch us go past; also a crowd of excited ragamuffins, who jeered clamourously at our heels down the whole length of the street. We made no very imposing procession, I must admit, nor one inspiring myself as its central figure with any particular feelings of gratitude towards my captors. What would you have, though? A prisoner after all is a prisoner, and doubtless these extra precautions against any possibility of my escape were intended by Colonel O'Byrne—for to him I had to accredit them—as in the nature of a personal tribute!

Once outside the town the pack of ragamuffins drew gradually off, and thence we rode through bright sunshine in comparative quietude. A number of people were abroad indeed, some of them armed, many drunken, most of them in a state of wild excitement, and all making towards Castlebar. From these, however, we suffered no molestation of any kind except once, when a group of noisy youths endeavoured to stop our progress, and were soon dispersed by a vigorous little bit of sword-play on the part of my escort. I saw the heights upon which the British cannons had been ranged, and also the position, at some distance from the town, flanked by a lake and a marsh and apparently all but impregnable, that had been carried in such an amazing fashion by the French at the bayonet point. A few dead bodies lay upon the roadside; at one place quite a number, mostly those of rebels, I think, that had been swept down by the cannonade. Presently the exclamations of my escort drew my attention to a body lying stark naked on a field. It was that of a French soldier, stripped, I suppose, for the sake of his uniform!

After a while we came to a wild and hilly region, crossed by various streams and rivers, and with a large lake shining in the distance. Here matters seemed to be much more peaceful. Peasants were working at the harvest or amongst the heaps of peat in the bogs. These, as we passed, stopped work to stare at us, or to run eagerly over to the roadside, standing there like scarecrows, and making a strange exhibition of their rags and nakedness. '*Sauvages*,' I heard the soldiers call them—not without justification—while the country at large they also summarily

characterized as being unfit for the habitation even of pigs. A considerable number of cabins stood scattered about, with here and there a house of somewhat greater pretensions rising among them, or some whitewashed building roofed with thatch that served probably for a church or a school. We passed through several villages, wretched places, whose mud houses straggled along the sides of filthy little streets, full of pigs, fowls, donkeys, and bare-legged children, and at the doorways of which more '*Sauvages*,' peering out of the smoke, stood to watch us go past. Amongst these villagers, as amongst the peasants, I saw few signs of excitement, and no signs whatever of any movement towards a general rising. The further we went, indeed, the more convinced I felt that between them and their allies, as represented by my escort, there was not so much as the faintest bond of sympathy.

This attitude of indifference on the part of the people, and of frank contempt on the part of the soldiers, appeared to me so remarkable that I endeavoured to draw some enlightenment from the soldier who rode on my right hand, and with whom I had already engaged in friendly conversation. He was a squat cross-grained fellow, with an ugly scar upon one lean cheek and a broken nose, but kindly in his rough way; very talkative, moreover, and intelligent enough.

'Bah,' said he in answer to my questions, '*Ce sont des animanx, ces Irlandais*. See their houses—their manner of life—their selves! And their country—frightful, desolate—nothing anywhere—no cattle, no sheep—nothing but goats and pigs. And the fields! And the roads—*tiens*, and the rain! *Mon*

Dieu, the rain! Soldiers, you ask? *Jamais de la vie, citoyen!* They will shout, they will eat—yes, they will eat, the poor starved devils! But fight—never! And we that came expecting—what?—a welcome; a great army; the whole country with us; much food; much everything? And we find—*nom de nom!* nothing to eat; no wine; not even any rebellion. As for their enthusiasm—they think we have come to fight for their Church, for their *grand monsieur* of a Pope! Ha, ha! *Tiens*, but it is amusing, positively amusing!

Thereupon this Jean Gourgand, for so I found he was named, told me a somewhat extraordinary story which admirably illustrates, I think, the methods adopted by the French, or rather that have been forced upon them in order to win favour from the Irish. It appears that before leaving Ballina—a town upon our route, some seven miles south of Killala—the English captured a rebel called Peter Walsh, who, having in his pocket a commission from Humbert, authorizing him to recruit for the service of the Republic, was promptly hanged in the market-place. Soon afterwards a body of the French, Jean Gourgand among them, entered Ballina under the command of an officer called Sarrazin, and he having learnt the circumstances of Walsh's fate, quickly turned it to dramatic account. Halting his troops in the market-place, Sarrazin stepped solemnly to the body, saluted it, embraced it, and then turning to the crowd of townsfolk declared, '*Voilà, messieurs*, how we honour the martyrs of your sacred cause!' You can imagine, Theodore, the scene of enthusiasm that followed, and how it swelled almost to frenzy as each company in passing lowered its colours to the corpse, and

each commander in turn kissed it on the forehead. But more was to come. Sarrazin had the body cut down and carried with due ceremony to a chapel; where, dressed in a French uniform, it lay in state upon a table with tapers burning at head and feet—and all this, mind you, to the accompaniment of the ‘Marseillaise,’ chorused by the assembled French soldiery! ‘Ah, but it was amusing,’ cried Jean, with a loud laugh. ‘The jests we made—the mockery—*tiens ! tiens !*’

‘It must have been vastly amusing for you, I have no doubt,’ I said. ‘But the Irish who assisted did not, I presume, see it from quite the same point of view.’

‘Why no,’ he answered. ‘They understood nothing—they are barbarians. They can work. We make them dig and carry. They drag our guns over the hills all the way to your Castlebar. But soldiers—never, never!’

‘Remember that it is as yet early,’ said I. ‘To make them into soldiers will take time. Already, is it not true, many have come to your standard, and have even died for their and your sacred cause?’

‘Ah, yes, it is true. But not as we expected. What did they make us come here for? I ask. The sacred cause! *parbleu*, I mock at it! We march—we fight—we win—and then we dance——’

‘Dance?’

‘So,’ said Jean. ‘Last evening, after the great victory. We—the officers too—all of us, we danced. Ah, the charming women, so fresh, so innocent—with their bare feet and their short red skirts. *Voyez!* Well, now it is over, and we march again.’

‘I see,’ said I. ‘Well, at least you have not been

without some amusement. Perhaps there will be more in store for you.'

'Why, no,' said Jean, shaking his head and looking over the fields. 'Here it is all desolate!'

'Yet the same sun shines here that shines in France.'

'But no—oh no—no,' he declared positively. 'It is not the same sun. Nothing is the same. *Ah, la belle France!*' he cried, and a tear actually, as he spoke, trickled down his sunburnt cheek.

'Yet you have served *la belle France* elsewhere?' I inquired.

Why, yes, he had served it in the wars of Italy.

'Under General Buonaparte?'

But certainly. Power of powers, what a man! What energy! What genius, always glory and victory! And so beloved! All his soldiers would die for him.

'Many have,' I said drily.

Naturally. Thousands upon thousands. What then? It was war.

'You, personally, have suffered, I suppose?'

Yes, he had suffered much—the cold—the heat—the rain—the terrible marches. At Mentz last winter he had slept in the earth four feet beneath the snow. Hunger too. Only a little bread, a little soup sometimes, meat seldom, and many discomforts. It was true that for a whole year he had not changed his small-clothes.

'Why, then, this campaign is but a bagatelle?' said I. 'You are having a comparative holiday among these "*sauvages*" and their charming bare-footed ladies.'

Jean Gourgand gave me a quizzical look.

'Ah, ha! I perceive that Monsieur is not like the

other English,' he said. 'He makes the jest. For me—Name of a dog!' he burst out. 'What hunger I have at this very moment.' And he looked ravenously around him.

In due course of time we reached the little town of Ballina, and there we halted for rest and food. As was to be expected, we found it in a state of tumult—its streets thronged, everyone highly elated at General Humbert's victory, and celebrating it generously after their fashion. In the crowd I noticed a few deserters from the Militia regiments that had been defeated at Castlebar, and presently learnt that some fifty more had just marched out of the town, with their tunics turned inside out, on their way to enrol in the Army of Ireland at Killala. Many of the local Irish also carried arms of various kinds, from bill-hooks and pikes up to French muskets, and some of them wore French uniforms or parts of uniforms—this man being crowned with a glittering helmet, that one arrayed in a pair of blue breeches, yet another having on an ill-fitting tunic, and so on. Our arrival did not pass unobserved, you may be sure; indeed, such feelings of excitement were aroused amongst the crowd at sight of myself that only the violent exertions of my escort saved me from being torn from my horse, and probably murdered.

I rested in a small room of the inn adjoining the market-place, where Major Truc, who was the officer in command at Ballina, had established his headquarters. Whilst I ate the coarse food provided, a sentry kept watch over me, it being feared apparently that I might either cut my throat with the table-knife or risk a dash for liberty through the window amongst my howling friends outside! Before I had

finished, Truc himself, accompanied by a local patriot, one Captain O'Keon, paid me a visit. This Truc proved to be a large corpulent man, noisy, brazen-faced, vulgar in manners, unclean in person, and wearing perpetually a mean and obtrusively cunning smile upon his face. From the first I distrusted him; but the other man, O'Keon, I found more to my liking. It seems that he was a native of the neighbourhood, and had been a priest in France until the outbreak of the Revolution, when, losing his benefice, he adopted soldiering as a profession. Fat, jolly, ruddy, with a soft voice and an agreeable manner, he showed himself, both by his tact and his proficiency in French and English, as useful an intermediary between Truc and myself as it would appear he had already been between the French and his own countrymen. That speech, for instance, which Sarrazin delivered before Walsh's body, had been translated to the crowd by O'Keon, and later on I heard from Bishop Stock how skilfully he had harangued the natives in the Ballina market-place, telling them amongst other things that the Madonna had related to him while he was asleep in Paris the story of Ireland's wrongs; had then aroused him with a gentle box on the ears; and had sent him to urge upon the Directory the necessity of equipping this present expedition.

Both men questioned me closely about the state of affairs at Castlebar; the condition of the country I had come through; the latest development in Wicklow and Wexford, and were particularly eager for every detail I could give them with regard to General Humbert's great victory. Neither, I gathered, had the smallest doubt that all Ireland

would now rush to arms; that they would shortly carry the standards in triumph to Dublin, and so add another province to the French Republic! What could England and her mercenaries do in the face of a united nation led by troops that had never suffered defeat? In a few days civil government would be proclaimed in Connaught; a huge army organized; reinforcements landed; a President elected. Indeed, according to Truc, all this was already as good as accomplished, with himself, so I understood, a General, possibly even Commander-in-Chief or President-Elect of Ireland. Swaggering up and down the room, he bragged of his astonishing deeds here and elsewhere; of his enormous popularity in the town; of his genius as soldier and administrator; of the plans he would carry out, and the wonders he would perform were he in Humbert's place—showing the while his contempt for the unfortunate English prisoner not only by his references to our unfortunate country, but also by an exhibition of manners worthy of a Parisian gutter-bird. O'Keon on his side laughed a good deal at these vapourings, and indulged in some good-humoured raillery at his friend's expense—on one occasion giving him even the name of Buonaparte the Second.

'Well, and why not?' cried Truc, swinging round and inflating himself into an absurd resemblance to a turkey-cock. 'There is room in the world, I hope, for more than one Buonaparte.'

'Ah, but not in his world, my dear Major,' returned O'Keon. 'And no doubt that is why you were so cruelly exiled here to Ireland!'

About five o'clock we resumed our journey towards

Killala, both Truc and O'Keon giving us the protection of their company for the greater part of a mile beyond the town. The road was filled with peasants going and coming, and all work apparently had ceased in the fields, for we had now come to a district in the very centre of French influence. It was from here that had been drawn most of the recruits whom I had seen in Ballina, as well as those I was soon to see in Killala, to say nothing of the unfortunates who had dragged Humbert's guns to Castlebar and perished in the hour of victory. I felt no small pity for the poor devils, many of whom were fine stalwart fellows, and all, I thought, victims to hopes and promises that would certainly prove false, and be the means of bringing upon them a swift and terrible retribution.

About another hour's ride brought us to our destination—the house, namely, of Bishop Stock, standing back from the roadside a little way outside Killala. It was called a castle, why I cannot tell, for though a large building of three stories surrounding a courtyard, with a gateway and extensive grounds, it would in England have passed for no more than an average-sized country residence. Facing it a squad of recruits, some in blue uniforms, but the majority in their everyday frieze clothes, was being exercised in a field by a very small but exceedingly vigorous French officer. Over the gateway of the Bishop's house flew a green flag, inscribed in yellow with the motto, 'Erin go bragh' (*anglice* 'Ireland for Ever!'), and in the space before it was a large crowd of peasants, clamouring and surging, brandishing muskets, gesticulating; all this apparently with the purpose of effecting an en-

trance past the sentries at the gate. So dense was this crowd and so demonstrative, that for a time we stood waiting in the rear of it, and probably our stay would have been a considerable one had not the officer in the field discovered our business, and thereupon plunged into the throng to our rescue. I heard his voice shouting formidable threats in French; saw his long sword flashing vigorously hither and thither. Suddenly the tumult ceased; the crowd divided; and we passed through into the courtyard.

Having given instructions to the sergeant in charge of my escort, the little officer strode back to his business in the field, leaving me with Jean Gourgand and the rest of the soldiers from Castlebar. The sergeant dismounted, and crossed to the doorway of what seemed a stable, but in reality proved to be a guardroom. It was some time before he returned, so that I had opportunity of observing the doings in the courtyard. Under the mild roseate light of a setting sun the place was astir with noise and confusion as though it had been a village fair. In the lower rooms of the building—formerly used as offices, I was told—were quartered the French soldiers, some two hundred of them, I think, and these in many stages of undress lolled about the doorways or filled the open windows—smoking, laughing, chattering, and some of them drinking from large earthenware vessels. Before the guardroom were the Militia deserters who had just marched in from Ballina, and were now engaged in openly avowing their treason by exchanging British for French uniforms. Nearer the gateway a marine officer, seated on a

powder-barrel, was superintending the distribution, by an enormous negro, of muskets, ammunition, uniforms, accoutrements, and so forth, amongst a number of peasants. This last proceeding was in its way so remarkable, that I must pause a moment to describe it to you in fuller detail. Such, my dear Theodore, was the eagerness of these unfortunate recruits to be bedecked that some of them stood in no more than their boots and ragged shirts awaiting the call of the negro. Others, who had been already served, danced joyously like so many children, in their blue tunics and trousers, rejoicing evidently, above all, in their gaudy helmets, edged with imitation leopard-skin made of brown paper.

Their delight at receiving the muskets which were made over to them was even less restrained. Here was to be seen one, still in his shirt, gloating over a weapon which he held out before him in both hands; here another taking aim at some crows wheeling overhead; yet another hero trying to extract a cartridge by banging the muzzle of his musket upon the stones; while another, strutting up and down, with a helmet many sizes too large for him, held his newly-acquired musket proudly shouldered, only the wrong way up. So far as I could see, no care had been taken to provide them with uniforms that fitted; consequently, the most grotesque figures were to be seen, one or two recruits, with unusually large heads, having had their helmets thumped on by the presiding officer with energetic blows of his fist. All this, you may be sure, evoked much amusement among the soldiery; and when a recruit, who had, under a false name, bartered for whisky the equipment

obtained the previous day, and was being vigorously ejected by the big negro, shouts of laughter resounded in the courtyard.

I laughed heartily myself, I must own, at this incident, the more so because the fellow happened to be one of those wearing only his boots and shirt. The absurdity of his figure, flying in such a plight before the great negro, drew peal after peal of laughter from a child of six or seven years old, who stood behind one of the palace windows in front of a group composed of several ladies, a tall French officer, and a clean-shaven man of portly habit wearing clerical garb. This last I judged, and correctly as I soon found, to be the Bishop himself. The little girl, whose fair hair he kept stroking gently, was, I made sure, his daughter, but I was at a loss to account for the presence in their close neighbourhood of the French officer. A glance, moreover, round the other windows in that second story, and also in the story above it, set me further wondering, so numerous were the faces I saw pressed against the glass or protruding over the sills. There were scores of them, literally, and of every sort and class, old, young, middle-aged; grave faces, laughing faces, the faces of peasants, of gentlefolk, of clergymen, of children, even of a baby in arms here and there. It was a truly astonishing concatenation of humanity!

Dusk was beginning to gather in the courtyard, when the sergeant came back, cut the rope from my waist, allowed me to dismount, and led me to a small room on the ground floor of the palace, where, behind a plain deal table littered with papers, and with a pair of candles in tall brass sticks at either

end of it, sat a stout, pleasant-faced French officer. Seeing me, he at once rose, dismissed the sergeant, and began an apology for having kept me waiting such an unconscionable time.

‘But I need not explain, for you will have seen how it is, Monsieur Bunbury,’ he said, smiling. ‘There is much to be done in this place, and some of it is a little difficult. Perhaps you have been interested in looking about you during your period of waiting? Yes? And probably amused? Well, I will confess to being not a little amused myself at times. Ah, well, it is best so. You have been unfortunate,’ he went on. ‘I have heard of your adventures, not all of them, but some. It will be my pleasure to hear further details from you, but not now—no. You are weary, I make certain, and need food; therefore, with your permission, and as I am myself much occupied, I will——’ He paused and stood pulling his underlip with a thumb and forefinger.

‘I have instructions from my General,’ he continued slowly, ‘that you are to be—what shall I say?—kept strictly in view. For myself, I am Charost—*moi, qui vous parle*—Lieutenant-Colonel in the Army of the Republic, and now in command at this place. You, monsieur, on the other hand, are an English gentleman obviously, one who, in addition to your other qualities, has the distinction of being more familiar than most Englishmen with the traditions and language of my country. Consequently, it will not be necessary to——’ He waved a hand and smiled upon me in a manner that immediately won my regard. ‘No, no! Your word of honour is sufficient. We shall be friends. You cannot serve with us—

that is clear—but that you will help so far as you can, I make sure.'

I bowed to the Lieutenant-Colonel, and gave him a full assurance that my aim would be to render myself worthy of his confidence, adding that my poor services would, for the present at all events, be at his command. He thanked me, and expressed his regret at the insufficient accommodation which he feared was available for me. 'I can do nothing,' he said. 'In this house I, too, am but a guest. The good Bishop provides us with everything—food, wine, places to sleep, everything, and already his hospitality, as you will see, is stretched to the uttermost. Ah, but he has the heart, has our Bishop! Yet I fear—However, we shall see. You also will be his guest, and I think his friend. And now, monsieur,' added Colonel Charost, rising, 'we will go to him, and tomorrow, when you have rested, we will talk.'

We went up the staircase, and as we did so I became aware of a sound of confusion within the palace, a murmuring of many voices, the going and coming of many feet, and mingled with these the violent closing of doors, the moving of heavy objects upon the landings, and quite close at hand a muffled clamour as of drunken revelling. 'You hear,' said Charost, looking upwards. 'These are all guests. And those,' he continued, indicating with an angry turn of his head the riot proceeding behind a closed door—'those also are guests. But pigs! *Vrai tas de cochons*,' he cried, with a stamp of the foot. 'Well, it shall be ended shortly.' Then he took me into a large room whose windows looked out upon the grounds and garden.

It was feebly lighted. A long dining-table ran down

the middle of it, and quantities of arms and baggage were piled against the walls. At the windows were dimly discernible a group of ladies, some seated, others standing. Before the fireplace stood two or three clergymen, also a man in ordinary civilian dress, the tall officer I had seen at the courtyard window, and beside him the Bishop, one of his arms around the shoulders of his fair-haired little daughter, the other giving oratorical emphasis to his talk.

Ceasing his discourse at our entrance, he came towards us, holding the child by the hand, and moving with a good deal of dignity across the polished floor. I was presented. Charost briefly explained my position, begging for me the fullest possible hospitality, and then retired. Thereupon the Bishop led me to the table; ordered his butler to provide me with food, and as I ate he sat near me, his gaitered legs crossed, his signet ring gleaming on a finger of his folded hands, his whole presence breathing a fine and genial benevolence. I found him most agreeable. In manner he was grave, urbane, extremely courteous; his voice had a sort of purring softness; his eyes a kind of twinkling kindliness. To see him sitting there so placidly, talking quietly or listening—turning now to smile upon the little daughter who stood beside his chair, expressing now his sympathy at some relation of my experiences—you would never, Theodore, have imagined that upon his capable shoulders rested such a tremendous burden of cares and of responsibilities.

My meal over, we joined the company gathered at the lower end of the room, and I was soon seated, the centre, it seemed, of a ring of faces peering eagerly at me in the dim candlelight, while I narrated as

much of the story of my recent adventures as might discreetly be revealed. Everyone appeared to be prodigiously interested, and disposed, I thought, to regard me as some sort of hero or martyr—everyone, that is to say, except the two French officers, whose silence and aspect of boredom signified that every word I uttered was meaningless to them. As it seemed unfair and discourteous to leave them entirely outside the circle, I interpolated, for their benefit, an account in French of my interview with Truc at Ballina, not failing to do justice to a few of his swaggering speeches. At this recital they looked at each other meaningly and presently both laughed, while one of the Bishop's sons, a youth of nineteen or thereabouts, muttered 'Scoundrel!' in English, and proceeded to explain to me that when Humbert marched to Ballina he took as hostages himself and four other young men of good family, all of whom, despite Humbert's orders, Truc confined for the night in a shed in the company of a drunken rabble. This youth and his three brothers (the Bishop has eleven children) tried eagerly to draw from me every particular of the Castlebar fight, a relation which I felt it wiser to deny them just then, partly because of its possible effect upon the ladies. They, poor things, seemed to be sadly overwrought, and no wonder indeed. I doubt if any of them had slept for several nights, or would sleep for many nights to come. Nearly all were refugees who, with their children and husbands, had come to the Bishop for shelter and protection, and, I suppose, still lived in constant fear of death, or even of worse things, at the hands of the French and their allies. Never shall I forget how violently one of

them shrieked as a sudden yell resounded from the garden, or at the evidences of terror they showed upon hearing other turbulent sounds which arose continually either within or without the house. At that very moment, right beneath the windows, shots were being fired, and such an infernal burst of yelling broke forth that we all instinctively leaped to our feet. The ladies huddled together, screaming; the two officers rushed away; and it was left to the Bishop to restore a certain measure of calmness by his assurances that the rebels were merely indulging in some of their accustomed diversions. To me it was all somewhat of the nature of a bad dream. I felt utterly weary and dispirited, and was thoroughly glad when the Bishop suggested that I should now retire to bed.

He was good enough to light me upstairs himself. We went up several long flights, until in the corridor of what proved to be the attic floor of the house he stopped before a window. Even here I was conscious of the great stir, as of hundreds of inmates in a state of confused restlessness. Far below us a body of the same local rebels whom I had seen through the window were collected about a fire; some seated on the grass, others gathered about a set of six or eight, engaged apparently in dancing; all of them uttering sounds of the wildest hilarity.

'They appear to be enjoying themselves, my lord,' I remarked. 'I hope, for all our sakes, that they will not continue these celebrations throughout the entire night?'

'I hope not,' he answered. 'We are getting accustomed to it, but it must seem not a little strange to you.' He stood a minute, as though in thought, with

an elbow against the casement, and a hand supporting his head. 'Poor misguided creatures,' he continued musingly. 'They know not in the very least what they do. The pity of it, Mr. Bunbury—the pity! They were so peaceable. They never wanted this sort of thing—never! It has been forced upon them. . . . However, we need not discuss the matter now. I wish that I could offer you a somewhat better hospitality,' he went on, turning directly to me; 'but I daresay you will have observed that I am hardly master at present in my own house.'

'I understand perfectly. Colonel Charost has explained matters in some detail to me,' I replied. 'Besides, your lordship must remember that I am, after all, only a prisoner.'

'I do remember it,' he answered, raising the candle and smiling benignly upon me—'consequently my regret is all the greater that I must consign you to so poor a dungeon. It happens to be the only available place, and unfortunately you will have to share it, for the present at least, with a poor fellow, McVittie by name, whose peculiarities may cause you not a little inconvenience. I cannot relate his story now in full, but I may tell you that he is a Northern Protestant, an Orangeman, and a particularly militant one. Indeed, it is partly because of his dogged resistance to the French, partly because of his contemptuous defiance of their Roman Catholic supporters, that he now lies practically a prisoner in the room yonder. There he is at least safe; at large he would be—— But no matter now.' The Bishop moved towards the door he had indicated. 'He received some slight wounds, and is still a little feverish,' he added. 'Give him what patient consideration you can, and

I think you will find him at least harmless And so good-night, Mr. Bunbury, and if possible sleep well!

I entered a small room, having a low sloping roof, a single window, and furnished sparingly with a few chairs, a table, a washstand, and two narrow beds. Between the beds stood a table, and upon it a lighted candle, a glass, a medicine-bottle, and what proved to be an open Bible. In the further bed, propped up with pillows, lay McVittie. A white bandage covered his forehead and one eye. He wore also a long woollen nightcap, his mass of reddish beard showed above the bed-clothes, while his long nose, and single eye fixedly peering at me beneath a bushy brow, all gave him a sufficiently formidable appearance.

I had half undressed, and had just pushed my head through a primitive form of nightgown which, with other toilet necessaries, I found upon the chair by my bedside, when McVittie, raising himself on an elbow, suddenly demanded: 'Who and what are *you*?'

The question came so abruptly, and was hurled at me in a voice so uncompromisingly harsh, that at first I felt disposed to resent it. Remembering the Bishop's admonition, I restrained myself, however.

'My name is Bunbury,' I answered.

'Tis little I'm caring about your name, good or bad,' retorted McVittie. 'Tis yourself. Who are you?' I say.

'An English gentleman, at your service.'

'*English*, is it? And what's your business here?'

'To get some sleep if possible,' said I, sitting upon the bedside, and preparing to pull off my boots.

'Who's put you into it?' he next continued in his raucous Northern dialect.

‘Bishop Stock, my man,’ I answered. ‘I believe he put you in here also.’

For a moment the fellow kept silence. Suddenly and with intense vehemence: ‘Tell me this. Are you a Protestant?’ he demanded.

The demand, I thought, sounded like sheer insolence, so I gave him no answer.

‘Is it a Protestant you are, d’you hear me asking?’ he repeated still louder and more angrily.

‘I entirely fail to see any reason for your question, nor yet the need for my replying to it,’ I answered.

I had now risen to my feet and stood facing him. Glaring at me with his one savage eye, he suddenly sat upright in his bed and shouted: ‘I’ll stay in no room with a Papist! How will I know what you may be after? You have the look of a priest or of a spy about you. Maybe ’tis one or other you are, or one of those devils of Frenchmen? You’ll be counting your beads, most like, and crossing yourself—or maybe you’ll be rising in the dead of night to cut my throat! But I defy you! I’ve put some of your black breed out of the world before now, and I’ll put more of it out yet, so I will!’

In this fashion my agreeable room-fellow continued for some time longer, and with such violence of voice and manner that I could only conclude he was demented. My state of mind became, moreover, still more confused when he all at once launched into an extraordinary harangue in which denunciation of Papists, Popes, Infidels and Heretics, was joined with glorification of Protestantism, King, Country, William of Orange, the Siege of Londonderry, the Battle of the Boyne, all interspersed with snatches of wild Cameronian ballads, with catch-

words that were so much Greek to my comprehension, and with an amazing profusion, moreover, of texts from Scripture.

Wearied out, I resolved at last to end it. Passing round his bed-foot, I leant across it and addressing the fanatic in my politest tones, I assured him that I appreciated his eloquence, approved his sentiments, admired him for the honourable wounds he had received in defending King and Church against the invader, and would gladly listen to him for hours, but that just then I was tired, and needed sleep. As a brother Protestant and fellow-prisoner, I craved, therefore, his indulgence for one night, adding that at some future time I should give him my fullest attention.

He sat looking at me still dubiously, with his one implacable eye.

'Then 'tis a Protestant you are, after all?' he asked.

'Assuredly. Quite as good a Protestant, I hope, as you are yourself.'

Obviously he doubted my assertion, but felt bound to accept it.

'We'll see about that in the morning,' said he. Then he grunted, recommended me to be after saying my prayers, and reached out his hand for his Bible.

I was soon in bed, and it was while still watching McVittie, bent over the Book, and following with a forefinger the words of a Psalm which he read aloud to himself, that I presently fell into a long unbroken sleep.

CHAPTER XIX

I MAKE FRIENDS WITH OUR ENEMIES

FINDING, when I awoke next morning, that McVittie still slept, I dressed quietly and hurriedly; carried my boots into the passage and there pulled them on; then went to the window, at which the Bishop had paused the previous night, and looked out.

It being a fine, clear morning I was able from my elevated position to command an extensive view over pastures and hills to a distant range of mountains. A spire, a round tower, and much blue smoke rising over scattered roofs, indicated Killala. Along the road, winding down to the town, came supplies of driven cattle, and of hay and corn in carts, convoyed by French soldiers and armed peasants. In a field close by the huge negro was already drilling a small party of recruits, noisily, and with occasional recourse to a blow. Beneath was the band of local rebels, whose revelling the Bishop and I had witnessed some nine hours or so before. A few of these were still lying asleep on the straw; the others were gathered around a pot hanging above a peat fire.

Presently I became aware of light feet tripping behind me, and turning saw the Bishop's fair-haired little daughter, bearing a tray on which was a jug of hot milk with some bread and meat.

'Hullo!' said I.

'Good-morning,' she answered, smiling up at me, and passed on.

'Mayn't I help you?' I said, following.

'Please,' she said, giving me the tray. 'It is for Mr. McVittie, you know.'

'Oh, it is for him! But I'm afraid he is not yet awake. I happen to know, for I shared his room.'

'He will wake when I come,' she answered.

'Do you always carry the meals to Mr. McVittie?'

'No—not always. Sometimes. The servants are vevzy busy,' she explained. 'I think, too, he likes me to come.'

'I'm certain he would.' We had now reached the door. 'Shall I go in with you?' I asked.

'I—I think I should go in alone,' she said. 'He is a vevzy funny man—and sometimes he is vevzy angry.' Then she took the tray, knocked, and entered.

Standing outside the half-open door, I heard the child place the tray on McVittie's table, and call—'Good-morning, Mr. McVittie—Good-morning, Mr. McVittie—I have brought you your breakfast, Mr. McVittie!' in her small, shrill accents. Then a sleepy voice, between two great yawns, followed: 'Thank you, my little maid,' it said, 'thank you kindly. 'Deed and I'm sorry to be such a trouble to you, but I'll soon be able and willing to attend to myself, please God. Better? Ach then, yes, I'm a trifle better, Miss Delia, thank you, only last night I was terrible disturbed——' Here I suppose McVittie glanced at my bed, and finding it empty, asked the child if she had seen me, and who I was. What

she answered I cannot say, for stealthily and upon tiptoe I stole back to the window.

In a few minutes Delia rejoined me there.

'Well,' said I, 'how is your patient? He wasn't angry, I hope?'

'No-o. Only a little.' She came close to me, a finger on her lip and glancing backwards along the passage. 'I don't think he is quite pleased with *you*,' she whispered.

'Isn't he, indeed?' I laughed. 'Well, never mind. We mustn't let that trouble us too much, must we? Won't you tell me your name?'

'Delia.'

'A very beautiful name! I hope we are going to be friends, Delia?'

'I think we shall.' She stood looking at me intently for a minute with her large blue eyes. 'You are Mr. Bunbury?'

'Yes.'

She still continued to look at me in a way that I found a little embarrassing: at last asked, in an awed soft tone:

'Are you really a prisoner?'

I had to laugh as I answered that I really was.

'Isn't it rader dreadful being a prisoner?' she continued.

'Sometimes—not just now,' I answered.

'Have they treated you vezzy horribly?'

'Oh no; I have only been a little uncomfortable, and uncommonly dirty.'

'Dirty—are you really vezzy dirty, Mr. Bunbury?'

'Why, yes, Delia, I think I am. The French are not fond of water, I find. That's why they are better soldiers than sailors, perhaps.'

‘Is it?’ The child gave me a smile. She had charming dimples when she smiled, not unlike what our own Kate used to have, you may remember, as a child; her cheeks bloomed a sudden pink just as Kate’s used to do. ‘Are you not vezzy much afraid?’ she next inquired.

‘Of what, sweetheart?’

‘Of—of—I thought prisoners were always afraid,’ she answered. ‘They may put you into chains, and feed you on bread and water in a dark prison place, and——’

She paused, not wishing, perhaps, to continue the list of my possible penalties to that final extremity which had been the fate of other prisoners about whom she had probably heard or read. Next moment, by good-fortune, as I thought, a shot fired by one of the party around the fire outside sent her clinging to my hand.

‘It’s nothing, Delia,’ I assured her. ‘Some patriot has killed a crow—that is all, I am sure. Come, let us go and see what is happening in the courtyard. Do you remember how you laughed last evening when that poor fellow who had come twice for his uniform was sent flying through the gateway?’

Hand and hand, we then went down the stairs. We did not, however, very speedily reach the bottom of it, certain happenings in the palace courtyard claiming on the way our interest.

You will really scarcely credit, Theodore, even after my previous assurances, the extent to which this unfortunate building was literally crammed with humanity from its cellar to its roof. Small wonder that the Bishop had assigned to me only a room in the attic story. Why, he himself and his whole

family, including his invalid wife, were huddled into a couple of tiny bed-chambers and counted themselves fortunate to retain the sole use of his library. The servants lived and slept in the kitchen and its offices; upon the ground floor were quartered the French soldiers; upon the second floor, Charost and his two subordinates had a suite of rooms with the dining-room as headquarters, whilst in the same region, one Bellew—calling himself, 'Generalissimo of all the allies of France levied and to be levied from Ballina to Westport'—made drunken revelry with his satellites, the same set that Charost had quite appropriately characterized as pigs. Will you believe that for four days after the invasion a party of nineteen yeomanry prisoners had been confined in Mrs. Stock's drawing-room, and furthermore accept the truth of the statement that not only were the remaining rooms of the palace crammed with refugees—clergymen and their families, including the Dean of Killala, with crowds of townsfolk and their families, etc., etc.,—but that its very landings and stairs were cumbered with a host of unfortunate people, who, bringing with them their chief treasures and valued belongings, had taken sanctuary inside its walls? I saw—nay, my dear brother, more than saw, I actually *trod* upon them! There they were, scores upon scores; women old and young; children of all ages; youths; bearded men; all sitting upon the bare boards, stretched out upon straw mattresses, or lying on chairs ranged together. Some were covered with patchwork quilts, others with shawls, tablecloths, or spare garments. Here an old couple were enjoying the luxury of a blanket;

there four babies were asleep in a big clothes-basket; elsewhere a woman, with a frilled nightcap about her wrinkled face, was supping from a bowl as she crouched under a table piled high with bundles, boxes, and litter of every description. As for the confusion of the place; the din, the ceaseless murmur of voices; the shouts coming at all hours from outside; children squalling; women weeping; the trampling of hobnailed boots; the clatter of spoons and knives; the pervading atmosphere of stuffiness; the odour of peat-smoked clothes, of straw, of food, of tobacco, and a thousand still more offensive things—but there! I must cease. No words of mine can give you more than the roughest idea of the scene in its details. When with my little companion I reached the bottom of the staircase, my sense of relief at escaping from it all even temporarily was profound, and not less so my feeling of thankfulness that at least a clean and solitary bed had been reserved for me in the roof.

Entering the dining-room, Delia and I found that most of the company whose acquaintance I had already made were being served with breakfast by Moran, the butler. * At the head of the table sat the Bishop in a large carved chair, having Charost on his right, and the two other French officers on his left. My natural place as a prisoner should, I imagine, have been lower down, if not at a separate table in some obscure corner, but, at an intimation from the Bishop, Moran brought me to a chair which was set next to that of Charost.

It surprised me, I must admit, to find on what easy terms of intimacy his Lordship was with these French officers. They might have been really his

guests, so pleasant and frank was the talk; indeed, to hear them all join together in discussing some phase of the situation—the behaviour of the local Irish, Humbert's latest achievement and prospects, Bellew's bestiality, the unexpected proclamation of civil government throughout Connaught, the outbreaks of plundering in the neighbourhood, the misbehaviour of the rabble in the courtyard—you might really have suspected the Bishop, like the Militia deserters, of having temporarily turned his coat. You would have been entirely wrong, of course, and I reminded myself of Colonel O'Byrne's mention of the Bishop's philosophic tact. Even so, his amenability seemed to me, I must own, excessive, and I wondered that he did not at least show disgust at the occasional profanities with which one especially of the French officers embellished his talk.

This was the same little man who, the day before, had cleared a way for my escort through the crowd at the gateway. His name, I ascertained, was Ponson; he came from Navarre, and was ranked as a Lieutenant in the invading forces. Standing not more than five feet six inches in his great boots, he bore himself with all the importance of a giant. Even at table he wore pistols. His sword was so long that, as it hung from his chair, Moran was obliged each time to make a circle round it. Against the wall, behind him, stood the fire-lock and bayonet which, in addition to all his other weapons, he carried when sallying forth to quell a disturbance among the Irish. He had extraordinarily large ears and hands, a wide mouth, a small wrinkled yellow face, very black hair, and eyes dancing with merriment. Never have I seen any human being so thoroughly alive.

He flowed over with high spirits, talked with his whole body, ate, drank, and laughed with such gusto that one almost came to forgive his many lapses from decorum and good taste. Both Charost and Boudet had the restraint of gentlemen, but little Ponson exhibited all the worst manners of the camp. He plied his knife and fork with noisy vigour; swore like a trooper, drummed on the table, whistled and sang, clapped Boudet on the shoulder, rallied the Bishop to his face, and showed himself entirely lacking in reverence for anything human or divine.

'*Votre Dieu! Bah!*' he mocked, 'what has He done for these *misérables* of Irish? They worship Him, yes. They bow down; they give Him praise. Alms, too, they give, certainly—which the priest takes! And He does—what? Gives them of His magnificent contempt!'

'Pardon me,' said the Bishop in his suave precise way, and raising a hand, 'you are entirely mistaken.'

'But no,' cried Ponson. 'Never, never in life! I have learnt. I see. What do I say? His contempt! Not even that. And why? Because He is not there!'

'You are wholly wrong,' responded the Bishop quietly. 'It is extremely unwise for any poor weak mortal to be so positive. We know so little. Your *misérables* believe that He is there, and I am convinced that He does much for them.'

'Bah! What is it, then, that He gives them?' scoffed Ponson. 'Is it rags to clothe their nakedness? Is it stables wherein to dwell? And for food? The same sort that they give to their pigs!'

'Those things are not everything,' began the Bishop.

'Ah, yes, I understand. Your other things—Heaven, Hell, Peace, Hope—I understand! Once I believed all that also—*moi, qui vous parle,*' and Ponson beat his breast. 'But now—pouf—it is gone! A fable, a lie. And they? You see them—a mere rabble, without intelligence, without desire to work—and the beautiful patriots! Fight? Not they. They want food, they want muskets, they want plenty of plunder. It is we who must fight! And for what? To uphold their grand Monsieur of a Pope. Ha, ha!' Ponson laughed and waved his hands in the air—'the beautiful jest! We who drove *Monsieur le Pape* from Italy, we are to come to establish him here! The likely story!' He laughed again, and this time Charost and Boudet joined in with him, for they, I found, were also true children of the Revolution. The next minute Moran brought a message to the Bishop, which he translated, and which was to the effect that the mob outside was causing trouble at the gateway. Thereupon the little bulldog of a Ponson sprang bristling from his chair, buckled on his great sword, snatched his musket and bayonet from the wall behind him, and strode away to interview the miscreants.

Breakfast being now over, and the Bishop having gone to discharge some of his many duties, Boudet roused himself from the depression in which he had sat during Ponson's tirade, and recounted to me some of his own adventures in the late wars. He was a Captain of foot, a native of Normandy, about thirty years old, and of great stature. Whether he was acquainted with the story of Don Quixote or not I cannot say, but certainly he strongly resembled in some ways that remarkable hero of romance.

Very grave, very proud, frigidly polite, immensely conscious of his superiority both by birth and training, to plebeians such as Charost and Ponson, it was easily seen that between him and his genial Lieutenant-Colonel relations could not be always pleasant, while nothing but the loftiness of his contempt can have saved the little bulldog of a Ponson from his vengeance. Boudet's self-complacency, his admiration of himself, were simply enormous! Not Don Quixote tilting at a windmill, or charging flocks of sheep, ever made a more absurd, albeit, in some respects, a more attractive figure than did Boudet, seated gaunt and stiff in his chair, solemn as an owl, grave as a sheep, and eternally magnifying himself before the despised English prisoner. Such measured language, Theodore! such composure; and then the Falstaffian inventiveness of the man! How from a child he had excelled as a swordsman; how as one of the King's Guards he had fought scores of duels, killing his man every time; how during his campaign on the Rhine he had held a bridge against an entire regiment, and had seen the dead piled high as a mountain; had swum rivers; had carried his wounded Colonel five miles on his shoulders; how in Flanders he had captured a town single-handed and kept it for four days—all this, mind you, with such a magnificent air of complete belief in himself and his own exploits that I could scarcely restrain my laughter. Afterwards, upon a closer acquaintance, I came to a better appreciation of Boudet, but, as you will see, my first impression of him was hardly flattering.

Then he too stalked off, leaving me with Colonel Charost. For a good part of an hour we two con-

versed, he drawing from me with much good-natured tact all that he wished to know, and in return giving me a few particulars of his own history. The son of a Parisian watchmaker, he had, it appears, when quite young voyaged to St. Domingo; had married there the daughter of a wealthy planter, and thereby had increased his income to fifty thousand francs a year. But troubled times had come. He lost all, and though he himself escaped to France, there to serve as a soldier, first with the King and afterwards with the Republic, his wife and child were captured on the seas by the English and were sent to Jamaica. For six years he had not seen them nor heard of them. 'It is a great misfortune,' he said, his voice tremulous, 'and my punishment is very great. The loss of my home and wealth—all that is nothing, Monsieur. But the beautiful happiness I had! And now it is gone! I shall not see them any more, my wife, my little daughter. She would not be so very little now—no, no—six years is a long time—perhaps, even, she is not alive.'

'Don't say that; perhaps she is, and your wife also,' I said, meaning to comfort him. 'At all events it is well always to keep hope.'

'I have no hope,' he replied; 'no, not any at all. The good Bishop here, to whom I have also related my misfortune, has said the same—"Have hope," and has also recommended me for his part to trust in God. But——' and here Charost paused. 'Monsieur, I am not as little Ponson. No, no. He loves to deny everything. But then, neither am I like the Bishop either. Of my parents, my mother was a Protestant and my father a Catholic, consequently they left me free to choose my religion.

Ah, well, I have reflected sometimes, and it all seems to be very strange. Why should the great God, for example, punish me so much—I who am not after all so very wicked, and who do not wish anyone evil? The Bishop is good and wise, yes, yet it is here on the earth, and while I still live, that I would see again my wife and daughter, because of the heaven that is to follow I am not so sure. Ah, it is all a great mystery. Some day, should I return home again to France, I will sit down and consider it out, but here I must not. You see, Monsieur, there is so much that I have to do—my religion now is to do my duty well.'

'Certainly,' I said, 'and a very good religion too; one that presents plenty of difficulties, Monsieur, I think?'

'Why, yes, they arrive—and they will not cease to arrive here, I fear. Think,' Charost said, lowering his voice and bending towards me, for there were others in the room. 'It is now comparatively easy. The Irish give us some trouble; they are wild; they will not understand, but I control them without difficulty because—oh, because they are merely children, and have no desire to do harm. Some plundering, much excess of zeal—all that is nothing. Yes, but if we go away; if the General demands the soldiers, if there should be another battle not so successful as that one you have witnessed—what then, Monsieur?'

'You fear that then these Irish insurgents might do more than plunder?' I suggested.

'I do not know. They have some terribly bad leaders amongst them. This man Bellew—bah! I do not know, but I fear much.'

‘And you think that Humbert may call upon you to go?’ said I.

‘It is possible. His difficulties will be many.’

‘Yes, but his recent victory,’ I said—‘that must have some effect. Did not Colonel Truc tell me that the way was now open for Humbert to march upon the capital, with all Ireland behind him?’

Charost looked at me, his one eye twinkling, a broad smile illuminating his face.

‘Colonel Truc has the gift of imagination not less than our good Captain Boudet yonder,’ said he. ‘It is a pleasing gift—but in a soldier not always one to be commended.’ Then, at the sound of a loud voice in the room, his smile went suddenly out, and he looked sharply towards the door. ‘Ha, there is the man I spoke of—Bellew,’ he added in a whisper, and sat silent and frowning.

This Bellew was a large corpulent man, with a bald crown, a thick neck, and a square face covered with a bristling growth of reddish hair. He wore riding-breeches, long boots, and a blue tunic unbuttoned at the top, that was girt about the waist with a white belt from which hung a cavalry sword. Already a little unsteady in his gait, even at that early hour, he came noisily over the polished floor, swaggering self-consciously, and shouting jocular observations to certain of the company as he passed. Reaching Charost, he stopped, clicked his heels, and made an elaborate salute.

‘Then I give you a good-day, Lieutenant-Colonel,’ he said, ‘and hope that I find you in good health? I’ve been down several times to your office beyond there, expecting to have a bit of a word with you, but it’s better company than the likes of me, it seems,

you have a taste for this fine morning. Maybe you'll introduce your friend to me, Lieutenant-Colonel?' he continued, glancing maliciously at myself.

Still seated, Charost turned to me.

'Will you have the kindness to translate this gentleman's communications?' he said.

As well as I could I complied; Charost nodded.

'Beg him to state what his business is, and to do so briefly,' he said.

'My business, is it?' answered Bellew, swelling himself out, and glaring with his small bloodshot eyes. 'That's the horse you're mounted on, is it, my friend? Well, then, you'll soon know my business. Tell him this, *you*, and mind that you make no mistake about it'—this remark was to me. 'Tell him that as General of the Irish forces in Connaught, duly appointed by General Humbert, I'm meaning for to lay a complaint about the way in which Lieutenant Ponson sees fit to treat my men. He's to be made to understand that what may be good enough for others won't do for them, and that if there's any more of this sword-whisking of his I'll put my foot down. The same with that black devil of a nigger of his. The next time he strikes a man of mine there'll be trouble! Furthermore, I'm informed that the damned Orangeman, McVittie, is lodged in this house, and if that is the case then I demand his person. Also I demand for every man under me full rations, and a proper complement of weapons and uniforms, and for myself I've come to tell yous all that in future I'm going to take my proper place here at this table.'

To Charost I translated the substance of Bellew's

speech. He listened; then said quietly: 'Inquire if that is all.'

'By God, it isn't all—no, nor half all,' shouted the man, when I had done so. 'But 'tis as much as I want to say just now.' He came and stood over me with his hands upon the table. 'And as for you, my fine young gentleman, that's so mighty glib at the parley-voing, I'd like to know by what right you're sitting there so iligantly at your ease? 'Tis just the prisoner you are, I'm thinking, that came in last night from Castlebar? Ha, I thought so. 'Stead then of being in your right place in the guardroom, you're enjoying your freedom here like a lord! Well, all I can say is, be careful, I recommend you'—and with that the bully gave a thump of his great hairy fist upon the table—'for I've got me eye on you, and I'm the master here, and if I catch you playing the spy or making any kind of interference work, 'tis myself will make an example of you——'

'What does he say?' asked Charost.

'Attind to me, the two of you,' shouted Bellew, with another thump upon the table.

'What does he say?' inquired Charost again.

'I cannot give you the whole of his remarks, I replied. 'His language is very offensive and threatening. He says that he is master here. He says that I ought to be in the guardroom. He thinks apparently that I may be a spy. It is all very absurd, of course, and I recommend you to make no response to the fellow. Obviously he has been drinking.'

'It is the same thing always,' said Charost. Thereupon he rose slowly, and, assuming a dignity which a fighting Frenchman even of his homely type could

somehow make impressive, he proceeded in his politest French to assure Bellew that when he had sufficiently recovered from the condition which at present unfitted him for the society of gentlemen, and had, moreover, learnt to give his superiors that respect and obedience which, if not forthcoming, must be exacted from such as he was, then and then only it would be possible to receive from him communications presented in accordance with the customary official military formalities. 'Meanwhile,' concluded Charost, 'I recommend to you the practice of a necessary discretion, and am able to offer you the assurance of my most profound contempt.' With these words he turned on his heel, and, leaving Bellew to his reflections, marched stiffly away down the room.

CHAPTER XX

A BISHOP'S AVOCATIONS

I WAS taking a little turn in the garden, an hour or two later, when the Bishop and a small party of clergymen and ladies returned from service in the cathedral along a path leading to a private gateway in the north wall. Seeing me, he detached himself from the rest of the group, and came over the grass, walking sedately, a book under one arm, and his hands behind him.

'Well, Mr. Bunbury,' said he, 'you are enjoying the air, I see. It is better out here than in your top story, I think. Beautiful weather, indeed—beautiful. And how,' he inquired, as we fell to pacing up and down beneath the trees, 'did you manage to agree last night with your fellow-prisoner?'

'Badly, I fear. He seemed persuaded that I was a Papist, or some other form of criminal, and I had much ado to gain his permission to sleep. Is he usually so aggressive?' I asked.

'Oh no,' said the Bishop, smiling. 'Ordinarily McVittie is the mildest of men, but when he becomes possessed of his peculiar devil it drives him to extremes. You may have noticed, Mr. Bunbury, how in this country we all run to extremes. Violence in

matters of religion, violence in our political relations—there seems to be no middle way. It is a somewhat unfortunate characteristic.'

'I have noticed something of the kind,' said I, 'and I agree with you that it is unfortunate. However, now that the French have come, who knows but they may set up their goddess of Reason in Ireland!'

'Ah.' The Bishop laughed in his mellow way, and glanced round at me. 'You have in mind our conversation at table some hours ago? That delectable goddess of Reason whom little Ponson would set up for McVittie and Bellew and myself and all the poor peasants around us to worship? No, no,' he added, pursing his lips and slowly shaking his head, 'that I am certain the French will never accomplish.' He pondered a minute with his face turned towards the grass. 'Their mission is hopeless,' said he. 'As well expect oil to mingle with water as for them and our poor Catholic Irish to combine in a common cause.'

'You are not, I presume, my lord, considering their mission only in its military aspect?' I inquired.

'No,' said he, 'that is not within my province. I have an opinion, of course. It seems inconceivable that, under any circumstances, success can long attend their efforts. What! a single regiment, even though it be of veterans and led by gallant officers, to vanquish the strength of England? But my point is this——' The Bishop stopped and, facing me, claimed my attention with a pointed forefinger. 'Mr. Bunbury, I have not been in Killala very long, and naturally my relations with the Roman Catholics here have not been very intimate; but they are at least friendly, and I think I understand them. Whatever their faults, they are a devoutly religious

people. The creed they profess may not commend itself to you or to me, but it is nevertheless a vital part of their existence and infinitely precious to them. How, then, I ask you, is it to be believed that they can respect men openly avowing the opinions of a Ponson, a Humbert, and a Boudet?—blank atheists all three of them—and atheists too nearly every man they command. They glory in it. They make a ribald jest of everything the Irish Catholics hold sacred. What is more, they despise them openly, holding the people to be utterly worthless, partly from natural causes, but chiefly because they are the slaves of their Church. Need I say more? Contempt upon both sides, and upon that of the Irish, especially of their priests, a feeling in addition of growing horror and dismay. Surely it is plain that such oil and water can never combine?’

‘It would seem not,’ said I. ‘Yet for the moment they do combine. I saw peasants lying dead at Castlebar and many of them were triumphing in Ballina. What of those recruits in the courtyard last evening, my lord, and those I saw being drilled in the field by Ponson and the negro?’

‘Yes, yes, poor victims of delusion,’ said the Bishop. ‘I may tell you another thing, Mr. Bunbury. Until the arrival of the French our people were peaceful, and on the whole contented. They had certain declared grievances—can you wonder?—but none, so far as I am aware, in the least corresponding to those which aroused the people of the South and East to rebellion. I doubt that they had much interest in current political questions, or even any knowledge of them. If they had a feeling against England and her representatives in Ireland, it was

slight and certainly dormant. They were on good terms with their landlords and the gentry generally; nor, I believe, would they have shown any spirit of antagonism to their Protestant neighbours had not certain fanatics—Orangemen like McVittie, and others upon either side—stirred them to strife. Now, however, all is changed. Agitators are at work promising them lower rents, free land, plenty of food, and the rest. One of my sons heard Humbert's harangue being translated to the crowd in Killala. Most of it was foolish and curiously ill-advised. For instance, he informed his brother citizens that he believed in the Pope as the proper head of their Established Church, but ended by promising them the millennium if only they would rise in their thousands, take the example of America, and fling off the English yoke. O'Keon, Bellew, and many others are repeating the same inflammable stuff. Proclamations are being distributed among the peasantry, reminding them of the suffering they have endured for the sake of their friendship with France. But why go on?' said the Bishop, spreading his hands. 'Were the results not so tragic, did I not foresee the inevitable horrors yet to come, I should laugh at it all. *Their* interest in the French Revolution! *Their* sufferings for France! It is amazing—amazing! Indeed, Mr. Bunbury, I sometimes wonder whether we are not all walking about in the middle of some monstrous nightmare!'

'It is no nightmare, my lord,' said I. 'The French are here; Humbert is conquering; the Irish are answering to his call. What else are they being drilled and given arms for? Ballina is full of them.'

'More is the pity,' answered the Bishop, 'for the

greater will be the retribution! Sir, I love these people; they are honest, simple, harmless, patient. Why are they answering Humbert's call? Merely to get gaudy uniforms, guns, and food. Wouldn't you, if you were poor and ignorant, take an opportunity to plunder, and to have at least one full meal in your life? How does Ponson assuage them? He gives them beef! The Bishop paused, then slowly mopped his brow. 'I must stop,' he said. 'It is not my wont, nor is it reasonable, to give way to excitement.'

We sat on for some time upon a bench beneath a chestnut-tree, and discoursed about more directly personal matters. Despite his learning and his burden of dignities, the Bishop, I found, was very human. He liked gossiping; he had a pretty gift of humour; was possessed of quite a womanly spirit of curiosity, yet withal displayed an abundant store of sound masculine shrewdness. A relation of some episodes in my adventures amused him, and he laughed heartily at my description of the man with the wigs in Dublin, also of the crowd that escorted me across the bog to Castle Byrne, and of the attempts that Johnston and myself had made to put the Castle in a state of high military defence.

'Ireland is the most delightful country in the world, Mr. Bunbury, when you once get the right point of view,' said he. 'Always here you may expect the unexpected. Think of your coming to Mayo merely to visit your sister, and being thrust into such a succession of startling and sanguinary adventures. Go on, please, for I am interested in all your details.'

I told him everything that had occurred—all

about Kate and Owen and Lady Alionora; about the arrival of Colonel O'Byrne; also about our home life in Miles Bottomley; about your distinguished self; even the story of my own love-affair with Lavinia I at last blushinglly related. There are some men, and he is one of them, to whom one can confide everything, even one's love-affairs. To have him place his hand on my shoulder and say: 'My dear young man, have no fears, all this will end, and you will then return to your friends and to your mistress. Think of that meeting! Conceive your mutual joy!'—such talk, simple as it was, filled me with renewed hopes.

By way, perhaps, of diverting my thoughts, he proceeded to tell me various further details with regard to the arrival of the French. He narrated so vividly that I was able to form an actual picture, as it were, of the various incidents he described. I saw the three frigates gliding out of nowhere, so to speak, and dropping their anchors in the bay; saw the townfolk watching them in eager speculation; next two of his own sons rowing out in a small boat to inspect them, going on board, and there—remaining. Towards afternoon a terrified messenger roused him and his guests, it seems, from their dinner with the news that 'they weren't English ships at all, at all, but French ones, and brimful of soldiers'; that 'the Yeos had gone out, and God save us but they were killed, every man of them.' Next the Bishop described how the little invading army had come ashore and had marched on Killala; had overcome the Yeomanry there, killing a few and taking the rest prisoners. How the ridiculous McVittie had barricaded himself in his house, and had from there delivered

shots from his fowling-piece at the invaders, shouting meanwhile defiance of all the Papist rogues and vagabonds in the universe. How he had been finally captured, but only after a desperate struggle. How the French had entered Killala in marching array, Humbert riding at their head on a white horse, and the prisoners trudging despondently behind him. Here, mounted upon a cart in the market-place, Humbert had delivered an impassioned harangue which the glib O'Keon translated to the assembled crowd. Afterwards, with flags flying, bayonets flashing, drums beating, Humbert on his white horse and a rabble following, they had marched past the round tower and the churchyard to the Palace gateway. It was then that Moran had rushed breathlessly to the Bishop, who chanced to be in the garden, bringing word that twenty thousand soldiers and officers and half the country were in possession of Killala; that ne'er a one knew what to do, and that the French General had sent his compliments, and would his lordship step in to see him immediately.*

Further, the Bishop described to me his interview with Humbert in the courtyard, himself conciliatory, the General brusque, loud-voiced and authoritative: 'I am General Humbert. I represent the French Republic. I have come to deliver Ireland. I have captured your town. This house is mine. Myself and my officers will in future lodge here. My soldiers will require food and quarters. You, I am informed, are the principal man in Killala, conse-

* Further details with regard to these and other occurrences will, it is hoped, be found in the 'Narrative of Recent Events at Killala,' to be published before long by the Right Rev. Dr. Stock, Bishop of that locality.—J. B., December, 1798.

quently you will see to all these matters. You will also find boats and carts wherewith to transport my stores.'

I could hear Humbert saying all this as he strode importantly to and fro, the Bishop meanwhile mildly disavowing any power or authority of the sort. 'It matters not. You will obey,' cried Humbert. 'Address the people, sir, and convey to them my commands.' Accordingly, either in English or in Irish, the Bishop had spoken to the crowd, recommending them to provide whatever boats and carts were possible. When no particular response followed, Humbert burst into fury, grew abusive, stamped, roared, put a pistol to the head of the Bishop's eldest son, even put the Bishop himself under arrest, and sent him away for imprisonment on board one of the frigates. This, however, was only a ruse designed to impress the natives, and the Bishop was soon afterwards brought back, received on the stairs by the now apologetic Humbert, taken into the library, and there engaged by him in a long and confidential talk. Humbert, it seems, was absolutely confident of success. Within a month Ireland would be free, and a province of the French Republic; a Directory would be established in Connaught; in a few more days, when the necessary stores were landed, when the Irish had been all armed, and other necessary arrangements made, he would march on Dublin and would raise the country.

'A very sanguine man,' said the Bishop with a smile, 'an extremely sanguine man. You found him so, I should think, during your interview at Castlebar?'

'Why, yes,' I answered, 'violent also, and cunning,

I thought, as well as offensively vulgar in appearance and manner.'

'Precisely,' said the Bishop, crossing his gaitered legs and folding his hands upon his knees. 'A splendid soldier, I am told, intrepid, prompt, full of resource, but utterly uneducated. He can barely sign his name. The uncouthness and foulness of his language is deplorable in a man of his position; and when his temper is roused he is a very tiger. Yet he is clever. I have seen him assume the deportment of a gentleman, and exhibit surprising qualities of tact and humour. You have not heard, perhaps, how admirably he turned to account his capture of a Yeomanry officer in Ballina. The poor man happened to be extremely corpulent, and so indolent that the French troops discovered him asleep in bed. "Ah, ha!" said Humbert upon seeing him, "I will make an exhibition of this luxurious gentleman!" So he had him dressed in a gaudy uniform, seated him in an open carriage beside himself, and drove him triumphantly back to Killala. You will understand how the quick-witted local patriots enjoyed such a spectacle, and how it added to Humbert's popularity? Oh yes, the man has a sense of humour, and that in our country covers a multitude of sins. He and I had not a few talks. It evidently disappointed him that I refused peremptorily to give him my allegiance, but he took it, upon the whole, pleasantly, saying that it was not his habit to force liberty upon anyone. His treatment of me and my family was, after the first day or two, quite considerate, I might almost say friendly. It is true we have suffered, and still suffer, inconveniences; moreover, my loss in worldly possessions is consider-

able. But what would you have? The fortunes of war, my dear sir, and I recognize that our case might easily have been worse. We are protected. The privacy of our own quarter of the house has never been broken. We can go and come freely. We have our share of everything. You see how many guests I am permitted to entertain! In my own room is a large sum of money which, with other valuables, the unfortunate Protestants carried in and put under my charge. Moran tells me, moreover, that Charost, from the first evening of occupation, consigned to him my whole stock of silver——'

Do the Bishop's words, I wonder, Theodore, convey to you the same impression they had upon me that morning? Perhaps not, for to give them due appreciation, you ought to have been seated with me and have heard the good man utter them. So benevolent and placid did he look in his neatly fitting black clothes, that you might conceive him to be pronouncing benediction on Humbert and all his works. Was it a vein of irony? or the man's natural humour? I wondered. Permission to inhabit the attics of his own house, to have a share of his own food! Suddenly the whole situation struck me as so irresistibly comic that I broke into laughter, at which the Bishop turned his head and surveyed me with some surprise.

'You are amused,' said he.

'My lord,' cried I, 'you must forgive my levity, but really I do not understand your indebtedness to these French! They have appropriated your Palace, eaten your food, burnt your coals, seized your horses and carriages, slaughtered your cattle—yet you are grateful!'

'Quite true,' he answered. 'I *am* grateful—not because of what they have taken but for what they give.'

'Really, my lord,' I cried, 'you bewilder me. They need surely never have come!'

'But they *have* come,' he returned. 'We must take things as they are; and that being so, my conclusion is that this might all have been immeasurably worse.' He laid a hand upon my knee. 'Please to consider this, Mr. Bunbury. Only imagine our present plight had Humbert really roused the passions of the people, and had then marched on, leaving us unprotected? Where should we be now? What fate would have attended those unfortunate refugees? As for my house and possessions, they might all be in ashes. Do you understand?'

I sat silent for a while, pondering the Bishop's words in the light of Charost's forebodings. What had Charost said? 'If the General demands the soldiers, they must go, and what then, monsieur?'

'I understand,' I said at last. 'Your fears, my lord, are that your present protectors may be withdrawn?'

'Fears?' he replied with solemnity. 'I have many fears. I lie awake counting and considering them, and I pray ceaselessly that they may never be realized. My poor wife—my children—my people! What could I do? Flight? Impossible! Mercy? Their leaders would show us none.' He mused a minute; then looked round, his eyes mildly blinking. 'You see, Mr. Bunbury,' said he, 'that under certain circumstances even one's household spoons may come to have but a small

value. However, as my butler Moran once told me, "Time enough to shake hands with trouble when trouble meets you." As I speak here he comes. Well, Moran, nothing wrong, I hope ?

'Only a bit of a blow-up between the Lieutenant and Mr. Bellew, me lord,' answered Moran—he was a squat man, rubicund and snub-nosed. "'Tis like to be a matter of blows, me lord, if they don't come to some kind of an understanding—so Mr. Edwin thinks—he bid me for to come and tell you.'

'Tell Mr. Edwin I am coming,' said the Bishop; and then to me, '*Beati qui sunt pacifici*. Ah, well, it is all a study of humanity,' he added, rising. 'I can but hope that these two belligerents will not tax my powers as translator by indulging overmuch in strange profanities.' So saying, and tucking his book under his arm, the kindly little prelate went off to his task of peacemaking.

It was, as I found, his daily, sometimes even hourly, task. Never had his talents of mediation been exercised assuredly to such purpose as now. On him depended everything. Between Catholics and Atheists, Catholics and Protestants, French and Irish, between England herself (so to speak) and her enemies, between his own people and their foes, the Bishop stood out; the friend, the servant of them all, mediator, counsellor, consoler, interpreter; trusted by Humbert, trusted by McVittie, trusted even by Bellew and his following, trusted to the utmost degree by all the unfortunate refugees; at the call of everyone, and never for a moment failing to respond to that call, whether it came in English, French, or Irish. How did he accomplish it, Theodore? Did his strength come

from without or from within? from philosophy or from religion? You, Mr. Diplomatist, used to the ways of the wise, versed in knowledge and experience, ought to be able to make some suggestion!

I stayed on some time longer in the garden, enjoying the fine sea air and the sunshine. It seemed odd to be sitting there, a prisoner, yet apparently free; everything immediately about me so peaceful, yet everywhere else such commotions. Occasionally a noise of shouting would come to my ears. Shots were fired; carts went by on the road; feet trampled. After a while little Delia came out with her nurse, a wizened elderly Irishwoman, who sat on the grass and knitted whilst I hid myself in the shrubbery for the child to find me. She would peer round a tree, then snatch at my coat with shrieks of laughter and cries of 'Here I am. I have caught you, Mr. Bunbury!'—just in the old way as we used to do in the copse at home, Theodore. She is a dear little body, very affectionate, and full of fun, yet wise for her years—old-fashioned, her nurse said. Seated on my knee, she told me long stories from English history, also from the classic mythologies, while I in my turn related the adventures of Jack the Giant Killer, finishing off with a more topical account of a certain Green Man who was the King of the Connaught fairies. 'Deed and indeed,' the nurse said, looking up for a moment from her knitting, 'there's many and many in this place would sell their chance of heaven itself, so they would, for that darlint's blessed innocence.'

Later in the morning two of Delia's brothers—Edwin, the eldest, and Arthur, three years his junior—came out, and they also talked with me.

I found that these were the two who had rowed out in the small boat to inspect Humbert's frigates, and that it was Edwin who had been taken by Humbert to Ballina as a hostage, and had there received brutal treatment from Truc. He was a tall, grave youth of about nineteen, preparing to enter Trinity College with a view of studying for the Church; very slow and deliberate in his way of speaking, and far more impressed with the serious condition of affairs than his father apparently was. Arthur, on the contrary, was a sturdy, red-cheeked youth, scornful of books and study, eager to talk about fishing and dogs and horses, boyishly careless of the dangers surrounding him; inclined even to regard Humbert as a hero, and loudly expressing his own determination to follow the career of a soldier.

'A soldier, indeed!' Edwin said reprovingly; 'like Lieutenant Ponson, I suppose?'

'I admire Lieutenant Ponson!' cried Arthur. 'Don't you, Mr. Bunbury?'

'I cannot tell yet,' I answered. 'He is a brave little man, no doubt of that.'

'He is an infidel,' Edwin said, slowly and decisively. 'All Frenchmen are infidels. I loathe him, and every one of them.'

'Well, father does not,' cried Arthur. 'He talks with Ponson a great deal, and is amused when he grows excited and waves his arms. His religion does not matter——'

'It does matter,' said Edwin. 'You should be silent, Arthur. You are too young to have opinions.'

'I'm not. Lieutenant Ponson's duty is to fight. He has been in many battles. Only think'—Arthur's

eyes grew round—'he has fought under General Buonaparte!'

Foreseeing that a quarrel might presently develop, I interposed, and asked Arthur if his admiration of Ponson extended to Captain Boudet also. Edwin at this drew a Greek Testament ostentatiously from his pocket and opened it, while Arthur did not immediately answer my question, but swung his legs, and sat frowning.

'Captain Boudet is a heap too proud,' he said presently. 'I don't understand him. He doesn't talk to me, or show me his sword, or tell me about his adventures. I wish he would, because my father says they are extraordinary. Has he told them to you, Mr. Bunbury?'

'Yes, to some extent.'

'And are they really very extraordinary, do you think?'

'So much so that I fear the good Captain has either invented or dreamt them. However, I must not judge too hastily. We shall see.'

'And when you have heard them you will tell me, won't you?' said Arthur eagerly.

'Perhaps,' I answered, laughing. 'Meanwhile, as your brother is busy, we will have a walk, and you shall tell me more about your experiences on board the frigate.'

CHAPTER XXI

THE TROOPS DEPART

THE morning of Saturday, September 1, the Bishop and myself met in the library in order to discuss the terms of a proclamation, recently arrived by express from Castlebar, establishing civil Government in Connaught. It was an elaborate and pretentious document, couched in the inflated language which characterized Humbert's official pronouncements. The Government, we learnt, would consist of twelve members, nominated by himself, with one John Moore as their appointed president, and would sit in Castlebar. The first duty of this Government would be to equip a force of militia, and to take the necessary steps to furnish supplies. There would be eight regiments of foot, each numbering twelve hundred men, and four of cavalry, numbering six hundred men. All males between the ages of sixteen and forty were liable for service, and were ordered by proclamation to repair instantly to the French camp at Castlebar, with intent to march against the common enemy, the tyrants of Ireland. . . .

These extracts, which I quote from memory, will serve to give you a sufficient notion of the style of the proclamation. The impression it made both upon the Bishop and myself was not favourable to the intelligence of the composer. We thought it

ill-considered and futile. Only a person utterly ignorant of the real conditions of the country and blind to the character of its people could possibly, we agreed, have formulated it.

‘Humbert is the victim of his delusions,’ said the Bishop. ‘There are scarcely sufficient horses alone in the province to mount such a cavalry, and as for his eight regiments of foot—preposterous! He has yet to learn that he is no longer in France. Civil Government—it will not last a week! My dear Mr. Bunbury, this means the beginning of the end. Humbert’s one chance of ultimate success was to press on—to strike again, and to strike quickly. Instead, he is wasting time over this folly, and allowing Lord Cornwallis to complete his preparations.’

Presently Moran brought in a message from Charost that he desired to see the Bishop privately. At this I rose to go, but, meeting Charost himself in the doorway, he invited me to stay. He looked very grave and troubled, I thought.

‘I have news,’ he said, when he was seated. ‘It is not very good, but it is what I have expected. My orders are to march all the troops from here to join our General at Castlebar.’

I watched the effect of this intelligence upon the Bishop. It was as though he had received a deadly blow. He grew pale as a ghost, and it was some moments before he could speak.

‘The troops!’ he said. ‘All of them?’

‘Yes, all,’ answered Charost. ‘Some of the Irish recruits—the best and most disciplined—will march also, but of the rest I may keep enough for purposes of protection and the maintenance of order.’

‘I see. Yes, yes, I understand,’ said the Bishop.

He sat heavy and motionless for a while in his chair, one of his hands lying tightly closed upon the table. 'And when, Lieutenant-Colonel,' he asked, 'are the troops to be withdrawn?'

'Immediately,' answered Charost. 'They are even now preparing to march.'

At this the Bishop raised his hand and let it fall upon the table with a gesture of despair. 'It is enough,' he said. 'Our fate is sealed.'

'Not so. Matters are not as bad as they might have been,' cried Charost; 'for, see, I for one will remain. So will Captain Boudet. So also will Lieutenant Ponson. We will take all the necessary measures for your safety. Be assured that all three of us will give our lives sooner than allow you and your household to suffer.'

'You are good—you are very good,' said the Bishop. His colour had begun to return while Charost was speaking, and now he looked a little relieved. 'I am indeed deeply grateful for your assurance, and I know it is genuine,' he continued. 'But what can you do? The people themselves would not molest us, I think; it is their leaders I fear. This man Bellew——'

'Bellew is a pig,' cried Charost—'*un vrai gredin!* I will not permit him to stay. No. Of that I am determined.'

'There are also others,' said the Bishop gloomily.

'Pouf! What of them? They are nothing—drunkards and cowards—whereas we are soldiers.' Charost broke off, sat thinking for a minute; then resumed. One other thing must be arranged, he explained. Although he himself had not any fears, it was necessary to act with discretion. In the

palace and the surrounding neighbourhood there were a number of Protestants whose feelings towards himself and his brother officers were not friendly. Consequently he must ask the Bishop to permit one of his sons to accompany the troops to Castlebar as hostage for his fellow-religionists. 'He will be quite safe,' said Charost, 'and I think he will be able shortly to return. Believe me, monsieur, this gives me no pleasure—but you will understand.'

The Bishop bowed slightly. 'There is, I suppose, no alternative?' he asked.

'Not any.'

'I should prefer to go myself. My sons are young. Their mother has to be considered.'

'Ah, yes,' said Charost. 'But no, monsieur; you are indispensable here. Without you we could not remain, and then—— No; it is impossible.'

The Bishop put a hand over his eyes, and kept silent for a space. At last he rose.

'Have you decided,' he asked, 'which of my sons must go?'

'No, no,' answered Charost. 'To me it is equal which goes: You, monsieur, will decide.'

I felt sure that had Charost named his hostage it would have relieved the Bishop, and would have made his task less difficult, for now not only had he to divulge the matter to Mrs. Stock, but also he was forced to the necessity of himself making a choice. Saying he would soon return, he went away, and while he was gone Charost and I remained in the library, he striding about the room with his head bent, evidently in considerable agitation of mind, myself seated by the table striving to picture what

was proceeding on the floor above. 'The poor people!' Charost muttered from time to time. 'That poor woman!' But between us no word passed.

After what seemed a long delay the Bishop came back, bringing the boy Arthur with him.

'Ha, ha!' cried Charost, stopping short. 'So then—— You have chosen this one?'

'It is so,' answered the Bishop.

'But he is the boy; he has great youth, monsieur.'

'He is willing to go, and we have therefore chosen him. Is he too young for your purpose?' asked the Bishop.

'But no; I was thinking only of you and of madame,' answered Charost, and with that he went up to Arthur.

'You are willing to go as hostage with the troops, my lad?' he asked.

'Yes, monsieur.'

'And you have no fears?'

'I think not, monsieur.'

'So; that is well! You will see—what?—a new piece of country, many 'new towns. Also you will have the excitement of the march along with my soldiers, eh?'

I saw Arthur glance at the Bishop as though doubtful how to respond. Obviously he was eager to make the adventure, yet unwilling to wound his father by any exhibition of eagerness.

'I'm not in any hurry to leave home, monsieur,' he answered manfully; whereupon Charost clapped him upon the shoulder.

'The good reply,' said he. 'Well, my little man, prepare, prepare, for in two hours you will have to make the journey.'

The news had by this time spread, arousing great commotion in the palace, and at the same time causing an immense crowd of excited Irish to gather before its gates. From a window I watched Bellew haranguing these as he stood upon a wall, and, though I could not catch his words, it seemed clear, both from the violence of his gestures and the effect of his oratory upon the people, that in that quarter the departure of the soldiery would not be unpopular. Shots were fired in the air; there was a good deal of wild huzzaing, capering, skirling, and other manifestations of a jubilant kind.

Upon the members of the household and the refugees sheltered in the palace, the news, as you may imagine, produced an entirely different effect. Everyone was in consternation, it being the common conviction that nothing could now prevent a wholesale massacre of Protestants. There were huddled groups upon the landings and stairs, the women sobbing, the men praying, all alike awaiting with terror the impending blow. In the dining-room were gathered the clergymen and their families, they also preparing for the worst that could happen. The sight of so much depression was unnerving, and it soothed me remarkably little to catch a glimpse of the soldiery getting ready with much bustle and every semblance of delight for the march. I was glad to escape to what I hoped would be the seclusion of my room in the top attic. Even there, however, I could find no peace. I could still hear all the noise of turmoil both without and within the palace, and mingled with it now a new and distressing sound of lamentation, which came, as I knew, from the rooms where Mrs. Stock and

her daughters were equipping young Arthur for his journey. Pacing up and down the room, moreover, was my pleasant fellow-prisoner, McVittie.

The morning being warm, he was only partly dressed; for a week he had gone unshaven, and above the bandage that still bound his forehead he now wore a hideous yellow wig. Stopping and fixing me with his one fierce uncovered eye, he demanded the cause of this disturbance.

‘You will soon know,’ I answered.

‘I want to know now,’ said he. ‘What’s wrong, I say?’

‘The French are to leave the palace within an hour,’ I responded curtly, ‘and your enemies will then have it at their mercy. You can hear them triumphing. I recommend you, my friend, to make your preparations, spiritual or otherwise.’

He stood regarding me with his one malevolent eye, his head thrust forward, his great hairy chest showing through the front of his unbuttoned shirt. Suddenly he leaped up and seized me by the shoulders.

‘You’re a Popish spy,’ he shouted, and shook me furiously. ‘I always thought it, and now I’m sure of it. You’re in league with them, so y’are. You think you’ve got us delivered into their hands, and that you’ll escape along with your heathen French. But you’ll not,’ he shouted. With that, he grasped my wrist and would have carried me to the window, fully intending, I think, to fling me out. I resisted, however, and he had not yet, I suppose, recovered his strength, for after a fierce struggle the contest ended upon the floor, he beneath, my knees upon his chest, and my hands round his throat.

‘Have you had enough of this, you fool?’ I cried breathlessly.

‘Spy—Papist—I give you defiance,’ he panted. Then he closed his eye and lay still; whereupon I rose, and, bruised and shaken as I was, went down the stairs, and so out into the garden.

For more than an hour, during which the patriots at hand maintained an incessant uproar, I remained there, but at last the rattle of a kettle-drum roused me, and entering the palace I found the soldiery drawn up in the courtyard. Standing before them was Charost, with Boudet and Ponson close by, whilst behind these and in front of the doorway at which I stood was a group composed of the Bishop, his elder sons, two or three clergymen, and the boy Arthur holding the bridle of a small, lean-flanked horse: In the windows were the refugees and the household servants, and judging by the way that Arthur kept looking up, I knew that somewhere above his mother and sisters were watching his departure, and were weeping too, I made sure.

Having spoken a few words to the troops, Charost stooped and kissed Arthur loudly on both cheeks, at which the boy, looking very flushed, but otherwise maintaining himself manfully, bade the Bishop and the rest farewell, mounted his horse, and took his place between the same troopers who had escorted myself from Castlebar. Then Charost gave the order, the gates were swung open; the soldiers marched out, grim and silent, Arthur among them, waving his hat, and looking back. I had an instant’s glimpse of the pandemonium that received them. The next minute the gates were closed fast by Boudet and Ponson upon a deserted courtyard.

Discovering that a number of Irishry had followed the soldiers towards Ballina, Charost promptly took steps to establish his authority during their absence. Leaving Boudet and Ponson to guard the gateway, he and the Bishop issued forth, and presently returned with a party of citizens, including various Protestants, also Bellew, Mulheeran, and some of the other rebel leaders. Charost thereupon proceeded to address them in a speech which the Bishop translated into English and Irish. The soldiers, he said, having departed to help Humbert in his great task of freeing Ireland, it would be necessary now to arm and discipline such a force as would ensure protection for life and property in the neighbourhood. Hitherto the behaviour of the citizens had been all that was admirable, and he trusted that this state of things would continue. He had himself, and his officers also, every confidence in the people; they would, he knew, show themselves worthy of their race and country, and would do nothing to tarnish the sacred name of liberty. As for their leaders, he looked to them to aid him in the work of maintaining order, irrespective of creed or condition. 'For myself I have no prejudices,' Charost ended. 'In my view all are equal. I shall protect everyone. It is the command of my General. Plundering will not be permitted. Persecution I will not endure. I appeal to you all,' he cried, spreading out his arms. 'Let us work in harmony for the good of our Republic—each man of us individually, so that our names may live in history.'

Some applause followed at the conclusion of Charost's harangue, but Bellew, I observed, stood

silent, with an ugly sneer upon his coarse besotted face. Presently he lurched forward. 'All very fine,' he said to Charost, the Bishop translating. 'We're to be brothers, are we, and 'tis yourself, it seems, that's to be the master? But I just ask you this, my brave Lieutenant-Colonel. Is this speech of yours addressed to others here as well as to ourselves?'

Charost did not understand, but the Bishop explained that the others spoken of were the Protestants, and Charost at once replied: 'Certainly. I look to them also to give help.'

'Then let me tell you,' responded Bellew, 'that we've no mind to consort with the like of them, so we haven't! They've held back, thinking that maybe the luck would turn. Now the boot is on the other leg, and they're afraid, that's what they are! Is it your meaning to entrust any of them with arms if they choose to answer your call?'

The man's manner, not less than his speech, was full of insolence. Charost stood watching him, contemptuous and angry.

'I command here,' he answered. 'My intentions are my own affair, and it is not to you, sir, that I will divulge them.'

'You won't, won't you? That's how the pig jumps, is it? You're to give your orders, and we're to obey! Let me tell you this, my grand man—we'll obey as long and as much as it suits us, and you'll soon find who is master here, or so I'm of opinion.'

While the Bishop was translating this, Mulheeran and several others endeavoured to dissuade Bellew, but the man was half drunk, and interference only enraged him the more.

'Let me be,' he shouted. 'I'll do as I like, I tell

you. Who are you, John Mulheeran? Damn your eyes, sir, I'll put you in your place too——'

He got no further; for as he was attempting to draw his sword, Boudet and Ponson, at a signal from Charost, closed in upon the tipsy ruffian, disarmed him, and, apparently to the satisfaction of his followers, if he had any, flung him out headlong through the gateway. So—fortunately for us all—ended the career of Bellew as a leader. Discredited and disgraced by that encounter, he never regained the confidence of the rebels, and was soon at open war with them. The room which he had occupied in the palace was found on entering it to be in the most shocking condition, filthy beyond description, strewn with bottles and garments, its window broken, and half the walls stripped of paper which the hog had used to light his pipe.

After this for a time matters went on with unexpected smoothness. Charost had asserted his authority and proved himself master. His appeal, too, had found favour among the better class of Irish, numbers of whom came in to be drilled and armed, and even the irresponsible rabble showed themselves more or less amenable. No attempt was made to enter the palace, or molest its inhabitants in any way; indeed, so jealous did the recruits seem to be on the side of order that some volunteered to guard the gates, while others asked permission to occupy the quarters vacated by the French, and the rest willingly undertook the duty of patrolling the town and its environs for some three miles around.

Complaints of robbery and personal assault were made, however, by certain residents, upon which Charost issued a proclamation that arms would be

issued to all responsible applicants for purposes of defence and under promise of restoring them on demand. As the local Protestants had been disarmed in the first instance by Humbert, these naturally took advantage of the offer; and, despite the Bishop's forebodings, muskets and ammunition were supplied to a good many of them at a distribution which took place in the palace yard.

Thereupon the Catholics instantly protested, saying that the Protestants were the enemies, alike of themselves and of the Cause, and that at the first opportunity arms given to them would be used in attack. Charost, however, to whom all religions were as one, and whose only aim was to maintain order, remained deaf to these protests. A deputation of Catholics, headed by Mulheeran, who had been elected to the rebel leadership in Bellew's stead, was accordingly appointed to remonstrate with him. These he received in the dining-room, and for more than an hour withstood their volubility. The din was indescribable. Sometimes as many as six orators would be on their feet at once, passionately shouting out their views to the Bishop in a mixture of English and Irish. He, poor man, laboured for peace incessantly, and with admirable tact strove to persuade Charost as far as possible to appease the Catholics. Charost, however, remained obdurate, and the upshot was that Mulheeran at last flung down his arms and defied the Lieutenant-Colonel to his face.

'On your own head be it!' he shouted in English. 'If you choose to take their part you'll be responsible for the consequences. One hour I'll give you, and if by that time you're still on their side, by God,

you'll see!' 'Come on, boys,' he said, and with that he and his following withdrew.

The situation was obviously alarming, and Charost's own intention, I think, was to meet it with stern measures, but happily here again the Bishop intervened. Begging him to remain passive for the present, he hurried away, returning after a while to the dining-room, where he sat down, looking utterly worn out. 'This is desperate work, Mr. Bunbury,' he said to me—'desperately weary and hopeless. As if matters were not difficult enough already! A little more, a very little more, and there will be a blaze.'

'You mean between the Protestants and Catholics?' I asked.

'Yes; unfortunately such fires are always smouldering more or less in this unhappy country. Religion, which should be the handmaid of peace, is here the minister of strife.' The Bishop paused; then musingly said: 'He doesn't understand. How can he expect to understand?'

'You mean Charost, my lord?'

'I do, Mr. Bunbury. With the best motives he is arousing the worst possible passions—the very thing I have dreaded from the first. Please God, we may be able to prevent it going further, but I have grave doubts.'

'Then your efforts so far have been unavailing?' I said.

'I cannot tell till I have seen Mulheeran again. I have counselled my own friends to return the arms. Some of them will, others say they will not. Naturally they fear attack. Already they are being plundered, and I hear news of grave doings against

the colony of Protestant weavers at Mullifaragh. Ah, well,' the Bishop added, rising, 'time will show. It is in the hands, happily, of a higher Power than ours. Good-night, my friend, and sleep, if you can.'

Sleep? Who under such circumstances, Theodore, could even think of sleeping? Not I, at all events, especially in the company of the attractive McVittie. I spent most of that night accordingly in the dining-room, either seated in the Bishop's chair, pacing up and down the room, or listening to the remarks of Ponson. Upon his being relieved from duty in the courtyard by Boudet, that tireless little man came at intervals to chatter to me, to whistle and sing, or to drink the Bishop's wine. He, the heroic little warrior, showed no signs of depression.

'Bah,' said he, 'all this is nothing! What! we who have faced a thousand dangers, and endured a thousand privations, to fear a rabble of peasants? Believe me, monsieur, should they require it, we shall know how to put a great show of obedience into their little hearts! But there! it will not be necessary. The Bishop will pray; you will pray; that imbecile of a McVittie, who detests the Pope not less than I do, he also will pray; and we shall all remain safe and sound under the great upstairs Protector.' With that the blasphemous little pagan burst out laughing merrily, then continued: 'Yet it is as well to be prepared. Prayers may not invariably be heard, or perhaps may not get the right answers. If these devils of Irish give us much trouble, we will try to calm them with other methods—with food and drink, for instance. And if they then continue—but bah, they will not!' Ponson

cried, breaking off. 'They are a queer lot, just like children, whom you lead by the hand, and who are good if you give them plenty of food and play. Like this weather, *parbleu*, now black and fierce, then in an instant all gay and laughing with sunshine. Listen, monsieur; we had not been two days here before one evening I come in from the town, and I find at the gate many people making a great disturbance. What do I do? Get angry and draw my sword? Not a bit of it! I go among them, laugh and smile; then I have an inspiration, and I sing them a little French song—very naughty, yes, but gay, gay! And the effect? Pouf! All at once everywhere laughter and pleasure!'

That night passed without mishap. Next day, notwithstanding that a good many Protestants voluntarily surrendered their muskets, reports came in of disturbance in many places, houses being ransacked for hidden arms, shops looted, churches wrecked, property stolen, and individuals threatened and actually assaulted. Towards evening, moreover, news came that the colony of Northern weavers, established at the village of Mullifaragh, some miles from Killala, and numbering about a thousand souls, had been attacked, their houses wrecked and plundered, their looms broken, and many of themselves sent as prisoners to Ballina. This information, which was brought to Charost by some of the unfortunate weavers themselves, angered him exceedingly, and when in addition he found that other unfortunate Protestants were importuning him through the Bishop to give them protection, he also came near to despairing. 'Never again,' he declared, 'can I have confidence in such brigands.'

In face of every difficulty the Bishop laboured on, sparing himself no drudgery, enduring a great many indignities, risking his life, interviewing all who came to him, drawing up petitions, translating, pleading, counselling. At last, and chiefly through his instrumentality, a rough form of civil Government was devised, which, being approved by the Irish leaders, was the means of restoring a certain measure of order to the locality. Departments were formed, each in charge of an elected magistrate, to whom was assigned a guard of twenty armed men, sworn to remain on peace duty within their own district. Killala had a town-guard of a hundred and fifty men, while the palace itself was made a separate department, with a guard of twenty men, who were relieved every day. Of these four stood always by the door of Charost's bed-chamber on the middle floor, four in the hall, four more at the small gateway in the garden, and the remainder at the courtyard entrance; and so well did the Bishop provide for their bodily needs, that soon the peasants were actually fighting among themselves for the privilege of protecting and serving him! Even now, however, depredations continued. Plundering was of common occurrence; thieves entered houses, despite the guards, and sometimes with their connivance; cattle were driven from the fields, and slaughtered by the rebels. Feasting went on unceasingly in the camps around the palace; dancing, drinking, and consequent rioting. We lived in a state of constant anxiety, a state not relieved when the news reached us that Humbert had at last moved from Castlebar, and when, as successor to Bellew, a certain O'Donnell came in

with armed followers, and established themselves within the palace.

One other circumstance, and I conclude this account. It was upon the 4th of September that Humbert, conscious that his scheme of provisional Government had ignominiously collapsed, and with it all hope of a general rising, marched his little army of eight hundred and fifty veterans, reinforced by a few companies of militia deserters and some hundreds of mountaineers, in the direction of Sligo, his object being apparently either to reach the coast or to evade the armies of Cornwallis lying between him and Dublin. What success attended this belated movement you will learn later. Just now I merely want to tell you how, on the night of the 4th, we carried out his order to dispose of the powder stored inside the palace. This store, amounting to nearly three hundred barrels, had from the first been a cause of great anxiety to Charost and of terror to the Bishop, the one having to guard it against marauders, the other living in hourly dread of its explosion. Now came Humbert's order to bury it or throw it into the sea, as Charost judged best; and our perplexity was great. To take it to the sea meant its certain seizure by the Irish, while burying it seemed an impossibility without their help or knowledge. After long deliberation a plan was at last devised, and in the dead of night—the guards having been plentifully fed and supplied with liquor—some thirty of us, including the Bishop himself and his sons, the three officers, McVittie, the most able-bodied of the refugees, and some of the household servants, attempted to carry it into effect. The night, fortunately, was very dark and windy.

With great stealth, under Charost's directions, and by no better light than that of a few stable lanterns, the barrels were one by one conveyed on poles and barrows into the palace grounds and there concealed, some being buried under a hot-bed in the garden, the remainder deposited in a vault in the corn-yard.

The worst of it was that our efforts were not entirely successful ; for though the powder was now concealed, it lay so near the palace that, as you will hear, the poor Bishop still had to endure mortal terror because of it. Terror, however, was a thing to which we were all by this time more or less innured. Yet we slept, ate, drank, talked, and were not so entirely wretched as you might expect. In our hearts we had a confidence that Charost would somehow or other contrive our safety. Moreover, the Bishop had certainly reason for his opinion that, all things considered, the local rebels were really behaving themselves upon the whole unexpectedly well.

CHAPTER XXII

NEWS FROM CASTLE BYRNE

A MORNING or two afterwards, while Charost and I were discussing a rumour that Humbert had been successful in a small engagement fought at a place named Clooney, some five miles from the town of Sligo, Ponson came with word that a horseman had just inquired for me.

Requesting Charost to accompany me, for I wished to keep within the bounds of my parole, I went to the gateway and, to my surprise, found the horseman to be none other than Micky Glynn. As he wore a French military tunic beneath his riding-coat, my first impression was that he had brought a message from Colonel O'Byrne. Finding, however, that he had ridden all the way from Castle Byrne, I thought it well to refrain from further inquiry within the hearing of the Irish sentries.

'This man,' said I to Charost, 'is the servant who was taken prisoner with me at Castlebar. Doubtless your General must have given him his freedom, for he now brings me a message from my sister, whose groom he is. Have I your permission, Lieutenant-Colonel, to receive his message?'

'But certainly, monsieur,' answered Charost. 'Admit him, and I trust the news of Madame your sister may be to your satisfaction.'

Upon that Charost left me, and I took Glynn across the courtyard to the common-room, lately used by the French soldiery. He and his horse were alike splattered with mud and tired out.

'You'll find a stable through that archway,' I said to him. 'Have you been riding long?'

'All night and more,' he answered gruffly.

'And you are hungry, I suppose?'

'Fair starving.'

'Well, you can rest there,' I said, indicating the common-room, 'and food will be sent to you at once. Haven't you a letter or a message for me?' I added.

He began slowly unbuttoning his garments, and at last, after a deal of fumbling, produced from a pocket in the small of his back a letter, which he gave me. Then he led his horse away at once through the archway.

Having asked Moran to send out food, I went into the garden and unsealed the letter. It was from Kate, bore the date of September 5, and ran as follows :

'DR BROTHER,

'As I am not sure this will reach you I must be brief. We are well, and still unmolested, though of course anxious. O—— came back safely, but has now gone away again on duty. Your note was delivered by messenger from Castlebar, inscribed in French *with the compliments of Colonel O'Byrne*. It distressed me dreadfully to hear of your arrest and other misfortunes. If possible send me news of yourself. J—— is of great service to us. Under the circumstances I thought it best not to entrust this note to him, but he can go to you should you need him. He has packed the saddlebags with some

necessaries which may be useful. Trusting to see you soon.

‘KATE.

‘P.S.—Our friends in the tower are quite quiet now. O—— feels certain the end cannot be long delayed.’

This was satisfactory as far as it went, if not particularly explanatory. The chief matter seemed to me to be to get Micky Glynn back to Castle Byrne as quickly as possible, before he had time to listen to any of the local tales, or perhaps even to throw in his lot with the people of the town.

I found him lying across a couple of chairs fast asleep, with an empty dish and tumbler beside him. It was not without considerable difficulty that I woke him, and when I did so he merely lifted himself upon one elbow with a prodigious yawn, and glared at me with an expression of sleepy ferocity.

‘Then it is not back to Castle Byrne I will be going now, never one step, wet or dry, so I will not!’ he exclaimed when I had expounded my wishes to him. ‘It is more sleep I am wanting, and not more travelling, not if it was to Dublin Castle itself. Is it a tinker or a sheep-stealer you take me for that I should live without sleep? I am neither the one nor the other, thank God, nor yet a man to be bid or bound by strangers, let alone an Englishman.’

This was conclusive. Plainly the strength of the situation lay with Glynn rather than with me. There was a certain reasonableness, too, in the fellow’s demand, and I left him, therefore, to finish his sleep, privately resolving, however, to get him off as soon as I could, and in the meantime to keep

him away from all local communications as far as possible.

When I returned a few hours later I found him awake and smoking an old black pipe, but with the same sulky ill-conditioned look upon his face as before—one which deepened obviously as I approached.

I took no notice, however—merely drew a chair towards me and sat down.

‘That is a French tunic you have got on,’ I presently remarked.

He gave a pluck to one of its sleeves, and looked at it with a monkey-like grimace.

‘French ’twill be, belike. Queer, unnatural clothes they have, and queer, unnatural people they are, for all their fighting and cunning.’

‘How did they treat you at Castlebar?’ I asked.

‘Treat? Much as the tailor was treated when they left him naught but his smoothing-irons. Set me into a pitch-dark room, so they did, with ne’er a thing to lie on, and a black-a-vised little dotteen of a man with a bay’net at the door to run me full of holes if I crossed the threshold.’

‘And how long did they keep you there?’ I inquired, with some amusement.

‘Next day, or maybe the next but one ’twas all for making a soldier of me they were at—nothing else must serve them! What call had they to be making a soldier of me, I that was never bred for no such work, nor any of my kith or kin? ’Twasn’t my mother’s son wanted to begin it, so it was not; French or no French.’

‘Before making a soldier of you, I suppose they put you through some sort of an examination?’ I said.

He turned upon me his most stolid face. 'Examination?' he repeated.

'They asked you a few questions, I suppose? About me, for instance, and about Castle Byrne?'

'Well, it was a few things of that sort they did put to me, so they did.'

'And you told them, of course, everything you knew?'

He grinned. 'I told them as much as they could get out of me—divil a word more or less.'

'I believe you there,' said I. 'Still, for the good of the country, you no doubt gave them what information you could?'

'Maybe so, and maybe not,' he answered, with another grin. 'Anyhow, I've a notion their opinion of me came to about the same as your own.'

'And what is that?'

'That I'm little better nor a fool-man or an omadaun.'

'You're anything but a fool, if that's what you mean, Glynn,' said I; 'and Colonel O'Byrne knows that quite as well as I do. He told me you were of great use to him.'

'He did, did he? And how might that be?'

'He didn't tell me precisely, but I gathered from his remarks that, for one thing, he found your knowledge of English and Irish of use.'

Glynn sat grinning. 'Himself must be the makings of a mighty innocent man, so he must! God bless us, how could he tell what I would be saying in the Irish? It might be all black lies, for aught he knew, and maybe was, too! Myself wasn't the only man in Castlebar with two sides to his face, nor two talks on his tongue, neither, and so I tell you.'

‘But General Humbert and Colonel O’Byrne insisted upon an answer, did they not?’

‘Sisted, is it? ’Twas learning us to fight they ’sisted on—sorra else they cared about; fighting, and dragging iron guns up and down the country; being harnessed to carts like wild beasts, scraping and scratching at ditches, and standing in them to be shot at—that’s all they were wanting to learn us.’

‘And naturally you were anxious to answer the expectations of Colonel O’Byrne and the rest?’ I said, laughing.

‘Bedad, and I had had enough shooting outside Castlebar, let alone elsewhere. Anyhow, I was never reared for such doings, and one dark night I just stepped out for home.’

‘You mean to say that you went off without leave?’ said I.

‘I made bold to hand that to myself.’

‘But surely you must know that if you had been caught you would have been shot?’

‘I might have stayed where I was and been shot! There was dead men and shot men up and down the country, thick as peat-sods in a red bog. So I just gave myself leave, and here I am alive, thanks be to God!’

I sat staring at the fellow. Evidently he had not even now the faintest notion of the risks he had run, nor of the almost equal risk he was at that moment running. Did he guess, moreover, how greatly he was trusting me? I wondered.

‘And did none of the people that saw you attempt to stop you?’ I asked.

‘What would ail them to be after stopping me?’ he answered.

'Well, they are supposed to be all upon the French side, you know. In fact, I thought that you yourself were also.'

'Twas on their own sides, I'm thinking, they were troubling themselves to be first and foremost. I wasn't the only one got sick of the whole show and went home, so I was not. Why would the others be blaming me, then?'

'You reported what you had done when you got back to Castle Byrne, I suppose?'

'For sure I did. Would I be disappointing them there?'

'Lady Byrne, too? Did you tell her?'

'Augh, I did not. Why would I be troubling her? 'Twas leaping with joy she was to get me back, anyway.'

I saw that he still did not in the least realize the position he was in, and that it would be necessary to force him to do so.

'Listen, Glynn,' I said seriously. 'You've come here wearing a French tunic. What in the name of insanity induced you to do that?'

'And why wouldn't I? 'Twas served out to me. Queer and unnatural it is, still it stood me well against the wet, and was a kind of a safeguard, too, up and down the country.'

'That has nothing to do with it,' I replied. 'Listen. You saw that French officer who was with me this morning at the gate? Well, he commands here, and he must have noticed your tunic. Supposing he asks me how you came by it, and supposing he finds out what you've done?'

He gave me a scrutinizing look that screwed his face up into wrinkles like a walnut.

'And what would ail me if he did itself?' he asked.

'It would so far ail you that he would in all probability have you put with your back against a wall, and call up a file of soldiers to shoot you.'

I saw him blanch at that, and he sat for a while with his eyes upon the floor without speaking. Presently he looked up at me swiftly and suspiciously.

'You'll maybe be telling him?' he exclaimed with sudden passion.

'Nothing of the sort, Glynn,' I answered. 'You're perfectly safe as far as I am concerned. But your position here, I can tell you, is a desperately dangerous one. Had Lady Byrne had the least idea of what you had done she would never have sent you.'

He nodded his head, and stood gazing apprehensively towards the doorway.

'I do be thinking,' he said slowly, turning back to me—'I do be thinking that, after all, maybe a bit of a ride might be pleasing to the powers and good for my health.'

'I think so, too, Glynn,' I said; 'only not just now. Wait till the early morning, when there will be fewer people about, and in the meantime you can have a little more of that sleep you are wanting so badly.'

'Well, I'll see as to that. You'll have something for me to carry back, I'm thinking, and I'd sleep the easier if it was in my pocket. Maybe her Ladyship would be disappointed if she saw me walk in, and never a bit of paper good or bad to show her.'

'Certainly she would,' I answered, and with that I made over to him the note to Kate that I had already written.

I had my suspicions as to what this sudden indifference to the much-desired sleep meant, and was not greatly surprised, therefore, when I learnt from Moran that Micky Glynn had ridden out 'to please the powers and for the good of his health' not many hours after my leaving him.

His coming, even with such limited news as he brought, made a small break in the monotony of existence. Otherwise the tension both without and within the palace was nowise relieved. Definite reports of the affair at Clooney had by this time reached us, showing that, although Humbert had been again victorious, his triumph over Colonel Vereker and his small body of militia and dragoons was gained at much cost of precious time. His dash towards Sligo had been made with amazing swiftness, but not so swiftly as to outdistance the army under General Lake which had followed him from Castlebar.

Finding his way to the north barred, a large army at his heels, and another body of troops under General Knox advancing upon him from the southwest; learning also that Lord Cornwallis with twenty thousand men was lying to the south at Carrick-on-Shannon, Humbert, upon September 5, after his victory at Clooney, turned eastward across the northern portion of Leitrim towards Granard, crossed the Shannon at Ballintra, with General Lake in hot pursuit, and eventually reached Cloone, a place lying some fifteen miles east of Carrick-on-Shannon.

To all of us at Killala, it seemed impossible that even Humbert the indomitable could achieve very much more. After their brilliant march of one

hundred and ten miles, his veterans would obviously be exhausted; his Irish allies were by this time rapidly deserting, and he had been forced to abandon most of his guns. Upon every side of them his foes were in overwhelming numbers, and his hopes of a general rising had proved to be utterly futile.

‘Yes, yes. The lion is at last at bay! Well, messieurs, no one can say but what he has done nobly, our gallant Humbert,’ Charost exclaimed the same day as we sat at dinner. ‘A single regiment against so many thousands! Gods of victory! Did anyone ever hear of such a feat before? And mark you—I ask you to mark this, gentlemen—a very little more foresight, a little swifter movement, just a little more help—ever so little—from outside, and he would have reached your metropolis!’

It was true enough, nor was there one of us, I think—whatever we might personally feel as regards the man himself—but was conscious of pity and admiration for the gallant leader and his indomitable men, who after such extraordinary achievements were now awaiting their fate at Cloone.

‘They have made history, there can be no doubt as to that,’ said the Bishop a little later, as we strolled to and fro in the garden after our meal. ‘Here, too, if in a lesser way, history also has been made, Mr. Bunbury,’ he added. ‘Could Boudet himself, in the wildest of his imaginations, have invented a more incredible adventure than that of these three officers, contriving to hold an entire town in check for all this time against a turbulent multitude?’

‘Three officers and you, my lord,’ I returned.

‘Ah, yes,’ he replied, smiling. ‘But I have merely

had to stand behind, working to defend my own, whereas they have had to stand between us and their own friends.'

'True,' I answered. 'Their conduct has been heroic to the last degree. I only hope,' I added, turning to him, 'I only hope, my lord, that some proper notice may be taken of it whenever the end comes.'

'We must see that proper notice *is* taken of it, Mr. Bunbury,' he answered vehemently. 'We must not leave a stone unturned to secure that end. I will write myself to General Lake upon the very first opportunity. It would be a scandal, a simple disgrace to the country, if conduct such as theirs were to be passed over without proper recognition.'*

* I may add to this that so impressed were the Authorities by the representations made on behalf of the three French officers by Bishop Stock that an offer was actually made to the French Government, proposing to give them their liberty at once. That offer, with the vaingloriousness so characteristic of their nation, the Directory in Paris declined, declaring that 'Every Frenchman would have done the same.' Our poor friends were accordingly despatched to England with the rest of their brothers in arms. Since my return to this country it has been no small satisfaction to me, I may mention, to be able in some slight degree to mitigate the rigours of their imprisonment, and I trust to be able to do so still more effectively in the future.—J. B., December 4, 1798.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE LOWEST DEPTHS

IT was upon Sunday, the 9th of September, that the first positive news of Humbert's fate reached us. Earlier that same day whilst we Protestants were at prayers in the palace—public services being impossible—we were startled at hearing the unwonted sound of the cathedral bell. Upon the Bishop going out to make inquiries he found that O'Donnell had ordered the bell to be rung as a summons to his followers to hear Mass in the town. A remonstrance from the Bishop drew an apology from O'Donnell, and further elicited the intelligence that amongst the local rebels there was a strong disposition to seize the cathedral, and restore in it the Catholic form of worship.

This affair caused some excitement, which was increased when fresh news was brought into the palace by Mr. Marshall, the Presbyterian minister. Everywhere, so we learnt from him, except at Ballina and Killala, the loyalist forces were now in the ascendant, Humbert's position was hopeless, and generally speaking the rebels were hastening to their homes.

'Well, well,' said Charost, 'the end approaches.' Upon hearing from Mr. Marshall that Truc was ill-treating the Protestant weavers imprisoned at

Ballina, he and Ponson were all for setting out at once to obtain their release. 'My orders were precise that no form of persecution was to be permitted,' cried Charost. 'That *diable* of a Truc would like to establish a new "Terror"!'

It was late in the evening before the two officers returned, tired out and despondent, for at Ballina it appeared that rumours were current that on the previous day Humbert, after a fierce contest in which many hundred were killed, had surrendered to an overwhelming force. How such rumours could have spread so far in so short a time seemed to be incredible, yet Charost accepted them as true, and such in the main they were. The contest, as eventually proved, had been short. Few of Humbert's veterans fell, but no quarter was given to his rebel allies, five hundred of them having been slaughtered, many others captured and summarily hanged, and the remainder dispersed.

'*Ah, les braves, les braves!*' said Charost, talking over the French defeat that evening at supper. 'Our eagles have made their last flight. Yet no disgrace, messieurs! Sooner than disgrace, the General would have died. *Pas de chance!* No resources—no help from anywhere—not even any encouragement! Well, well, it is fate.'

'*Parbleu,*'tis but the fortunes of war,' cried Ponson. 'Courage, we shall soon meet them again, our brave comrades. *Vive la République!* Are we not still here and unconquered?'

Charost smiled. 'We are indeed!' said he. Then, with a wave of his hand indicating the local rebels who were demonstrating as usual outside the gates, 'Shortly these gentry will know—perhaps already

they do. What will they do then?' and he turned to the Bishop.

'Disperse probably,' was the answer. 'That is what you would counsel them, is it not?'

'Why, yes. I could not counsel them otherwise. In that way only can they escape an appalling punishment.'

'And you?' asked the Bishop.

Charost sat in thought, his arms folded across his breast and face lowered. 'We stay,' he answered.

'You might escape,' said the Bishop.

'No,' answered Charost. 'We may yield up our swords, but not dishonour them. My only wish is to rejoin our comrades and to share their fate. What say you?' he asked of Boudet and Ponson.

'You have spoken,' answered Boudet, 'not otherwise could Frenchmen decide.'

'No, no,' said Ponson; then he added: 'But the end is not yet. Thunder of God! We may still employ our swords in defence of your hospitable house, *monsieur l'évêque*, and of your adored cathedral. Why do I think so? Ah, I cannot tell. Tail of the devil! 'tis an inspiration. Yet no. It is my belief. Those English are slow, dull, lethargic. Your pardon, Mr. Bunbury, I speak, you will understand, only of your soldiery. As for these Irish, they will not yield because their leaders have ropes round their necks, and because they have the devil's own obstinacy. Also, here they have freedom, food, enjoyment. You hear them now? Ah, the children, the poor foolish babbling children, so simple, so amusing!'

You observe, Theodore, that Ponson always regarded these Irish levies and spoke of them, as if

they were really children, wayward, thoughtless, excitable, giving him endless trouble, but also providing him with infinite amusement. In their turn they found the little man, with his parade of weapons, his importance, his gaiety, his high spirits and reckless courage, enormously to their liking. Charost, the just and indomitable, they held, I presume, in respect. Boudet, with his great stature and measured gait, his grave countenance and mien, they were inclined to laugh at, but Ponson had so won their admiration and affection, that he could do with them precisely as he would. I have seen him turn them from anger to laughter in an instant; and more than once, I believe that he, and he alone, saved the whole of the helpless Protestant inmates of the Castle from having their throats cut.

As it turned out, events fully justified the truth of little Ponson's inspiration. Before another day had passed we knew for a certainty that the news of Humbert's disaster, so far from discouraging the rebels, had only stimulated them to a fiercer resistance. Few returned to their homes. Many recruits came in from the country. Drilling went on regularly. Threats of vengeance against the loyalists were constant, and only Charost and Ponson's influence saved the entire Protestant community from seizure as hostages. On September 11 a body of nearly a thousand recruits stayed for hours before the palace gates; clamouring for arms and powder; demanding that the French officers should lead them to retake the neighbouring towns; claiming permission to cut down a grove of ash trees in the grounds as material for pikes; also to seize the iron in Killala for the like use.

In spite of Charost, who had all a soldier's horror of such methods of warfare, a body of pikemen was rapidly formed, who—armed with their improvised weapons—marched where they would, refusing to perform any military duties, but taking a prominent part in every tumult. On the 12th, a portion of the mob marched off under Mulheeran and Flannagan to attack Castlebar, but were, of course, promptly and easily routed. Plundering continued far and wide. Again and again Charost or the Bishop was forced to refuse the plea of those who wanted shelter for themselves and their families, there being literally not room now for one other soul within the gates. In the palace was stored quantities of more or less valuable property, conveyed thither in secret by the now homeless residents, such as jewels, leases, treasured relics, and so forth, whilst large sums of money had to be kept under lock and key in the Bishop's bedroom. Even Moran the butler returned one afternoon drunk, and in such a combative mood, that he quarrelled with the other servants, attempted to shoot the gardener, refused to perform his duties, proclaimed himself a rebel, and even abused the Bishop. For some time past the man's conduct had been unsatisfactory, and his loyalty both as servant and citizen not above suspicion. Now in his cups the truth came out. Not only did he assert his disloyalty, not only did he boast of having given wine from the palace cellar to the French soldiery, and of having supplied the rebels with powder, he went so far even as to apply to the Bishop himself epithets such as 'schemer,' 'solemn-face,' 'friend of the black English Protestants,' and other opprobrious terms. This, of course, was unendurable. Seizing Moran by the

collar, the Bishop held him, while Charost soundly boxed his ears. He was then carried down and locked in the pantry, whence, after a sobering night's sleep, he was escorted by Ponson to the gates, and discharged with a kick to join his friends outside.

Such were a few of the numerous incidents which marked the days immediately following that Sunday on which we first received positive news of Humbert's downfall. Every hour awakened hopes in us that the rebels would now begin to disperse, or that relief would reach us from Cornwallis. The rebels, however, remained where they were; the situation seemed to be unchanged, and we had yet many long drawn out hours of misery to endure.

For my own part, now that the end seemed to be approaching, my thoughts projected themselves more and more upon all that lay outside our prison walls. Why had no news, I wondered, reached me either from England or from the neighbourhood of Dublin? That the roads had all this time been blocked, and that few or no direct communications had been able to pass over them, was true; still, that no answer had come to the many letters I had written, was a cause of bitterness to me a thousand times more unendurable than those petty discomforts to which habit had now largely accustomed me. As the interminable hours dragged along, a passionate longing to ascertain for myself what was really happening outside became a consuming desire, one which gave me no peace, and left me a prey to every sort of wild and unreasonable anticipation.

That the most intimate of these anxieties and preoccupations centred upon Lavinia, I need hardly tell you—my relations towards her, my hopes,

fears, speculations, misgivings as to the reality, at all events as to the permanency of her feelings for me. Hitherto—up to the time of my leaving England—those relations had been stamped—you have yourself more than once hinted this—with a certain lightness, a touch of inconsequence, more appropriate, perhaps, to a lover and his mistress in a comedy than to a pair of responsible human beings who hoped to spend the greater part of their future lives together! Now, so far as my own side of the matter was concerned, this earlier and more frivolous point of view had entirely vanished, and, as I devoutly believed, *finally*. Recent events—the experiences of our daily life, with death never very far away from any of us—had created in me an entirely new series of ideas—I might even go so far as to say had created a new self, a self which contemplated with not a little surprise that more feather-headed and irresponsible being which it had superseded. That the other one—the volatile self—will some day or other reappear is indeed possible enough, and I were a fool to utter any very violent protestations upon the subject. Men are mighty queer creatures, my dear Theodore, and we Bunburys not the least queer of the lot. Restore me to my old surroundings; set me anew in Miles Bottomley—with servants at every turn, bells ringing at intervals, all the routine of life going on as it were by clockwork—and ten to one I should be the same Jack Bunbury as the one of your recollection. Meanwhile, a very different Jack Bunbury desires to make his bow to you, and requests you to try and form some little idea of the make and semblance of the fellow before he departs—possibly for ever!

CHAPTER XXIV

HOPE REVIVES

IT was upon September the 13th that another prisoner arrived under escort from Ballina, sent from there by the agreeable Captain Truc upon the charge of being a British spy. His name was Fortescue, he was a member of an Irish family of good standing, and it was whilst travelling in quest of news of a younger brother, who had been mortally wounded during the earlier operations, that he had fallen into Truc's hands. During his examination by Charost, at which the Bishop was present, Mr. Fortescue stated that he had seen Humbert and his brother officers, and he also delivered to Charost letters from Humbert which it would seem confirmed the rumours of disaster to the French at Ballinamuck on the 8th. Their entire force of eight hundred and seventy, with the exception of a few killed, had been captured, with a loss upon the British side of not more than some twenty men. All the officers, Mr. Fortescue reported, had been released upon their parole, and when he saw them, were riding towards Dublin with Lord Cornwallis's staff. The rank and file, together with certain prominent Irish leaders, were being conveyed to Dublin upon turf-boats by way of the Grand Canal. With the first of these boats went an escort of militia

and a full military band: in the remaining four were the French soldiery, all of them as gay as larks, whiling away the time with singing, dancing, card-playing, and occasionally joining together to shout the 'Marseillaise.' '*Ah, mes enfants! mes braves enfants!*' Charost cried again and again upon hearing this: and so moved was he that the tears actually ran down his war-worn face.

Concerning the fate of the rebels who had accompanied Humbert on his last march, Mr. Fortescue also brought us grim news. He had himself visited the battlefield at Ballinamuck, and had seen the soldiers encamped upon its slopes with their tents pitched along a stream; some of them engaged in grooming their horses, others in cooking at wood fires, or innocently occupied in gathering blackberries, and this, too, within sight of the dead bodies of rebels lying strewn about in every direction.

Although usually accounted a merciful man, Lord Cornwallis had on this occasion given no quarter, about five hundred of the captured rebels having been shot by his orders in cold blood, numbers of others doubtless perishing in the bogs into which they had been driven, while some two hundred more escaped only to be eventually captured by the troops posted at Carrick-on-Shannon. Seeing that these last all carried arms of some sort, Lord Cornwallis directed that a certain number should be summarily punished, whereupon the whole two hundred were paraded, an officer walking to and fro in front of them carrying a hat in which were folded pieces of paper, and all who drew from it pieces marked with the word '*death,*' were at once hanged.

How does this particular variation of military discipline strike you, Theodore? To me I will frankly confess that it appears to be simply revolting, immeasurably more so than the more commonplace and, so to speak, natural variations of slaughtering. There is something about it which causes the stomach of the mere ordinary man to turn. Moreover, anyone who knows how little volition of their own these poor devils have had; how simple-minded, nay how absolutely childlike their whole attitude in the matter has been, cannot fail, I think, to feel that to exact such a penalty from such culprits is a piece of official brutality which stands outside of all the decencies of ordinary warfare.

It being clear to every intelligent person that Mr. Fortescue was innocent of the charges brought against him by Truc, he was released by Charost, but in view of the disturbed conditions prevailing around Killala he was glad to accept the Bishop's invitation to remain on for the present as his guest. Being a man of no little pleasantness, and having gained some military experience whilst serving as a militia officer, he before long won the confidence of all in the palace, his foresight and advice on several occasions making easier the task of its defence. He and I were soon on friendly terms, and had long talks together. Amongst other matters I questioned him as to whether among the French officers taken at Granard he had observed Colonel O'Byrne, but despite the fullest description I could give, and Fortescue's own strenuous attempts at recollection, he could recall no one in the least resembling him. Was it possible, I wondered, that O'Byrne could have escaped? Had he not accompanied

Humbert from Castlebar, or was it possible he was dead? We speculated a good deal on the subject, arriving at length at the conclusion that, as capture by a British force could, for one of his record, have but one result, he must either be dead or in secure hiding.

Another and a more personal service Fortescue was able to render me, for one morning Johnston arrived, having at great risk effected the journey from Castle Byrne, and bringing with him both our horses and the remainder of my impedimenta. I was glad to have the fellow again, and still more to have his assurance that everything was going on well at the Castle when he left it. Sir Owen, he said, had returned; the inmates of the tower were quiescent; the country around Castle Byrne and as far as Castlebar was peaceful; but thence to Ballina was disturbed, and the remainder of the journey he had found very dangerous. Twice he had been fired at, and probably it was only because Sir Owen had instructed him to use Charost's name as a password that he escaped being murdered outright by several bands of pikemen.

Meanwhile, hundreds of fresh fugitives from Balinamuck had joined the Killala rebels, rousing these by their stories of the severities practised by the British to wilder excesses than ever. Some of the fugitives, having had enough of warfare, offered their services to Charost, and from these he selected guards for the palace, but the great body of rebels, numbering many thousands, behaved as if possessed. They pillaged and destroyed in all directions with utter recklessness. A thousand of them broke into the Bishop's meadows and encamped there, living upon the proceeds of plunder, fighting among them-

selves, rioting, and maintaining a semblance of merriment day and night. They threatened to exterminate all the Protestants, and had Charost not avowed his determination to lead the loyalists against them, I am sure blood would have been shed. Outside of the palace, Killala was by this time in a state of anarchy. The surrounding country swarmed with marauders. Had their leaders been competent to enforce upon them some measure of organized discipline, Heaven knows what consequences might have ensued, for, ignorant and misguided though they were, they showed no lack of animal courage. In fact, they seemed positively to revel in danger, and when in the end death came to them, not a man flinched from it. Fortunately for us, of their leaders only O'Donnell had a notion of enforcing discipline. Fortescue and I used often to speculate as to what would have been the result had Charost, Boudet, and Ponson openly assumed the leadership of the rebels. It seemed likely enough that in a short time the greater part of Connaught would have risen to their call.

It was a wonderful tribute, alike to their personal and to their military qualities, that these three officers, whilst labouring always on behalf of the poor little threatened Protestant garrison, kept the respect of even the most fanatical Catholics up to the very end. Without hope of more than an honourable capitulation, they still struggled on with heroic devotion in the interests of peace. So desperate had become the state of affairs that for days and nights none of them put off his uniform, nor did one of them sleep a dozen hours in the whole period. Yet they were always alert and cheerful, ready at any moment

for any service, however unpleasant or dangerous—ready even for a jest. One day, for instance, while Ponson and Charost were endeavouring to appease a body of pikemen outside the gate, little Ponson came rushing down from Killala, forced his way through the crowd, and, saluting Charost, said to him: 'Citizen Colonel, I have to report to you a grave misdemeanour on my own part. Half an hour ago I offered myself in marriage to Miss Reilly, who is, as you well know, the lady most remarkable for intelligence and beauty in this town. I resisted her persuasions as long as was possible, but her love for me seems to be unbounded, and, as all Killala knows, I have long been her slave. I am come, therefore, Citizen Colonel, to crave your pardon, and to request that protection and shelter for Madame may be found within the palace.'

To this utterance Charost listened with all becoming gravity, but when at his request the Bishop had translated it to the surrounding pikemen, they broke into irresistible shouts of laughter, the lady in question being, it appears, a huge elderly fish-wife, notorious for neither beauty nor virtue, and probably the one person in Killala of whom little Ponson was really afraid!

On another occasion a number of rebels succeeded in overpowering the guards at the gateway; swarmed into the courtyard, and probably would have invaded the palace itself had not Boudet been equal to the occasion. Sauntering into the courtyard, in the calmest manner he ordered them to form for drill, and, they instinctively obeying, he put himself at their head, and marched them back in good order to Killala.

A few days later, a riot having broken out in the town, Charost and the Bishop, with a guard of thirty men, patrolled the streets for several hours, and at last induced the rioters to follow them to the round tower situated on a knoll whence three roads diverge. Here Charost delivered a harangue, the Bishop, as usual, translating, in which he urged the people to disperse to their homes. To this Mulheeran replied in a passionate oration, declaring that until the people were avenged they would never disperse, that they were determined to fight the troops, and that if the Catholics then imprisoned in Castlebar were not released, he would have every Protestant in the district put under arrest.

'Very well. I will go myself to Castlebar,' answered Charost, 'and obtain the assurance of the English General that no prisoner shall be punished.'

'And how will we know that some of them mayn't have been hanged already?' cried Mulheeran. 'By God, if a hair of one of their heads is touched, 'tis a bloody revenge we'll have!'

'Your fate would only be the worse for that,' said Charost. 'Have patience. I will see to it. Meanwhile, believe me, the wisest thing is to disperse.'

As a result of this discussion, Roger Maguire, representing the rebels, and the Dean of Killala, representing the garrison, rode to Castlebar, under a flag of truce, bearing General Trench a letter, requesting that the safety of all prisoners in his power should, in the interests of the Protestants at Killala, be guaranteed. Nothing, however, could now appease the rebels. Rumours were current that English troops were advancing from the South, and whether true or not, it was quite certain that such

an advance must be imminent. On the night of the 19th not a soul of us in the palace slept. The noise and confusion outside were appalling. Every moment we expected attack. The guards were doubled; we all went armed; Boudet watched in the grounds, Ponson at the gateway; Charost and Fortescue took command in the house. About midnight, just as the Bishop and his family were preparing to retire, one of the Maguires broke into the dining-room, declaring that some of his troop had been fired upon. As it proved, the story was false, but it caused an uproar in the palace, which, having spread among the rebels, roused them to a furious pitch of excitement. Throughout the entire night crowds demonstrated, singing, yelling, blowing horns, beating drums, firing muskets; fires blazed everywhere; the cathedral bells were rung. Again and again attempts were made to force the gates. Twice Boudet and his guards frustrated the efforts of pikemen to scale the garden walls and gain possession of the buried powder. To add to the pandemonium, O'Donnell and the Maguires fell to carousing in their rooms, compelling Charost at last to break in and expel them.

Next day, the 21st, O'Donnell reporting that a newly arrived band of pikemen was causing trouble in the town, he, with Charost, Ponson and the Bishop went into Killala, discovered the pikemen, and tried to persuade them to disband. They refusing, Charost informed them that he wanted no more recruits, would not permit plundering, and that their services were needed at home in order to protect their families and save the harvest. To this they replied sullenly that they were their own masters and would do as they pleased. Whereupon

Charost ordered them to disperse, and little Ponson enforced the order with firelock and bayonet, charging among the fellows so recklessly and venting upon them such a torrent of abuse that, much to the amusement of the bystanders, the whole troop fled.

During the afternoon of that day, the 21st, definite reports reached us that the troops were really advancing in force, and two hours later Dean Thomson and Maguire arrived from Castlebar with a letter from General Trench giving the required assurance that all prisoners should be well treated. This being publicly read by the Bishop in the gateway so pleased the rebels that they remained peaceful all that night, but as it was now certain, from information conveyed by the Dean, that a relieving force was on the march, Charost took every precaution in defence of the palace. Fortescue and myself lay that night upon the study floor. In the Bishop's bedroom Mrs. Stock and four of her children slept, together with four other children and their terror-stricken mother. Altogether more than a hundred refugees spent that night in the palace.

It was upon the following morning that an utterly unlooked-for piece of news reached us, one which proved to be of considerable importance to myself, and not a little affected, as you will see, the whole of my future movements.

Requesting me to join him for a turn in the garden, we had no sooner got safely out of earshot and seated ourselves upon a bench, than the Bishop proceeded to tell me that Colonel O'Byrne had arrived at Killala in the course of the preceding night.

My astonishment was great. 'Colonel O'Byrne here? Impossible, surely!' I exclaimed.

‘It is true. I have not yet seen him myself, nor has Charost told me much about him. Naturally under the circumstances he would be reticent. I gather, however, that he somehow escaped capture at Ballinamuck, but has since suffered the most appalling privations of all sorts. At present he is lying concealed in the officers’ room, very weak and exhausted. It would never do to——’ The Bishop paused. ‘It is not for me to judge, but we both know only too well what the consequences would be if the unfortunate man were captured,’ he added.

‘He knows it too,’ I said. ‘I made it clear to him myself at Castlebar.’

The Bishop shuddered. ‘It is a hideous business,’ he said. ‘That he is a rebel technically, I admit. At the same time I cannot think the Government well inspired in pushing to its brutal extreme what is, after all, so mere a technicality. However, we need not discuss that matter now. The man is here. He cannot remain in this house, or indeed anywhere in Killala. Perhaps for the moment we may conceal him somewhere, but the question is how and by what means his eventual escape is to be managed?’

‘Could he not get away to the North,’ I suggested, ‘and take passage there in some friendly vessel?’

‘Impossible,’ the Bishop said with decision. ‘For one thing, his present condition of health forbids further exposure. For more than a fortnight it seems he has been wandering about the fields, often without food or shelter. English ships, besides, are watching everywhere. I have given Charost my opinion that when he has sufficiently recovered the safest plan will be for him to go South, say to Galway, and there await an opportunity. Mean-

while, he must be removed from the palace. To-night I propose taking him to a house where he will be cared for, and I think safe.'

'At no little risk to yourself, my lord,' cried I.

He shrugged his shoulders. 'True,' he answered. 'The responsibility is heavy enough, no doubt, yet what else can I do? The man has suffered worse than the pains of death. He has taken refuge here with me, and I must be ready, therefore, to face the consequences. I tell you all this, Mr. Bunbury, because I have the utmost confidence in your discretion, also I know that you have a personal interest in this man's safety.'

I bowed. 'You are always too good to me, my lord,' I said. 'As for Colonel O'Byrne, it is true that I have an interest in his safety, one of a rather peculiar kind, and which lays upon me, I think, a special responsibility.'

I then told him more fully than I had as yet done the errand upon which I had been despatched by Kate; also the odd and embarrassing links which bound her and Owen to this highly inconvenient connection of theirs; giving him at the same time a slight sketch of the antecedents of the O'Byrne family, so far as I understood them myself.

'And you feel bound still by this promise that you made to your sister?' he asked.

'Why, yes,' I said. 'How does it strike you? Remember that I have done nothing up to now to redeem it, the occasion never having arisen. Now apparently it has done so, and what you tell me about the man's state of exhaustion and helplessness seems to make it all the more incumbent that I should do what I can to help him. At the same

time, I do not in the least mind confessing that, apart altogether from any question of risk, the business is thoroughly distasteful to me. Colonel O'Byrne, on the few occasions on which I have encountered him, has been cold and overbearing to the last degree. Moreover, I have special reasons for wanting, as soon as I can escape from here, to be free of all responsibilities and entanglements. In short, my lord,' I added, 'the matter rests with you. Advise me as you would a son, and I pledge myself to abide by your decision.'

The Bishop turned at that so as to face me, his eyes resting full upon mine. 'The responsibility is rather serious,' he said thoughtfully. 'To begin with, I will admit that what you suggest does seem to me to be the best, if not indeed the only hope, for O'Byrne's escape. Whoever else might be suspected of conniving at the escape of a rebel, you probably would be one of the last. On the other hand, I cannot feel that, as a stranger and an Englishman, you are in the least morally bound to help him. Are you equal, do you think, to such a load of responsibility? Remember that once taken up you cannot lay it down again.'

I felt somewhat nettled, and I suppose showed it.

'I am sorry, my lord, that you have found me so unstable and wanting in resolution,' I said rather stiffly.

'Not at all, Mr. Bunbury; not in the least,' he answered quickly. 'You mistake me entirely. On the contrary, few young men brought up as you have been would have adapted themselves to the state of affairs here, or have shown a better example of courage and of endurance than you have done.'

This, however, is a very different matter. So far you have shared with the rest of us in risks coming from the hands of rebels and outlaws. What you now propose to undertake is a case in which you would have the whole organized resources of the Government against you. In short, you must forgive an old and a very anxious man,' he added, laying his hand lightly for a moment upon my shoulder, 'if he fears to encourage you in what is perhaps a more or less momentary impulse of generosity. Remember that you are young, and that to compromise your life so seriously at the outset is not a risk which ought to be lightly embarked upon. Moreover, apart from your own views and feelings on the subject, there are others to whose affection you owe some consideration.' He paused; then added with a smile, 'One more especially, or else I am greatly mistaken.'

It was now my turn to shrug my shoulders, a trick we had both perhaps acquired from our French friends. 'For the matter of that, my lord,' said I, 'I have no reason, it seems to me, to hesitate on anybody else's account. Out of sight is out of mind, and if I can be of any use in this matter, it is assuredly no very tender or enduring emotions on the part of anyone whom I have left behind that need restrain me!'

I suppose there was some pique in my tone, for the Bishop glanced at me with that unmistakably quizzical look in his eyes which at times seems quite to transform his ordinarily benevolent face.

'Tut, tut, my young friend,' he said mockingly, 'these are but the prods and pricks, believe me, of offended feeling. As for any apparent absence of

interest or sympathy from without, are we not all of us in the same plight? Betting,' he went on in the same tone, 'is not, I believe, usually regarded as a becoming episcopal avocation. Were I, however, to allow myself to indulge in such a pastime, I would safely just now wager a considerable sum that the person of whom we are both thinking has suffered a good deal more during the last few weeks than even you have done.'

I sprang to my feet. 'You really believe that, my lord?' I cried.

'I really do, Mr. Bunbury. In fact, I feel perfectly convinced of it.'

I tossed the hat which I chanced to be holding in my hand into the air and caught it again.

'You give me fresh life, my lord,' I cried joyously.

'I am glad to hear it,' he answered. 'We all of us need fresh life from time to time, especially after such an ordeal as we have of late been passing through. Only I am sorry,' he added demurely, 'I am exceedingly sorry, Mr. Bunbury, that it should manifest itself in your case by so deplorable a display of selfishness.'

'Selfishness, my lord!' I cried indignantly.

'Certainly, selfishness, Mr. Bunbury. Here you are transported with joy because it is suggested to you that the person whom you presumably love best in the world has been breaking her heart and injuring her eyes with weeping!'

This sobered me. 'Alas, my lord, if you only knew the person of whom you are speaking, you would know how utterly remote from her nature any such demonstrations are!' I exclaimed despairingly.

'And perhaps if you knew the person of whom

we are speaking a little more thoroughly, who knows but you would discover that her capacities in this respect were considerably greater than you have ever supposed!' he retorted. 'In any case,' he added, getting up from the bench, 'will you promise me one thing, Mr. Bunbury? Will you undertake to write to me whenever the first meeting between you and the person in question occurs? If you are not obliged to confess then that I was nearer right in my hopeful prognostications than you in your more gloomy ones, well'—here he turned round, with a smile, upon the doorstep—'well, in that case I shall have to admit that I am a very much blinder and less intelligent old gentleman than my vanity has hitherto led me to suppose!'

CHAPTER XXV

RELIEF

A FEW days after this conversation, upon Saturday, September 22, Fortescue and myself clambered up a height called Steeple Hill, whence a clear view was to be obtained of the train of smoke and fire which marked the advance of the English troops.

Now that the advance of these troops was beyond doubt, many of the rebels lost heart and dispersed, some even of the palace guards deserting with them. A considerable number, however, still remained under arms, and from the windows we saw these marching out in command of Flannagan, Mulheeran, and other local leaders, to take up positions along the road leading towards Ballina.

About two o'clock upon the same afternoon, the sound of cannon and musketry fire reached us from the direction of Ballina. Hastening again up Steeple Hill, Fortescue and I were able this time actually to discern the guns flashing at intervals through the dense volume of smoke that rose from a long line of blazing cabins. 'God help them!' he exclaimed in a tone of deep feeling. 'How many innocent are suffering there with the guilty! And how many years, do you suppose, Bunbury, will have to pass before the savagery of this day is forgotten?'

‘Moreover, upon that side the savagery is barely beginning,’ said I.

‘True,’ he answered. ‘Too true. God help them! God help all these poor people! God help the whole unhappy country!’

At four o’clock we were all at dinner, much excited, yet endeavouring to preserve an appearance of unconcern, when of a sudden O’Donnell rose and faced us. He stood for a moment at the foot of the table, then—‘Here’s to old Ireland, for I can bear this no longer!’ he cried. With that he emptied his glass, saluted us all, and left the room. A few minutes afterwards one of the servants rushed in shouting, ‘Captain O’Donnell’s killed.’ A clergyman named Marshall, his arms extended and face distorted, also ran in, crying out, ‘O’Donnell is dead! I saw him pulled from his horse and murdered!’

At this the whole company rose in great agitation, and while some of us remained with the terror-stricken ladies, the remainder rushed down into the courtyard, only, however, to discover that O’Donnell was still quite alive. Some drunken fellow among his followers had, it seems, resisted orders, and being struck with a pistol-butt, had clutched at his captain and pulled him from his horse. His injuries were, however, slight, as appeared from the fact that he felled the man with another blow of his pistol, and mounting again rode off, followed by three hundred of the rebels. It was only, as it proved, a very short respite, and none of us in Killala ever saw him again. Earlier in the same day he had taken counsel of the Bishop as to whether it was possible for him to save his life honourably. Now he had ridden away, mean-

ing to fight the thing out to the bitter end. At some place a few miles distant from the town, he was seized with sudden vertigo, probably as a result of his fall in the courtyard, so sent away most of his band towards Ballina in command of one of the Maguires, while he himself, with some thirty followers, returned to Killala. Next day, in the thick of the fight there, he was shot through the breast by a Highlander. 'Tell the Bishop—tell the Bishop——' he is reported to have murmured, as he lay dying in a furrow in a field. Three days afterwards, his dead body was found there, and was carried back to his own home for burial. He was a gallant fellow, brave as a lion, and with a little earlier discipline would have made a splendid soldier.

It was late on Saturday when Ponson brought us news that the English force was within two hours' march of Killala; but the night turning out desperately dark and wet, General Trench found it advisable to order a halt some four miles short of the town. Not a soul of us in the palace slept, although the rebels remained for the most part comparatively quiet. Throughout the whole of that night, Charost, Boudet, and Ponson in turns kept a vigilant watch. The following day, which, as it happens, was a Sunday, the same unprecedently heavy rain continued until about noon. We were still at breakfast when Truc and O'Keon arrived from Ballina, both of them covered from head to foot with mud. Although well aware of the peril threatening his life, O'Keon bore himself manfully. Truc, on the other hand, had lost none of his brazen vulgarity, and fell at once to boasting of the great deeds he had accomplished—how he had cut his way on one occasion through

Trench's army, and defeated a giant English officer in a desperate encounter. 'Behold, citizens, the trophy that I secured!' he cried, producing an epaulette. 'I tore this with my own hands from the Briton's shoulder. It is a memento of the struggle. I shall keep it always! Horn of the devil, how I burn to meet those dogs of English again face to face!' Of course the fellow was lying. At the first approach of the English troops he had escaped from Ballina with all haste, while as for the epaulette, it had been torn, so we afterwards ascertained, from the shoulder of a wounded yeomanry officer.

Presently a sound of firing announced that the main body of the troops were advancing, and before long we had sight of the battle (if it can be called by so dignified a name) from one of the palace windows. Fortescue and I had secured the lower portions of the library windows with mattresses so as to shield the women and children who lay upon the floor, whilst allowing the more daring spirits, such as the Bishop, to make comparatively safe observations through the upper panes. These precautions were taken because, irrespective of the chances of attack by the rebels, we were uncertain whether General Trench would regard the palace as the Bishop's residence or as the headquarters of the French, and that they were necessary was soon proved, for, upon Fortescue showing his head somewhat injudiciously above one of the mattresses, a rebel fired at him, the charge of slugs shattering the window; wounding him slightly in the forehead; and breaking a mirror over the mantel by which the Bishop stood.

After about an hour's fighting the rebel forces

broke, many taking to the fields with soldiers in hot pursuit. The majority, however, came streaming back past the palace, where the three French officers sat on horseback before the gates. We inside the palace had a full sight of them. They came past in a great, confused mass, singing, cheering, brandishing pikes, discharging muskets, and advancing to certain death with the most amazing unconcern. We heard the bullets whistling over them. A considerable number fell wounded or dead, and of those that escaped the majority were cut down in the open fields. Soon a body of cavalry galloped up in pursuit, young Arthur Stock among them, and these pressed the rebels on right through Killala, where being received by a regiment that had made a forced march round the town, they fled to the beach below, only to be swept by the fire of a cannon posted across an arm of the bay. Here many perished, including every man of the Longford regiment who had deserted after Castlebar. Their fate could awaken no pity in anyone. No discrimination, however, was made throughout that day and the next. Parties of soldiers and militia, utterly regardless of discipline, raided the town and its environs, dragging fugitives from the houses, seizing unresisting peasants, and butchering them; pillaging indiscriminately; destroying recklessly. So furious was the slaughter that when it was over more than four hundred dead bodies lay in the roads, and Killala itself looked as if it had been taken by storm. Even now the list is far from complete. For while the prisoners, numbering several hundreds, were being tried in batches by court-martial, and almost all sent for execution, the whole surrounding country was being

cleared to such purpose that even those guiltless of the slightest offence were left homeless to face starvation and the rigours of the winter. Amongst those condemned to death were the two leaders Bellew and Bourke, the latter of whom tried to evade capture by slipping into the palace after the battle, and seating himself among a group of loyalists. He and Bellew were taken out and hanged in the grounds. Roger Maguire, who had gone with Dean Thompson to Castlebar, was, as a result of the Dean's testimony in his favour, sentenced merely to transportation. O'Donnell's fate I have already recorded. Mulheeran was killed in Killala, defending himself with great valour to the last against the attack of four troopers, and not falling until his skull had been actually hacked to pieces. Flannagan also died in the battle, but in less heroic fashion. Issuing from a house where he had taken refuge, he pretended to direct a party of soldiers to where some rebels lay hidden. Coming to a place, however, where two streets met, he directed the soldiers to go down one of them, and himself fled down the other; whereupon he was instantly shot.

Meanwhile General Trench and his officers had entered the palace, thereby putting an end at last to our month of misery. An affecting scene ensued when young Arthur Stock rode through the gateway and was received by all his family. The lad wore an old red tunic, much too large for his slender figure, and carried a long cavalry sword. He was in excellent health and spirits, and certainly appeared to have enjoyed his experiences to the full, severe though some of them must have been. He had taken part in several minor actions; had, as I have stated,

charged the routed rebels through Killala, and had spent the previous night in a cabin, sleeping upon a pile of straw.

The next event of importance was the surrender of the French officers. Little Ponson gave up his enormous sword with a swaggering air of devil-may-care that provoked laughter in all who saw the performance. Boudet, on the other hand, preserved his Don Quixote dignity to the last, kissed his sword solemnly upon the blade, and handed the hilt of it to his conquerors as though conferring upon them a prodigious favour. Charost's surrender was a more difficult affair, and very nearly resulted in tragic consequences. Carrying his sabre, he was advancing to the gate to surrender it when a soldier of Fraser's snatched it from his hand. Unperturbed by this insolence, Charost returned to the palace, got a second sabre, and was carrying it to the gate, when an enormous Highlander suddenly burst in and fired at him point-blank. Fortunately the bullet passed under his extended arm, and he continued his march as though nothing had happened, and handed the sabre to an officer. Afterwards, when General Trench had received from the Bishop a full account of the part played by the three Frenchmen, he not only returned them their swords, but permitted them to retain all their effects, and the use of their bedchamber.

It was my privilege to stand near the Bishop at the top of the staircase when he received the General and some twenty of his subordinates. Five of these were billeted in the palace—which was before evening vacated by most of the refugees—the remaining officers finding quarters in Killala or its neighbour-

hood. An entertainment, not indeed of a very lavish kind, but the best that his slender resources could provide, was given by the Bishop in honour of our deliverers, and it was while this was in progress that a final incident occurred which deserves to be recorded.

Earlier in the day, while these operations I have described were at their height, a labourer employed in the palace had gone out to rescue his wife, who was running about in a pitiable state of terror. Having pacified her somewhat, he was leading her back towards the palace when a bullet struck the poor creature, wounding her mortally. She was carried to the granary, and there died, whereupon her husband and relatives prepared to hold a wake over her remains, as the Irish custom is, by lighting a fire of peat upon the floor. That floor, being of wood, and not, as they perhaps expected, of clay, it caught fire. In a short time the whole building was ablaze, and the flames were being driven by a high wind towards the corn-stand, beneath which lay a large quantity of the buried gunpowder. Of the many distracted scenes which I witnessed during my stay at Killala this really, I think, was the worst. The confusion and uproar were quite indescribable; the servants shrieking wildly; the poor dead woman's husband hardly to be restrained from rushing into the flames where the body of his wife was being consumed; the inhabitants of the palace running hither and thither in terror of their lives from what, not unnaturally, seemed to them to be imminent destruction.

Fortunately, the English officers and their men being at hand, these, aided by Ponson, Boudet, and

others in the palace, succeeded at last, after a great effort, in averting what might easily have been a horrible catastrophe.

I slept profoundly that night, as I am sure did many to whom that luxury had for weeks been denied.

CHAPTER XXVI

MY ESCAPE

AFTER a good deal of reflection the Bishop and I arrived at the conclusion that the best hope of enabling our unfortunate fugitive to escape from his foes would lie in taking him on horseback across country by the least frequented tracks possible, avoiding Castlebar, Foxford, and all the region at present overrun by the troops, and in this way reaching the neighbourhood of Castle Byrne, whence it might be possible to convey him to Galway, there to smuggle him on board of a fishing vessel, and so enable him eventually to land in France. It was a plan, we were both well aware, the carrying out of which, even under the most fortunate circumstances, would be attended with considerable risks and difficulties. It was, however, the best we could contrive, and accordingly it was arranged that, in a few days, when the country had recovered a little from its state of turbulence, I should attempt its accomplishment.

About eleven o'clock, therefore, upon the night of Wednesday, September 26, I set out from the palace, accompanied by the Bishop, and preceded by Johnston with a guide, who it was arranged should await us at an appointed place. We went very secretly, it being feared that the fact of Colonel

O'Byrne's presence in the neighbourhood had become known; also I was extremely anxious that the Bishop should not implicate himself further than could be avoided in what was obviously an extremely dangerous enterprise.

We halted in a copse through which the road ran, and in which Johnston and the guide were waiting. Here the Bishop left us, but speedily returned, bringing with him a horseman whose tall figure I recognized as that of Colonel O'Byrne. No word passed between any of us. In silence the Bishop and myself clasped hands; then, the guide going in front, O'Byrne and I riding together, and Johnston following, our little party at a walking pace moved away.

The night was so excessively dark that I could scarcely discern the figure riding beside me. Colonel O'Byrne did not speak, neither did I, but I judged by the way he sat in the saddle, and from an occasional groan that escaped him when his horse stumbled on the rough road, that he had not yet overcome the effects of his privations. In what direction we were going, or through what kind of country, I had not the smallest idea. All I knew was that everything appeared to me to be increasingly gloomy and solitary; the path extremely tortuous and difficult, now running through sodden fields, now over muddy by-paths that eternally went up and down. From what the Bishop had told me I knew that we must be following a route which would at last lead us to the same wild road that had been taken by Humbert on the occasion of his forced march to Castlebar. Further than that I knew nothing. How the guide continued to keep

his direction I cannot imagine. We never met with a soul, nor so much as saw a friendly light in a cabin. The whole country, indeed, seemed to be deserted, and the weather was just then bitingly cold and unpleasant.

In this manner we journeyed for more hours than I can recall, until at last a lessening of the darkness gave warning of the approach of dawn. Gradually the light increased, giving sight of a country the most God-forsaken, I verily believe, that the world contains. In front of us the guide went steadily forward upon his shaggy horse, his hat pulled over his eyes, his coat of frieze wrapped closely about him. Behind, Johnston followed patiently, bent forward between the saddlebags. I glanced at Colonel O'Byrne, and saw how worn he looked, his eyes deep sunk in their hollows, his lips met tight in an effort of endurance. Drawing closer to him—

'You are suffering, monsieur?' I said in French.

He looked at me, smiling faintly.

'A little, Mr. Bunbury,' he replied. 'But it is nothing. A soldier must learn to endure.'

We went on for some distance; then I spoke again.

'You are cold. My servant carries a spare cloak. I beg of you to use it.'

'I thank you,' he answered in his deep voice.

'Believe me that at present I do not need it. Shortly, I presume, we shall have some daylight at least, if not warmth.'

After that we rode on in absolute silence for perhaps two miles more. Suddenly, not a little to my surprise, my companion turned to me and asked:

'Do you carry pistols, Mr. Bunbury?'

'Unfortunately not,' I answered. 'Mine were taken from me at Castlebar, and I have never been able to replace them.'

'That is indeed unfortunate.' His head sank again upon his breast, and he made a despairing gesture. 'Had you possessed a pair,' he presently went on in a tone of dignified deference, 'I should have requested you of your generosity—a quality which, believe me, I am able to appreciate—to spare one of them to me. Everything belonging to me—clothes, money, papers, pistols—was stripped from me by the rascals I fell amongst, whoever they were. To the rest of my goods they were welcome, but my pistols were my life—far *more* than my life,' he added meaningly. Then he once more relapsed into a profound silence, one which I did not venture to break.

About sunrise a fine rain began to fall, whereupon I insisted upon his taking my spare cloak, and we pressed on at a quicker pace. The rain, however, grew heavier, and presently became a perfect deluge, so that at last we were forced to take shelter in a deserted shed. Here we rested for about two hours, eating some of the food we had brought with us, and endeavouring to snatch a little sleep.

The sun was actually trying to shine when we resumed our journey, and O'Byrne seeming to be somewhat refreshed, we went forward steadily. Our way now ran directly south through an extraordinarily wild and mountainous region, intersected with streams and rivers, very rough and exposed, and apparently uninhabited by anything human. That the country had a certain savage grandeur of its own

I must freely admit ; at intervals we caught distant glimpses of Lough Conn, along the western side of which we were riding, being now upon the identical track, so the guide informed us, taken by Humbert when he was marching upon Castlebar. After a while we sighted Mount Nephin, and at this point our guide, having given us a variety of directions as to our route, left us. By that time the day had grown warm ; our horses began to show signs of weariness. Colonel O'Byrne, too, was obviously weary and in pain ; accordingly we once more halted under some trees and rested for a few hours, again taking food, and such sleep as we could contrive to snatch.

Thus renewed, we remounted and continued on our way ; but the road, if I can so call what was the merest track, seemed to get continually more and more difficult. O'Byrne, too, grew weaker and weaker, till he could scarcely keep the saddle. At last I was convinced that to attempt getting any further that day was simply impossible. What were we to do ? I asked myself. Suddenly O'Byrne decided the matter by falling helplessly forward upon his horse's neck ; whereupon we lifted him from the saddle, and I despatched Johnston to search for some place in which we might rest for the night.

After a prolonged absence, he returned saying that he had found a refuge, and to it with considerable difficulty we conveyed Colonel O'Byrne, one of us supporting him on his horse upon either side. The place proved to be a small square tower, set somewhat picturesquely on a promontory in the lake, but without either door or roof, its floor trampled into a villainous condition by cattle, and a number of great holes gaping in its rough walls. It was hardly the

habitation in which to shelter a sick man, but apparently it was the best that we could hope for, and at least it would afford us some slight protection. Whilst Johnston gathered brushwood and made a fire, I collected reeds along the lake, and strewed them deeply upon the floor. Then, having eaten a little food, we secured our horses by hobbling them in the Irish fashion; filled the doorway with brushwood; wrapped ourselves in our cloaks; and, with saddlebags for pillows, laid ourselves down upon the reeds, to rest if not to sleep.

Early the next morning we resumed our journey, taking now a south-westward route from Mount Nephin, and, as we judged by the position of the sun, in the direction of Newport. Knowing it to be advisable to avoid the highways as far as possible, our rate of progress was necessarily slow. At one time we were toiling over fields bare of everything except flat grey stones; now up and down what seemed an endless succession of hills, clad with furze and heather or stunted grass; brown streams flowed amongst them, and in the distance there were great wastes of bogland, with perhaps a lake, and sometimes a mountain. Often we rode for miles without seeing a house or any signs of humanity save an occasional goat. Trees of any kind were few; the country was sparingly cultivated. Such a thing as a town or even a village did not seem to exist, but several times we saw smoke rising over what we supposed to be detached cabins.

Under ordinary circumstances, I should rather have enjoyed the ride than otherwise, for the weather was now exceptionally fine, the air full of wholesome freshness, and the scene around us diversified to an

extraordinary degree. Weighed down as I was, however, with the responsibility of O'Byrne's health no less than of his safety, I confess that the only thing that gratified me was the thought that each mile brought us so much nearer to the end of our journey. He, on his side, never complained; seldom, indeed, spoke. He looked extremely ill; coughed a great deal, and I saw that nothing but sheer resolution kept him in the saddle. At intervals we halted to rest. Whenever it was possible, Johnston procured some goat's milk; and this, mixed with a little brandy, was the only sustenance O'Byrne could take. At last, our stock of brandy being near exhaustion, I sent Johnston to try to purchase some more at a village we saw in the distance. He came back empty-handed, and with the very serious news that a party of soldiers was billeted in the village.

'Did any of them see you?' I asked, anxiously.

'They did, sir,' he answered. 'I was among 'em before I knew aught about it.'

'And did they question you?'

'One of them, a sergeant, sir, asked me my business. I told him I was the servant of an English gentleman who had been killed by the rebels, and that I was on my way to Galway, and wanted a lodging for the night.'

'Was he suspicious, do you think, Johnston?' I next inquired.

'I can't say, I'm sure, sir. He was a bit rough-like with me. "You'll get no lodgings here, my man," says he. So I told him as how I was an old trooper myself, and could sleep well enough in the fields—and with that, sir,' said Johnston, 'I thought it best to come away.'

This news disturbed me a good deal, as you may imagine. I could only hope that Johnston's diplomacy, such as it was, had disarmed the sergeant's suspicions, and in any case I resolved to get away as speedily and secretly as we could from the neighbourhood of that village.

Unfortunately, the long day's journey had so exhausted Colonel O'Byrne's strength that before we had ridden very far we were obliged once more to support him in the saddle. To add to our difficulties rain again set in heavily with the approach of evening. This last fact decided me, and at the next cabin we came to I drew rein, and inquired if we could have food and lodging.

The poor people spoke only Irish, but they understood clearly enough what we wanted, and offered to let O'Byrne have a bed. Upon inspection, however, it proved to be so wretched, and set in a room so thick with peat smoke, that he preferred to share with Johnston and myself the comparative cleanliness of an open shed at the back. At one end of this we stabled the horses, in the other we selected the driest spot we could find for ourselves, the roof of the shed being terribly dilapidated; and here, upon a litter of straw and rushes, we prepared to pass the night. Before lying down O'Byrne drank some warm goat's milk, supplied by the poor owners of the cabin, while Johnston and I ate plentifully of the boiled potatoes and hard oatcakes which they also gave us. I cannot say that either he or I precisely enjoyed the meal, but such was our condition of hunger and fatigue that I believe we could have eaten husks just then, and slept upon ant-heaps.

Next morning was fine and warm. The owners

of the cabin refused any reward in return for their services, nor would the bare-legged boy, who accompanied us for a mile or more, accept even the smallest gratuity. Before leaving us he indicated a highway far down in a valley, which we understood led to the sea, and being then, as I judged, within a reasonable distance of Newport, I despatched Johnston to Castle Byrne, cautioning him to avoid any further contact with the soldiers, and bidding him warn Sir Owen of our arrival.

Happily the day continued fine. There was an inspiring wind from the Atlantic, and Colonel O'Byrne being apparently stronger after his night's rest, we made fair progress. For the most part we rode along in complete silence, I maintaining always a vigilant watch for soldiers, he riding doggedly, his head bent and his hands frequently clutching at the pommel of his saddle. At one cabin a woman gave us some unleavened bread made of potatoes, very tough and unappetizing, also a bowl of sour milk which had the unfortunate effect of making Colonel O'Byrne violently sick. He coughed a great deal, at times distressingly. Every few miles we halted to rest, but in spite of these delays, we made, on the whole, fair progress. We were now, I made sure, approaching the coast—indeed, already I fancied that I could perceive its salty odours.

As I have already told you, Colonel O'Byrne and I spoke seldom, our conversation, as a rule, going no farther than a few inquiries on my part concerning his health, and his brief replies thereto. You must not imagine, however, Theodore, that there was between us the slightest feeling of animosity or even constraint. It was merely that

in his condition of mind, no less than of body, he could have no desire to speak, while upon my side I had a reluctance to disturb the train of his reflections. By this time I had come to feel not only a genuine pity for the man, but more than this, a strong admiration for the dignity and stoicism with which he endured his afflictions. As for those indignities which I had previously endured at his hands, I no longer remembered them, nor did he, I am sure, recall them save with sensations of regret. Several times in the course of that day I had a strong premonition that he was upon the point of speaking. At last, late in the afternoon, as we sat under a willow-tree beside a brook, he did open his mind to me a little.

‘Mr. Bunbury,’ he said slowly, ‘I find myself quite unable to understand something. I cannot in the least understand why you have rendered, and are still rendering, so many services to me.’

Naturally, I did not wish to enter into unnecessary explanations of the matter, so merely answered lightly that my services were a trifle.

‘On the contrary, they are very great,’ he replied with marked firmness, ‘so great that they trouble me. Remembering our original relations, I ask myself why in return you should do all this for me?’

Again I assured him that I was doing remarkably little, and that what I did do was as much in my own interests as in his.

‘That cannot be,’ he answered with some impatience. ‘Consider the risks you are taking at this moment in accompanying me. If you were captured with me——’

‘Quite so ; quite so,’ I broke in somewhat

abruptly. 'But really I have considered all that. Why then need we discuss the matter further?'

'As you will,' he replied, bowing in his grave fashion. After this he sat silent for a minute or two, then he again turned to me.

'There is another detail,' he continued, 'which is constantly in my thoughts. With your permission I will now mention it to you.'

'Please do,' I answered.

'It is this,' he said. 'In deciding to render me these services, what was the motive that chiefly influenced you?'

I reflected upon his question, and then—'You must excuse me if I say that I prefer not to tell you, Colonel O'Byrne,' I answered stoutly.

'Oh, but I must insist, I really must,' he cried, in a tone of some distress. 'Can you not understand? Will you not believe me when I say that for all your unlooked-for assistance I am profoundly grateful?'

'I am quite ready to believe it,' I said with a laugh.

He looked surprised at my levity. 'Much has happened since we first met,' he continued in the same tone as before; 'many very unexpected things. If I am grateful now, it is merely because I am—on the whole—shall we say human?'

'We have both experienced a good many unexpected things,' I responded. 'Cannot we accept that fact as a sufficient explanation of the change in our relative positions?'

'Well, no,' he said, 'not entirely. Tell me this, Mr. Bunbury. Was your motive chiefly one of pity—pity for my condition and my possible fate?'

'Not at all,' I answered, growing a little irritated

by his persistence. 'Believe me, it was not. Still less was it in expectation of your gratitude that I offered to help you.'

'Then I fail entirely to understand it,' he said. 'Forgive my importunity, but an answer of some kind would, I assure you, relieve my mind greatly. Since I have expressed my gratitude for your help, you might, I think, Mr. Bunbury, at least indicate in some way why you have offered it.'

I still felt little inclined to enlighten him; yet there was really no particular reason why I should not do so, and I could only admit that, after all, his curiosity in the matter was natural. 'Colonel O'Byrne,' I said, 'I cannot answer you fully, nor is it, I think, necessary that I should do so. You will, however, remember our interview at Castlebar, and a certain communication which I then made to you. Need I now repeat what I revealed to you then?'

'Ah!' he exclaimed. 'Yes, I remember. It was your sister, Lady Byrne. You explained to me then that it was *she* who was so unaccountably interested in my welfare.'

I bowed.

'Then it is to Lady Byrne,' he continued, 'that I should, if possible, express my gratitude for all these services upon my behalf?'

'Presumably,' I replied.

'Had you not been influenced by her desire—her, I must say, extremely strange desire—you would not, perhaps, have tried to serve me?'

'There would in that case probably have been no opportunity,' I answered. Then I rose up. 'Colonel O'Byrne,' I said, 'we have, I think, pursued this question of motives quite far enough. If it pleases

you to accept my poor services for a little while longer, it pleases me at least equally to render them. That, surely, is sufficient. Shall we not ride on ?

‘Certainly,’ he answered, rising also. ‘One word, Mr. Bunbury. Is it your intention, if possible, to reach your sister’s house to-day ?’

‘Either to-day or to-morrow,’ I answered.

‘And—afterwards ?’ he asked.

‘Ah, well, that must depend obviously upon circumstances,’ I said. ‘But I trust eventually to insure your reaching a place of complete safety.’

He bowed. I helped him to mount his horse, for which he thanked me. Then he added, with a smile: ‘I think at least we understand one another a little better for this explanation, Mr. Bunbury. Perhaps when—*if* we ever reach that place of complete safety you speak of, you will permit me to express my gratitude again, and a little less inadequately ?’

CHAPTER XXVII

'JOURNEYS END IN LOVERS MEETING'

WE did not succeed in reaching Castle Byrne that night, but were fortunate enough to find a decent lodging in a barn belonging to a farmer who, in addition to his other virtues, possessed a certain knowledge of the English tongue. We sat for some hours with him and his family, enjoying the warmth of their kitchen fire, and, for the first time since leaving Killala, I was able to assuage my hunger with a decent, if homely, meal. Colonel O'Byrne also, for almost the first time, ate a little food, and it was I think this, as much as the warmth of the barn, which insured him some hours of sleep. My own rest, however, was broken, for before leaving us for the night the farmer had confided to me casually, yet meaningly, that a party of redcoats was in the neighbourhood. I pretended not to be specially interested in his news, and merely asked him how far we were from Newport. He said not far—about ten miles or so—and further informed me that the country beyond it could be attained without passing through that town by means of a road which ran at no great distance from his house.

The information about the soldiers was so alarming that next morning we resumed our journey before sunrise, the farmer himself directing us as

far as a lane which he said would bring us out upon the road he had mentioned the previous night. Fearing that once there we might the more easily be detected by the soldiery, I decided to keep to the fields as long as possible, but soon found this course to be less feasible than I had expected. As we progressed the country rapidly changed its aspect, becoming more and more mountainous, with loose craggy rocks on every side, and high stone walls surrounding the fields. Leaving these, therefore, we presently entered a rutted track running between more high loose walls, and, following this, we issued upon a road, though whether it was the right one or not we had no means of deciding.

Fearing that we might now at any moment encounter danger, we pressed forward at a trot, my single concern being to attain with all speed that region of bogs and marshes which, as I remembered, lay between Newport and Castle Byrne. Colonel O'Byrne, though obviously with an effort, endured the ordeal well. For myself, I was so engrossed with these present concerns, above all with the necessity of constant vigilance, that I hardly had a thought for anything else. The road kept twisting and branching in a distracting sort of fashion, and it soon became clear to me that, as usual, I must have missed my way. From what followed I am inclined, though, to think that this usually inconvenient propensity of mine must for once have been watched over by some particularly friendly deity!

Presently we came within sight of the sea, visible at the end of a long narrow vista of rocks meeting almost like a tunnel. Other rocks in huge numbers,

fallen from the high ground on either side, lay thickly around us, at places covering the entire road, and almost blocking the passage. Suddenly a startling event occurred. Upon the nearest slope above us I caught sight of something red. It was a mere speck, and the next moment had disappeared behind one of the rocks; but I had seen it, and I was not likely to mistake it. I knew that colour!

I slackened my pace, and beckoned to Colonel O'Byrne to come up. 'We are pursued,' I whispered, as soon as he had drawn level with me. 'There are soldiers upon the hillside up there. Probably others—mounted ones—are upon the road behind us.'

A frown crossed his dark pain-drawn face. This business of escaping offended his pride bitterly, as I was well aware. It was only the ghastly, the utterly dishonouring nature of the fate that otherwise awaited him, which induced him, I made sure, to endure it.

'We must push on fast as soon as we can,' I added, still in a whisper, affecting as I did so to point to my stirrup. 'We will continue to go slowly till we have got round the corner of this bit of rock, when we shall, I hope, be out of sight. So long as they think we are unaware of their presence, they will probably take their time.'

We were now nearly upon the top of a steepish stretch of road which led directly down to the coast. Up to this time the nakedness of the countryside had been complete. No sooner, however, had we reached the summit of the slope than we found ourselves, not a little to my surprise, looking down upon quite a considerable tract of woodland country, the trees being chiefly oaks and sycamores. Many

of these, judging by the trunks nearest to us, were of a considerable age, but all so warped by the wind that the whole body of them leaned completely over to the eastward, the branches upon that side being covered with foliage, while upon the other there remained only a few brown, discoloured leaves. A sort of outlier of this wood came close to the road we had to descend, and either on that account, or from the steepness of the ground, we found ourselves in almost complete shelter, although on the further edge of the wood the leaves were swaying briskly in the breeze.

Beyond this wood extended a level space of ground deep in grass, upon which cattle and sheep were grazing. Further, a great curve of coast spread away to the horizon, the waves rolling in, not as I had usually seen them on these shores, in huge tumultuous billows, but in a succession of smaller ones, broken up by a number of rocky islands, which dotted the sea in every direction.

And now occurred that incident, Theodore, of which I am still unable to write or even think without emotion—an emotion which will, I feel sure, last me throughout the remainder of my life! We had begun to descend the hillside, and had got upon an exceptionally stony bit of road at a point where another still narrower and if possible yet more stony road met ours at right angles. Glancing down this side-track I perceived that a vehicle was coming towards us. Expecting to see one of the usual turf or potato carts of the neighbourhood, I at first, as I say, merely glanced at it; then I looked again, and again, and yet again!

Not a wheeled thing of any sort had we met all

that day, and hardly so much as a single foot traveller. So stripped of humanity was the countryside that even an ass-cart or a potato-barrow would have been seen with a certain amount of surprise. The vehicle which I saw approaching was nothing, however, of this sort. On the contrary, it was a small, peculiarly built, but perfectly appointed phaeton, protected by a low projecting hood, and drawn by a pair of cream-coloured ponies harnessed tandem-fashion, the mountings upon their harness glittering like silver in the afternoon sunshine.

A surprising enough phenomenon, as you will admit, in itself. True, but that, my dear fellow, was only part, the very smallest part, of the surprise that awaited me! What will you say when I tell you that the driver of this vehicle was no other than the fastidious, the distinguished, Miss Talbot herself, and that beside her—beside her, Theodore—sat Lavinia, Lady Lavinia, *my* Lavinia, the centre of all my dreams and hopes; the object of all my desires, cogitations, despairs; the being from whom I had of late assured myself I was for ever hopelessly cut off.

With a muffled cry I sprang from my horse, tossed the bridle to O'Byrne, and in another moment was beside the phaeton. A young groom, whom at first I had not perceived, so entirely was he concealed by the overhanging hood, sprang down at the same moment, and went to the ponies' heads. The instant these stopped I had flung myself upon the step on the side where Lavinia sat, below the driver's perch, had seized her hand, and was pressing kiss after kiss upon the gauntlet that protected it.

What sort of a reception I expected to meet with

is, perhaps, more than I can tell; that the one I did meet with towered high above my highest expectation is at least quite certain. The tears sprang impetuously to her eyes, and she gazed at me wonderingly, even wildly, as at something inconceivable, as at a vision too incredible to be believed in.

'*John!*' she cried; and again, 'John! is it John? Is it indeed you, John, alive and safe? Oh, what agonies, what unspeakable miseries I have gone through on your behalf! They told me you were in the hands of the rebels. . . . Everyone seemed to take a pleasure in describing the fate of all the Protestants to whom that happened—the butcheries in Wexford, the shootings, the burnings, the pikings! . . . Those dreadful, dreadful pikes! Night after night I have dreamed of them, and woke crying out. . . . I saw you suspended upon them—bleeding, dying! Oh, John, John! . . . But there! I was a fool. You were safe and sound, I see now, all the time, and I might have spared myself all those agonies on your account.'

'Grudge none of them; do not grudge a single one of them!' I exclaimed, intoxicated, and hardly knowing what I was saying in the extremity of my rapture. 'You shall hear everything. I have much to tell—only not now. I have a duty first, a debt of honour which has to be paid before anything else can be thought of. Terrible things have happened, and are still happening. That man whom you see upon the road behind me, I am responsible for his safety—for his life. My honour is pledged. He is already almost at the point of death, and the pursuers are at his heels. He is a gentleman of good birth and breeding, and stands in peril of a fate the most

ghastly, the most ignoble, that imagination can conceive.' With that, in as few words as possible, I told her how the case stood.

My mistress exclaimed in horror, wrung her hands, then turned impetuously to Miss Talbot, who up to then had not spoken, and whom, in the vehemence of my raptures, I had not even had the decency as yet to salute.

'Oh, Honoria, Honoria—you hear?—what are we to do?' she cried. 'Think, think quickly! You are so clever. You are always able to plan out something. Find some way by which we can help the poor gentleman. Think! Think! How are we to enable him to escape?'

'One moment. . . . Give me time. . . . Keep quiet, dear, please—just for one moment. Yes, yes, I think I see my way now,' was that young lady's prompt response. 'Come here, Hyacinth. And, darling Lavinia, do you think that you could take his place for just a very few minutes?'

As this meant that Lavinia was to take the groom's place in front of a pair of small, but evidently very mettlesome steeds, I naturally made haste to assist her. But our preceptress would not hear of it.

'No, no, Mr. Bunbury. You must stay here, if you please. You have to take Hyacinth back with you; everything depends upon that. Listen, Hyacinth.'

With that she bent down and proceeded to impart instructions in a whisper, to which Hyacinth—a tall good-looking youth, with a pair of uncommonly bright blue eyes—listened attentively.

'Hyacinth is of my own training. I can trust him *thoroughly!*' [This was to me, the tone being

one which a Buonaparte might have used in speaking of some subordinate officer!] As she spoke Miss Talbot was taking off a long grey scarf that she wore round her neck.

'Go with this gentleman, Hyacinth. Muffle your head completely in this. Five pounds, remember, if you reach——' The word was inaudible. 'Ten if you get into the mountains before they overtake you. Your part, Mr. Bunbury, will be to persuade your friend to trust himself to us. Assure him that we will be positively responsible for his safety. I will wait here until your return.'

Not a little bewildered by these peremptory directions, but beginning to perceive what they implied, I returned to Colonel O'Byrne, who still remained upon the road where I had left him. From Miss Talbot's rapid explanations I gathered that a simple exchange was the idea, Hyacinth to mount Colonel O'Byrne's horse and ride away in his stead, Colonel O'Byrne to take Hyacinth's place under the hood of the pony phaeton.

The idea did not appear to me a very hopeful one, I must confess. Still, seeing that I was quite unable to suggest a better plan, and that I was already at the limit of all my own resources, it seemed as well to accept any solution of a situation, which in truth appeared to carry danger to the very verge of hopelessness.

The same argument apparently influenced Colonel O'Byrne himself, or it may have been that his condition of weakness made opposition impossible; for, not a little to my surprise, he submitted, and, divesting himself of his big riding-cloak, made it over to the young groom, who, rapidly stripping off his own

livery coat, proceeded to muffle the cloak about himself as closely as possible. Being, fortunately, as I have said, a tall strongly made lad, when the large riding-cloak was thus gathered about his shoulders, the difference in size between them was considerably less than might have been expected. The scarf, too, which muffled his head disguised the shape of it absolutely, so that at a little distance the change of personality might possibly have passed muster. Any attempt to disguise Colonel O'Byrne was, however, a widely different matter; and as I led him towards the phaeton, keeping as close under the shelter of the rocks as possible, I told myself dejectedly that the scheme was an utterly absurd one; that we were simply making fools, not alone of ourselves, but of Colonel O'Byrne, and that the first hostile glance would reveal all that we desired to conceal. In so concluding I had, it is true, failed to consider how complete was the shelter afforded by the overhanging hood of the phaeton—and it was this consideration, as was soon apparent, upon which Miss Talbot based her strategy.

That astonishing young lady received us with as complete a *sang-froid* as if the business of rescuing political prisoners from the gallows was for her an ordinary afternoon's experience!

'Get up, please, Hyacinth,' she said in a matter-of-course tone, indicating the concealed seat, and with barely a glance at the transformed Hyacinth. 'Now, dearest Lavinia, return to your place. Mr. Bunbury will take yours for a moment in front of the ponies. You will follow us, will you not, as soon as you have seen Hyacinth fairly started?' This with an obliging smile and bow in my direction. 'My cottage is not more than four or five miles from

here. You cannot mistake it. You have only to follow our tracks. Get on, Oberon!

The foremost pony responded to this appeal with a jerk and a bound which, almost before I had time to let go the reins, carried the phaeton forward over a road so thickly bestrewn with stones of every size that it was only by dint of keeping to a track specially cleared, I think, for the purpose, that an inevitable capsizing was avoided.

It was a fascinating little piece of charioteership, and moreover decidedly alarming for one to whom all that was most precious in life seemed at the mercy of those crags and boulders! Not much time was given me, however, to follow these gyrations, for before the phaeton had gone more than a few hundred yards a succession of loud shouts upon the other side arrested me, and I turned quickly to see what had occurred.

Following his mistress's directions, Hyacinth had ridden quietly along until he reached the end of that projecting ridge, which, as I have already explained, hid the road up to this point completely from all observation from the hillside above. No sooner, however, was this point passed, and the solitary rider come into view, than an excited stampede took place—some twenty or thirty soldiers starting up from behind the rocks, and beginning clumsily to clamber downhill.

Affecting for the first time to perceive that he was in danger of capture, the rider thereupon turned sharply round to the right, and, forcing his horse to scramble across a bit of loose wall, which gave way under its hoofs with a tremendous falling of stones, he reached a boulder-strewn space of grass upon the farther side; on again over another similar but

higher wall, and so gained a narrow concealed track which led away to the south-west.

A rapid pounding and clattering of hoofs upon the road behind me was the next thing that attracted my attention, and I had only just time to draw to one side before a cavalcade, consisting of some half-dozen troopers, with an officer in command, came noisily down towards me. Apparently I was not their object, for they rode past me at full speed, thundered on along the road in the rear of the pony phaeton, passed it by, and then drew up again upon the further side, evidently with the intention of disputing its passage. In an agony of apprehension I watched to see what would happen next; and it was with sensations of unspeakable relief that I saw the officer bow upon recognizing the two occupants of the phaeton, and after a moment's hesitation, and a very casual glance under the hood at the back, draw to one side of the road, and allow the vehicle to continue its course unmolested.

Meanwhile, the hunt upon the other side had naturally been all to the advantage of the hare, who by this time had passed out of sight, the soldiers panting along hopelessly in his rear. Perceiving this the officer in command gave a fresh order; the troopers retraced their steps, passed me by again at full speed, with a mere glance of curiosity on the part of their superior; hastened on to the place where Hyacinth's passage had left a huge breach in the loose wall; scrambled through this breach one after the other; then across the grass-grown space, and over the further broken wall into the track beyond. In another five minutes hare and hounds had alike disappeared, and I was left, not a little to my own astonishment, in solitary possession of the road.

CHAPTER XXVIII

AFTER THE DARKNESS

HERE then, you perceive, Theodore, was an entirely new development, and a development all the more startling from the fact of its having come to pass in such an extraordinarily short space of time! For my part I must confess that, profoundly interested as I was in Colonel O'Byrne's chances of escape, it was only, as it were, with a corner of my mind that I was able just then to pursue that subject. Can you blame me? or do you wonder if everything else was swallowed up for me, lost in one thought, or rather in a multitude of thoughts all converging upon a single point? Within that same amazingly short space of time, an entire revolution had been accomplished in my own prospects, nay, I may say, in my own destiny. Out of the very depths of despair, I had leaped at once to the topmost pinnacles of hope, beyond even my wildest anticipations. 'She is mine!' I cried exultingly, 'mine, mine, mine, and no power upon earth shall ever come between us again! Oh, Bishop, Bishop, wisest and most discerning of Bishops,' was my next thought, '*you* knew, you who had never set eyes on her were ready to go bail for her, whereas *I* doubted. Fool, sceptic, that I was! I who flattered myself that I knew her, and all the time it was only

the least part of her I had ever penetrated to! Fool, dolt, idiot!

How long I remained, Theodore, absorbed in these reflections and self-upbraidings I cannot recall, nor will I trouble you by trying to follow them out in any further detail. Enough that, knowing as you have done the state of my despair, you will be able to understand, in part at least, the intensity of the relief that now followed. Like a man long bereft of daylight, to whom the sun has suddenly been revealed in its splendour, I could have flung my arms to the heavens, so overwhelmed was I, so filled with a sense of gladness and of recognition

In the meantime, that there was no need for me to remain any longer where I was, had become perfectly clear. Pursued and pursuers had alike disappeared, and I might, therefore, follow my own desires and at the same time obey orders by hastening in the wake of the phaeton. Accordingly I again turned my horse's head, and began to descend the hill, glancing backwards from time to time on the chance of some new development.

I had not gone more than a couple of miles before I came to a place where the road forked, one branch leading inland, the other downwards towards the coast. I had no difficulty in deciding which to follow, the narrow clear-cut marks of the phaeton wheels in and out of the entanglement of stones making the way quite certain. Another two or three miles, and I had reached a gate, through which the wheel-guides pointed. A tiny child, bare-footed and red petticoated, ran out of a lodge hard by, and set the gate open for me. Entering, I found myself in a large

paddock, almost a park, with groups of trees at intervals, protected from the cattle by wooden palings. Across this paddock or park I rode, without meeting anyone; then up a long gradual slope, and came to a momentary halt where the road again divided, the wider and most frequented branch striking to the right, the narrower and most grass-grown continuing straight downwards towards the sea.

Below me now lay the first of that multitude of rocky and grass-grown islands which I had seen from the hillside above. Other islands of various sizes were scattered farther out, and between them the water leaped and glittered, the edges of every rock and island being laced upon two of its sides with a pattern of silvery foam. To the right the trees were seen to gather themselves again into a piece of dense woodland, in the midst of which I caught a glimpse of a red roof and a sheen of windows. At that sight I pushed on rapidly, my heart beating with anticipation—wondering, dreaming what was about to happen next. With every step I advanced the impression of neatness and harmony increased. I passed through a belt of tall conifers, evidently exotics, between the trunks of which were to be caught glimpses of a green lawn sloping symmetrically downwards, and beyond that again of a small pier and boathouse with boats of various sizes lying at anchor in a tiny harbour.

Suddenly I found myself close to the dwelling-house. It was built upon the lines of a cottage, although of a cottage quite unlike any that I had ever seen in this part of the world. I might rather, in fact, describe it as three cottages, having their inner gable ends merged into one another. The

roof was of red tiles, brought, evidently, from a distance, there being no clay in the region, so I had been told, suitable for making them. The walls were of grey stone, shining with minute fragments of mica, and were covered with a profusion of climbing plants, chiefly roses, which, even now, late in the month of September, hung out not a few white or crimson blossoms on long leafy tassels that shook in the strong sea-breeze.

I rang the doorbell, thereby awakening a jangling sound somewhere far in the recesses of the house; but for a considerable time no one answered the summons. Looking up, I observed that though nearly every window was open, not a face was to be seen at any of them. The whole front of the cottage, in fact, wore an air of complete, though anything but neglectful emptiness and desertion. The roses swung to and fro upon their tassels. A multitude of doves and domesticated pigeons, which my arrival had disturbed, strutted about on the ledges, uttering soft thunderous notes as they preened their feathers in the faint sunshine.

At last a woman's step was to be heard approaching. I started forward, my heart leaping joyously at the thought of who might be coming. It was a complete stranger to me, however, that presented herself—a middle-aged and exceptionally tall woman, so dark, in fact so swarthy that I assumed she must be either a Spaniard or a South Italian. She was dressed in well-cut black silk, yet her whole air and a certain formality about her aspect showed that she must be a retainer of some sort, though evidently one of exceptional dignity and importance.

In answer to my inquiry she told me that the

Signorino was expected, but that the two Signorine were at the present moment engaged. If the Signorino would dismount, his horse would be taken round to the stable, and she would herself conduct him to where he could partake of some refreshment.

Puzzled, and, I must own, not a little hurt and disappointed, I obeyed. The tall woman took the horse by the bridle herself and led him round the corner of the house. Here a groom or someone must have been in waiting to receive it, for she returned almost immediately, and, opening the door, motioned for me to go in.

I found myself in a long low room, something between a hall and a corridor. The walls were panelled with oak, large beams of the same wood crossing the ceiling and standing out in strong relief against the intermediate whitewash; while in the centre the red roof of the house was visible through a skylight, rising at a steep angle, and having upon its parapet more doves strutting about and industriously preening their feathers.

Through this passage or hall we passed without delay, and into the open air again upon the other side. Here, after crossing a small veranda, overhung with creeping plants of every kind, we attained the lawn of which I had already caught a glimpse, and which upon a nearer view impressed me afresh with its symmetry, the centre having been evidently hollowed out by artificial means, its grassy slopes curving evenly downwards and rising again on either hand in long smooth curves.

Right and left of this central lawn, the woods closed in, the trees consisting chiefly of sycamore, whose broad leathery leaves seem better able to

endure the Atlantic storms than others. Below the shelter of the trees the ground was further covered with a dense undergrowth of bushes some eight or ten feet high, sprinkled over with crimson flowers. I felt puzzled at the first glance as to what these last could possibly be, not being able to recall their aspect, although they seemed somehow to be familiar.

A low table with benches and garden seats on either side of it was set out here, and on it was arranged a goodly cold collation of various kinds, a sight not without attraction, I must own, to a man who had travelled fasting since the rather unpalatable breakfast of which we had partaken so many hours before. I was too excited and impatient, however, to do more at the present moment than nibble a few mouthfuls; whereupon the tall foreign woman led the way again downwards along a narrow path, which brought us eventually to the actual seashore a little to the right of the pier and boat-house.

Here a narrow and extremely steep causeway led between wet rocks, evidently under water at high tide, for they were densely covered with seaweeds, chiefly brown tangles and dark slimy-looking oarweeds. This causeway was so rough and precipitous that instinctively I halted, wondering how my companion was going to cross it, but without a moment's hesitation she led the way, balancing herself with a perfect equilibrium upon a track so slippery that I had no little difficulty myself in keeping a footing.

Once safely on the farther side, I could not refrain from paying her a compliment upon her agility, but she merely glanced at me with a slight uplifting of her eyebrows.

'I am of Ana-Capri,' she said, speaking in good English, though with a strong foreign accent. 'We have a saying there—"The goats of Ana-Capri are surefooted, but less surefooted than are her daughters." The signorino understands Italian?' I nodded vaguely, and she repeated her little epigram in that language, adding :

'When one has carried stones upwards a thousand feet upon one's head, from the time one was six years old, one is not likely to slip on places such as these. *Sicuro*, no.'

We had left the causeway behind us by this time, and were upon a narrow strip of seashore, from the very edge of which the red-flowered undergrowths began again. Looking at them now more closely, I perceived to my surprise that they were fuchsias, plants I had always associated with indoor cultivation, but which here seemed to be growing as freely as blackberry bushes, and, judging by the size of some of their stems, must have been of a considerable age.

On the shore my conductress halted.

'The signorino has only to follow the path that he sees before him,' she said, pointing to an extremely narrow track which led through the middle of this undergrowth. 'If he succeeds in reaching the farther end he will find himself assuredly rewarded,' she added in a tone and with a smile which I afterwards characterized as malicious, although at the moment I was so eager to follow her direction that I scarcely heeded her manner of indicating it.

I had not gone more than a few hundred yards before I began to perceive that I had embarked upon a far less easy task than at first sight appeared.

The track I followed not only narrowed greatly as I went on, but kept turning and twisting in a bewildering fashion, bringing me continually up against some new line or hedge of fuchsia bushes. The more I advanced the denser and thicker grew their encompassing masses. They hemmed me in on every side, rising high above my head and decorated to the top with crimson flowers that seemed to bob derisively at me as I advanced.

At last I came to a place where it was plainly hopeless to get a single step farther in any direction. The track through the undergrowth had been growing narrower and narrower, and at this point ceased altogether. Overhead, clouds were to be seen sailing slowly along, but right and left I could see nothing. Behind me the roll of invisible waves came distinctly to my ears, and there appeared to be other sounds coming at intervals from the farther side, but what these were I could not determine.

With a feeling almost of desperation in face of this impenetrable mass, I turned back, thinking that I might have overlooked the right path, and presently found myself in a side track which I had not noticed before. Here, however, the same thing occurred. I had not followed it for more than forty or fifty yards before it also began to narrow. All at once it ceased, and I was again left staring up at those exasperating flowery walls, unable to discover so much as a rabbit-run by which to thread them.

I was making up my mind to retrace my steps, with an angry thought of seeking out that maliciously smiling Italian woman, when my foot caught in something thin as a gossamer, but unlike a gossamer, not breaking off at a touch. Stooping

and picking it up, I discovered it to be a thin thread of crimson silk, so exactly the colour of the fallen blossoms as to be practically invisible. Although fine, it was, as I say, strong, and as I held it in my fingers it drew me towards a space in the flowery walls which seemed to be rather thinner than the rest.

Suddenly an explanation of the whole enigma flashed across my mind. I was in a maze, or labyrinth, ingeniously contrived through the middle of the jungle, and this thread which I held in my hand was the clue by which alone I might hope to escape from its entanglements!

With a vivid recollection of some half-forgotten fairy tale, I quickly followed the guidance indicated by the crimson thread. It ran straight towards a portion of the fuchsia jungle, which, though apparently solid, yielded to pressure, letting me through, and then closing up behind me.

In this fashion I advanced, pushing through three or four similar hedges, and making my way along all but invisible paths between them, when all at once I found myself within sight of a hut—exactly the sort of hut that, as every child knows, appears at the right moment in all fairy tales—one roofed over with green sods, hanging down so low that only the traditional witch who inhabits such places could hope to get under it without stooping.

A half door, shut below but open above, showed beneath this overlapping thatch, and, as I approached, I caught sight of a figure inside, wearing a short red petticoat, her head covered with a shawl such as is worn by the country girls in these parts. Her back was towards me, and she was apparently so engrossed in stirring a large pot over

the fire as not to have observed my approach. I called to her to ask whether Miss Talbot had passed that way, and getting no reply called again, this time somewhat impatiently, trying as I did so to open the door, which was apparently latched on the inside.

At my second call the figure in the red petticoat turned round, still holding in her hand the big iron spoon with which she had been stirring the pot, and—Well, Theodore, you have guessed by this time, have you not? It was *Lavinia*!

What happened during the next ten minutes is more than I can relate with any pretence at clearness. That I managed by a violent effort to get the door open; that I was beside her on the hearth and kneeling close to her; that I had seized the hand which held the iron spoon, and was pouring out a long-accumulated tale of hopes, fears, despairs—this much indeed I do recall. On her side she listened to me in absolute silence, her face wearing an expression which I had certainly never seen upon it before, one in which there was a shade of something that seemed almost like remorse.

That it really was remorse her first words to me made evident.

‘Oh, John, that letter of mine, that horrid, horrid letter!’ she exclaimed.

‘What letter, my dearest?’ I asked, for indeed in the rapture of this meeting I had almost forgotten any and every previous grievance.

‘What letter? Why, the letter, of course, which I sent to you just before I started for Ireland—the only one of the many letters I wrote which, I believe, ever reached you. Do say that you forgive me.’

That there was both nothing to forgive, and that

I had also forgiven her completely, I promptly proceeded with all a lover's inconsequence to assure her.

'I have so hated myself ever since for sending it,' she went on. 'But I was in a wicked, tormenting frame of mind, I know, just then; moreover, I wanted to keep up that silly little mystery which Miss Talbot told me had been started in Dublin about my movements. It was quite settled then between us that I was to join her, and that she and I were to come off here immediately; and once here I knew that I should be sure to meet you sooner or later. Of course, I could have told you all this in that letter, but, as I say, I was in a tormenting mood, and besides I wanted it to be a surprise. I had a plan for our meeting on the hillside, pretty much as we did to-day. And then—oh! then—everything seemed to happen all at once. Before I had actually reached the Talbots' house in Meath, news arrived of the landing of the French, and it became impossible for us to get across Ireland. Then I wrote to you again—quite, quite, differently! But I suppose that letter never reached you, and the next thing we heard was that you had been taken prisoner.'

'How did you hear that?' I asked.

'It was through Lord Ormond. He reported having spoken to you outside Castlebar. He made certain that you had been taken prisoner by the French, but believed that they would treat you well, because of your being a civilian. This gave us a certain amount of comfort, but within a few days came the worst news. We heard that you had been sent as a hostage to Killala, and next that the French troops had been all withdrawn from there, leaving the rebels in possession of the town. Oh dear, that

was a dreadful time! Everybody seemed to have a fresh tale of horror to tell—a fresh account of the abominations of every sort practised upon prisoners at the mercy of those terrible rebels. Never, never can I tell you half the misery I suffered! And always, too, I had the feeling that my last letter to you must have made you believe that I was utterly heartless and indifferent. But I wasn't, John—indeed, indeed, I wasn't. You do believe me now, don't you? Say that you do!

To the best of my recollection, to all this, Theodore, I answered nothing at all! There are moments when the rush of emotions, of thoughts, seem to choke a man's utterance, and he remains dumb.

That Lavinia understood my silence and took it for what it meant I must conclude. Her confession once made seemed, moreover, to clear the air. Something of the old Lavinia came to life again. Her face as she lifted it to mine took on, I saw, quite another expression—a whimsical, I might almost say a provocative, one.

'Listen, John; listen to me, sir,' she said. 'You will have to be very, very good to me always—remember, *always*—to make up for all this. Do you understand? Will you promise?' And she shook me gently by the lappets of my coat.

This time I did find something to say, but as it was neither very wise nor particularly important I will not trouble you by trying to recall it. Suffice it that another twenty minutes, or possibly longer period, elapsed, the particulars of which I leave to your discreet imagination.

It was broken by a subdued murmur of voices, and

a sound as of someone moving cautiously about in a part of the cottage lying beyond the partition wall.

'It is only Filamena, Miss Talbot's Italian nurse,' Lavinia explained. 'She is taking care of Colonel O'Byrne, who has been put to bed in there.'

'Colonel O'Byrne!' I exclaimed. 'He is in there?'

'Yes. Only Miss Talbot, Filamena, and myself know that he is in this hut. No one else has seen him. As I am of no use, unfortunately, as a nurse, I have been set, as you see, to cook, or rather to stir the pot, for it is Filamena that really does the cooking. This is my kitchen uniform. Does it please your highness?'

'I have never seen one that became you half as much,' I exclaimed, with conviction.

She dropped a curtsey. 'Ladies Sheffield and Davenport might consider it a trifle short,' she replied demurely. Then, with another sudden change of tone: 'Oh, John, shall you ever forget the evening when I was sitting between those two women, and you looked in? How rude, how horribly rude, Lady Davenport was, to be sure! I was rather cruel to you that evening myself, I believe.'

'You were,' I answered, with even more conviction than before.

'Perhaps so, but I couldn't somehow help myself. And you provoked it; you really did. You had in those days a sort of conquering hero air about you that would have provoked anyone in the world to torment you, let alone a born tease and quiz such as I am supposed to be.'

'There has not been much of the conquering hero about me for many a long day!' I replied, rather grimly.

'I know—poor John! We have both of us been through a terribly bad time, but, at least, we have learnt something from it, haven't we? I have, at any rate. We are never going to play tricks on one another, or vex one another again ever, *ever*, are we?'

'Never,' I responded fervently.

There was another prolonged silence after this, which was again broken by the subdued sound of voices coming from the other side of the partition.

'How did he get in here?' I inquired. 'Not by the maze, surely, as I did?'

'No; there is another way, through a sort of tunnel. You should see that great tall Filamena coming out of it! She has to crawl almost on her hands and knees.'

'Her Ana-Capri experiences would not be of much help to her there,' I said, rather maliciously.

'She has told you already about Ana-Capri, has she?' Lavinia answered, laughing. 'Poor Filamena! She is always longing to get back to Italy, only her devotion to Honoria is so great that she can never make up her mind to leave her. She was her foster-mother, and the tie is as strong in Italy, it seems, as in Ireland. The Talbots happened to be at Capri when Honoria was born. I really believe, now that her mother is dead, that she cares more for Filamena than for anyone, except her father, in the world.'

'She is certainly a very remarkable young lady,' I said. 'Tell me about this maze. How did she come to construct it? She couldn't possibly have planted it all?'

'Oh no; the fuchsias have been here for ages.

This hut was Honoria's play-cottage when she was a child. Finding on her return how thick the fuchsias had grown, the idea came to her of cutting a maze through them, so as to be sure that no one could find her in this hut if she wanted to be alone. Hearing from you about Colonel O'Byrne this morning, she at once thought that this was the very place in which to hide him, since no one would ever dream of looking for him here.'

'Quite so,' I answered. 'Only now the question is, how in the name of Fortune is he to get away from here, especially in his present condition of health? I wonder, by the way, how ill he really is.'

'Very ill indeed, I am afraid. Filamena, who is almost as good as a doctor, says that both his lungs are in a terrible state. She does not think that he can live long.'

'If only he could die here quietly at once!' I ejaculated.

'Oh, John, how can you wish anything so dreadful?' she cried. 'And yet—perhaps—I don't know—you may be right. Surely, though, if those people knew that he was dying, they would let him do so in peace.'

'I hope so,' I answered gloomily—'I hope so, my darling. But I have my doubts.'

She clasped her hands. 'If he could but be got back to France! There must be *some* way of getting him there! If there is, Honoria will discover it, I am sure. Hark! There she is.'

There came a discreet tap at the partition wall, and the next minute Miss Talbot appeared round the corner of the hut.

She entered the room with a look of some little

embarrassment, extending her hand to me, which I saluted respectfully with my lips.

'Forgive my disturbing you, but I fear that it is time for Mr. Bunbury to leave,' she said, with some hesitation. 'It is rather a long ride to Castle Byrne, and you, dearest Lavinia, have your dress to change. Two of the officers camping near here are coming to dinner. I thought it safer to invite them, and perhaps—perhaps it would be better if Mr. Bunbury and they did not meet. You could go to the end of the labyrinth, though—that is, if you will promise, dearest Lavinia, not to delay *too* long.'

The first part of this little speech Miss Talbot uttered with a certain amount of formality, but it would appear that as she went on something in my mistress's face enlightened her as to the actual condition of affairs, for she left off upon a lighter note, and it was with an air of suppressed amusement that she stood at the doorway of the hut waving her hand to us as we started.

We did not remain long in sight, for the intricacies of the maze speedily swallowed us up. That the path through its entanglements had not been constructed for two persons to walk abreast is certain, but it is wonderful what difficulties can be overcome if you are only sufficiently determined to surmount them! It may have been due to the hindrances thrust in our way by the fuchsia-bushes, or to some other cause, but by the time we had reached that narrow space of seashore where I had parted from the Italian woman, the sun was already low, one long shaft of yellowish light illuminating the foreground of weed-covered rocks, shining upon the little pier, upon the boats at anchor within its shelter, and

stretching away past the islands in the bay till it lost itself amongst the mists of distance.

'Beautiful!' exclaimed Lavinia, her face lighting enthusiastically.

'Very beautiful,' I responded fervently, though I will not pretend that my eyes, as I uttered the words, were fixed exclusively upon the Atlantic Ocean.

We stood there for a few minutes longer, then moved on together over the slimy rocks, and along that narrow causeway which I have already described to you. The danger of slipping in such a place was so obvious as to make it a mere matter of courtesy that an inexperienced climber's steps should be properly supported—and supported accordingly they were.

It was while we were still here that the same idea, I believe, visited both our minds, though it was Lavinia who gave it utterance.

'Oh, John, how happy we are, and how dreadfully, *dreadfully* unhappy most people in Ireland are this year! It doesn't seem fair, does it?'

It was only too true. Of all the black and tragic years which Ireland's history records, this year—1798—will always, I suppose, stand out as the blackest and the most tragic of them all. Yet for two eminently unimportant individuals—mere wayfarers and accidental sojourners upon its shores—it was, so they then held, and believed that they always would hold, their *annus mirabilis*; the year in which for the first time they had definitely discovered one another; the scene of that discovery being for them no rain-saturated, and now blood-stained region, but, on the contrary, one lit up with adorable lights, and brimming over with all the rosy and ecstatic hues of a veritable Arcadia!

CHAPTER XXIX

THE LAST PHASE

IT was late that evening before I reached Castle Byrne, having, in addition to other causes of delay, once more contrived, you will hardly be surprised to learn, to miss my way in that formless multiplication of bogs which encompasses it. Again I was greeted at the steps by the whole of the hospitable household ; again Owen ran down to the road to meet me ; again I was seized and embraced by Kate as I crossed the threshold. So far, both my arrivals had been alike, but I was not long in discovering that a prodigious change had passed over the scene since the occasion of that first coming of mine. Gone were the Gargantuan feastings which had then so impressed me ; gone equally, or at least disappeared, those vast receptacles for claret and stronger drinks ; gone, too, the boon companions who were apt to empty those receptacles with so marvellous a celerity. Sobriety—for the time being, at any rate—seemed to reign over Castle Byrne. Greatest of all and most salutary was the change in Owen himself. That look of incipient dissipation which had begun to spoil his handsome and still boyish face was all but entirely gone. It was a browner, a more or less weather-beaten, and an infinitely manlier-looking Owen who came down the

steps to meet me. That the campaign in which he had taken part could not exactly be called an illustrious one was indeed true; but perhaps, from a sobering and a steadying point of view, it was not so very much the worse for that. To have to realize that to draw one's sword does not necessarily mean being victorious, even against a poor rabble of 'foreigners' and 'rebels,' is an instructive, if a somewhat startling little piece of experience, worth perhaps, in the long run, a good many cheap and easily-come-by victories.

To turn to my own share in these new developments. I was utterly unprepared, I may tell you, Theodore, for the reception that I met with, and that not so much from Owen as from Kate. Of her sisterly affection I had never been in doubt, but her sisterly admiration was quite another matter, and I cannot flatter myself that I had seen any very marked signs of that upon our last meeting. Now apparently it had sprung suddenly into full bloom! It was as if the dear creature could not possibly say or do enough to express her delight, gratitude, astonishment, admiration, over my really very moderate achievements. Again and again she made me relate to her at full length all my adventures down to the very smallest; listening, suggesting, eking out my recollections when I halted, with a zest and an enthusiasm which nothing seemed to tire.

Even after we had separated for the night she followed me into my bedroom, and settling down in a big chair by the hearth, which sent blazing up the chimney its huge masses of glowing peat, she incited me to tell her more and more, insisting upon an account of everything that I had seen, heard, and done.

So insatiable was the dear girl's desire for every detail that the night had grown old before I could persuade her to retire. As for myself, sleepiness had, I must confess, long before this so descended upon me that I was barely able to keep my eyes open.

Next day no news reached us from Miss Talbot's cottage, not a little to my disappointment. Its chief event was the arrival at Castle Byrne of a certain Sir Galbraith Doherty, no less important a functionary than the High Sheriff of the County. He was a man many years older than Owen Byrne, but had served in the same force of yeomanry, and had, therefore, undergone the same rather humiliating experiences. Unlike Owen he was a warm supporter of the punitive methods of the Government, outrunning it even in his desire to enforce the fullest possible degree of severity. With regard to this matter a somewhat hot little controversy arose at the dinner-table, Owen, Kate, and myself being, all three of us, strongly on the side of clemency; the guest, as I have said, maintaining the other side, and that too with a zest for the more sanguinary measures which impressed me as being little short of disgusting.

It was possibly on account of this lack of agreement that we all separated rather earlier than usual; and still feeling the need of making up my arrears of sleep, I had betaken myself to bed, and had just fallen into a heavy slumber, when I was awakened by Kate's voice whispering to me some communication of which I failed at first to understand the drift. Shaking off my drowsiness with an effort, I caught the words—'Lady Alionora,' and 'dying'—thereby gaining a sufficient explanation as to the cause of Kate's coming.

‘But that can be no great surprise to you, can it?’ I asked, stifling a yawn. ‘Surely you told me only yesterday that her life could not be prolonged beyond a few weeks?’

‘Oh no, it is no surprise; we have been expecting it for a long time back. I should not have disturbed you, John, merely to tell you that, but there is something else, something new and really important. Owen and I have come to the conclusion that her son being so near we ought to give him a chance of sending her some message, just a last word before she died. After Sir Galbraith had gone upstairs last night, Owen and I talked it over, and we decided to send Micky Glynn with a note to Miss Talbot, telling her how matters stood, and asking her to decide whether to inform Colonel O’Byrne or not. We expect him back very soon, and I want you, please, to get up and come downstairs, so that we can talk the whole matter over together.’

‘Very well. Give me ten minutes to shuffle into my clothes, and I will be with you,’ I answered. ‘But how about your other guest? His sympathies are not likely to be on the same side as ours, I take it?’

‘Oh no, no! Why *did* he come here just now! It adds so dreadfully to all our difficulties. We must keep as quiet as we can, so that he may not hear us.’

After a few minutes Kate came hastily back again.

‘Miss Talbot has written to me, John,’ she whispered breathlessly. ‘She says she is sending—I cannot in the least make out why—her nurse, that tall Italian woman. There is evidently something mysterious about the whole matter, for she twice over repeats that Filamena—that is the nurse’s name—is on no account to be seen by any of our

servants; that she must go straight up to Lady Alionora's room the very moment she arrives. Oh, and look; there is a bit of writing across the corner of the letter which I cannot read. Perhaps you can make it out.'

I looked at the writing. It was in Italian, and legible enough. I translated it: *She whom I send you, may not be the same Filamena whom you expect to see.* 'That is quite plain; but what on earth does she mean by it?'

'I know!' Kate exclaimed. 'I see it now quite plainly. Don't you understand, John? It is *he* who is coming, Colonel O'Byrne himself, and not the Italian woman!'

'I believe you are right, Kate,' said I. 'Yes, I really think you are!'

'I'm certain of it. But, oh dear, what shall we do!' she cried. 'If only that weary Sir Galbraith were not here! Should a hint reach him we are lost! You heard how he spoke last night, and if he knew that one of the actual leaders of this unhappy rising was under the roof with him—one, too, whom he would think a thousand times more guilty than any of the French—he would certainly declare it to be his duty to inform the Government, and no remonstrances of Owen's or mine would have the smallest effect.'

'Calm yourself, my dear girl,' I said soothingly—for she was beginning really to grow hysterical—'come along to Owen, and we will see what our united wisdom can evolve.'

With that I tucked her under my arm, and we made our way downstairs through the darkened house. Owen was not far off, and a whispered

consultation ensued. That our expected visitor must, as far as possible, remain invisible was evident. Not only did his safety require this, but it would obviously be far less embarrassing for himself. On this basis, then, our plan of action was soon established. As the person he knew best I was to be at hand in case he should require my services. Unless such services, however, were urgently necessary I was to remain concealed, leaving him to find his own way to the north tower, which, as I think I have already explained, was attainable from the hall by means of a small, almost concealed doorway set in the thickness of the wall.

So it was settled, and long before our visitor arrived everything had been made ready for his reception. It still wanted an hour or two to daylight when I at last heard the sound of wheels coming up the drive. It came to a stop at the foot of the great stone steps. The hall door had been purposely left ajar; I was well out of sight, hidden within a recess, and not a creature save myself was within reach as the only survivor of the direct line of the O'Byrnes entered and stood for the last time under the roof of his fathers.

He remained for a minute or two upon the threshold. In the dim light of a pair of candles burning in the hall I saw his tall figure distinctly, and not even the grotesqueness of his disguise could entirely conceal the dignity of his bearing. A long woollen cloak hung straight down from his shoulders almost to the ground, and below this was visible a black skirt. He seemed at first considerably puzzled by the solitude in which he found himself. Suddenly he caught sight of the small open door leading to

the north wing, and he at once went quickly towards it. Another moment and I could hear his steps passing slowly and heavily—the steps of a very sick man—round and round the steep little winding staircase which led to Lady Alionora's tower.

I waited for another minute to make sure that all was clear, then emerged cautiously, and went to shut the tower door. Hardly had I done so, when, hearing stealthy footsteps, I turned and saw Owen Byrne creeping down the front stairs like some unwontedly substantial ghost. We met at their foot, and stayed together to watch; listening, and occasionally talking to one another in whispers. Not a sound of any kind reached us. Even the ever-complaining Atlantic seemed that night to be silent!

CHAPTER XXX

'A SICK LADY'

THREE quarters of an hour and more had passed, when again we heard the heavy labouring footsteps descending the spiral stairs. Like a pair of guilty conspirators, Owen and myself promptly darted apart, I ascending the great stairway, while he went down the passage which led to the gun-room at the back of the hall. I had reached the second flight of steps when I was arrested by Kate's voice calling to me in an eager whisper to come to her. Obeying, I found her at the door of her own bedroom, into which she beckoned me, and as soon as I had entered she carefully closed the door behind me.

She then proceeded to inform me that another letter had reached her from Miss Talbot, sent by special messenger, and containing the details of an entirely new plan for Colonel O'Byrne's escape.

'You can read it yourself, John,' she added breathlessly, 'but it will save time if I tell you about it, since part of it needs explanation. You remember that big old travelling coach, with a sort of folding-bed inside it, and a sword-case, and a dicky behind, that I showed you when you were here last—the one which Owen's grandfather used upon his journeys, and in which he twice visited Rome?'

'I remember it perfectly,' said I. 'But how does the coach come into Miss Talbot's plan?'

'It seems that she also knows of it,' answered Kate, 'and as it is exactly suited for an invalid, her idea is that it would be safer if Colonel O'Byrne were sent in it quite openly, with a letter of explanation from Owen, in case of meeting any of the military, saying that we were sending a sick relative to the coast, and begging that all assistance possible might be rendered to her—to *her*, John! You see, don't you?—for, of course, it is in his present disguise that Colonel O'Byrne is to travel.'

'Yes, I see that perfectly well,' I answered; 'and the scheme does Miss Talbot great credit. In one respect, though, I think that it might be even improved upon.'

'How so, John?' she asked eagerly.

'Why,' I replied, 'in case any officious member of the force examines the coach, might he not be less curious concerning its occupant if Owen's letter of explanation were countersigned by someone known to be high up in the favour of the Government?'

'Perhaps it might,' Kate answered with a slight frown. 'But surely Owen is in favour—he is known to be entirely loyal?'

'No doubt; he has proved his loyalty with his sword. Let me remind you, though, of the discussion we had with your guest last evening after dinner. He may have carried to bed with him some doubts as to our entire sympathy with Government methods. Still, as he and Owen have served together, if Owen were to approach him tactfully it seems to me that he might be persuaded to

strengthen Owen's letter with at least the addition of his distinguished name.'

'Bravo, John!' she cried, clapping her hands softly. 'Your suggestion is really splendid, and I will send Owen up to Sir Galbraith at once.' With that she was on the point of hurrying from the room, but at the door paused and came back to me. 'There is one other thing that I had almost forgotten,' she said. 'Miss Talbot, as you will see from her letter, considers it indispensable that someone should accompany Colonel O'Byrne, since were he obliged to speak his voice would betray him at once. You see that, John, don't you?'

'Certainly,' I answered. 'And which of us does Miss Talbot suggest should go?'

'She thinks that *you* should do so—but only as far as Westport,' Kate added hurriedly. 'She can arrange for a friend of hers to meet you there, she says, and take charge of Colonel O'Byrne to Galway, where he will remain in hiding until a vessel is ready to convey him to France. What do you say, John?'—clasping my arm with her hands, and looking pleadingly into my face.

'What can I say?' I answered, laughing, 'except that I am bound to obey whatever you and Miss Talbot desire.'

'Thank you, John, oh, thank you!' she cried. 'And now I will tell you a further little plan of my own. It is to persuade your Lavinia to come here. I feel sure that she will agree to do so, and you will, therefore, find her here very probably upon your return from Westport. What do you say to that?'

So saying, and without giving me any time to reply, Kate tossed Miss Talbot's letter to me, and hastened

from the room. I picked it up, but whether I read it with any profound attention just then is more than I can swear to. I mastered its general meaning, however, and put it into my pocket in case of any further need of reference. Then, after waiting a little longer, I once more descended the staircase.

I had reached the bottom of it, and was upon the point of entering a narrow passage which led to the back of the house, when I perceived that the door at its end was slightly ajar. Being curious to know whether Colonel O'Byrne was still in the hall, I paused to glance through the opening, and thereby became the witness of a somewhat singular proceeding, one of which I entirely failed at first to penetrate the meaning.

Almost in the centre of the hall, across which the dawn was now throwing faint streaks of light, stood Colonel O'Byrne, the heavy folds of his dark cloak reaching nearly to the ground, its hood pulled forward so as almost to conceal his face. Opposite to him stood Owen, his coat off, his shirt gleaming in the imperfect light, and two fingers of his right hand laid significantly across his left breast. A little nearer to the front door and facing Owen stood a third person, whom, rather to my surprise, I presently perceived to be none other than Micky Glynn.

Apparently it was for his benefit that Owen was going through his curious little bit of pantomime, for while doing it he looked steadily at Micky, tapping his fingers the while upon his breast; Micky in return watching his master's proceedings attentively, his head thrust forward, his eyes narrowed, his ugly, monkey-like face screwed into a peculiar grin.

Doubtless he must already have learnt from Owen the purport of this dumb show, but while I was watching them not a word was spoken by anyone, nor did Colonel O'Byrne so much as move. The whole incident passed, in fact, so rapidly that I had barely caught a glimpse of it before the performance came to an end. Colonel O'Byrne turned and, with an air of exhaustion, dropped into the nearest chair. Owen put on his coat, and crossing the room, bent to speak to his visitor; while Micky Glynn, with a pull to his forelock, departed hastily through the front door.

Half an hour later I was crossing the hall to take my seat upon the coach, Kate following me, and urging me again and again to make sure that Owen's letter and Sir Galbraith's note of recommendation on behalf of the 'sick lady' were safely bestowed upon my person; begging me also to eat and drink, and, above all, to muffle myself against the cold, until at last I fairly fled from her ministrations, and took my seat beside Micky Glynn upon the box of the coach. Colonel O'Byrne was already inside, the blinds being drawn close upon the windows nearest to him. Owen shut the door with a bang. Kate waved one more good-bye from the steps. Micky touched up the horses with his whip, and we started.

For the length of the approach to the house, we went at a walking pace, but once upon the road to Newport, Glynn urged the horses into a steady trot, causing the clumsy vehicle to jolt and lurch violently in the deep ruts of the road. Although now fully daylight, the air remained chilly, the sky being overcast with leaden clouds which presaged rain before long. In such circumstances, with the coach

labouring heavily beneath us, and on either hand nothing to be seen except the usual wide expanses of bog, the scene and circumstances were not precisely cheerful. My own thoughts, however, were happily in a sufficiently jocund and dancing mood to need no external stimulus to keep them cheerful, and I looked round at the lugubrious landscape with a complacency which it had certainly never previously inspired.

By seven o'clock the sky had begun to clear, and the sun was endeavouring to shine. A few thatched cabins were to be seen here and there, their inhabitants loitering about at the doorways. In the far distance the mountains of Iar Connaght—Conmacne-mara I had found the region called in a chart of Owen's which I happened to turn over—showed above the nearer foothills. The road was getting steep, and feeling cramped upon the box, I got down and walked beside the coach to the top of the slope. As I was mounting again I noticed upon the seat of the box beside Glynn a silver-mounted pistol which I at once recognized as one of a pair belonging to his master. It struck me as odd that this weapon should have been entrusted to such hands as Micky's, so, after waiting for a few minutes, I turned to him.

'You have arms, I see?' I said.

'Arms is it?' he replied stolidly. 'Would it be those I am driving with, you would be meaning?'

'No, I mean that pistol upon the seat beside you. It belongs to Sir Owen. How did it get here?'

He glanced at me with that peculiar expression of hostility with which he has always honoured me since our first acquaintance.

'Och *that!*' he said, and no more.

'What brings it here?' I persisted.

'Maybe someone has been after leaving it convenient,' he answered, with a humorous twist of the mouth.

'That someone I presume being yourself?' said I.

'Maybe, and maybe not.'

'Don't trifle with me, Glynn. What I wish to know is what you are about to do with it?'

'And how can I tell what I'll be after doing with it,' he answered. 'Maybe 'twould be a robber or a tinker I'd be firing at, or maybe just a Redcoat. Anyhow, there it is, and that's the whole of it,' he added, with a sudden relapse into sullenness.

Naturally I was not particularly satisfied with this explanation, but, seeing that I could get nothing more from him, I questioned Glynn no further. Happily an incident occurred before long which helped me to a fuller enlightenment.

We had passed through Newport, without other molestation than that of a crowd of ragamuffins who followed us for some distance, and had reached a point about a mile beyond that town, when, round a bend in the road, there appeared an officer attended by two troopers. At sight of these Glynn became suddenly excited, and had I not restrained him would have flogged the horses into a gallop.

The officer stopped us, and, with a good deal of civility, begged to know where we were going. I answered that we were conveying a 'sick lady,' a relative of Sir Owen Byrne, to Westport; to which he replied that he had had the pleasure of making Owen's acquaintance during the recent operations, and inquired further whether we had come from

Castle Byrne. I told him that we had done so, presented my credentials, and, by way of increasing his confidence, added that Lady Byrne was my sister; at which he bowed and asked whether I were not an Englishman. I replied that I was, mentioning my name and Sir Peter's; whereupon he asked if I had been in Ireland for any considerable time, and when I had said six or seven weeks—

'Quite long enough to have had enough of it, I'll warrant, Mr. Bunbury,' he retorted with a laugh.

I had observed that, while he spoke, he kept examining the coach rather curiously, and presently—

—'That is a singular-looking conveyance of yours,' he said. 'I cannot remember ever having seen anything like it before.'

'It is my own first experience of such a vehicle,' I answered, 'and I assure you I hope it may be my last. Can you believe that a relation of Sir Owen's twice journeyed in it to Rome?'

'Amazing!' cried he, then continued with another laugh: 'Even as far as to Westport you will have had enough of it, I expect, and I am afraid Madame also. By the way, as a mere formality, I must ask permission to see her for a moment.'

'Certainly,' I replied, and was about to get down; but he begged me not to take the trouble, and, dismounting, went round to the back of the coach.

I sat still, enduring such torments of suspense as you, Theodore, can well imagine. Glynn, too, sat motionless in a crouching attitude, his face distorted with an agonized expression, at the same time tightly clutching, I noticed, the silver-mounted pistol in his right hand. I heard the coach-door

open; then it was softly closed again, and the next moment the officer was remounting his charger.

'I trust I have not disturbed the lady or caused her any distress,' he said civilly. 'It was a mere formality—a necessary one, as you will understand. She appears to be very ill.'

'Dying, I am afraid,' I replied in a low voice; upon which he expressed a proper amount of sympathy, apologized again for detaining us, and wished us a safe journey. Then, when we had exchanged all the usual courtesies, he rode away.

Anxious to ascertain what effect this sudden visitation might have had upon our invalid, I climbed down from the box, went round to the front of the coach, and opened the door. Within, upon the folding-bed, lay Colonel O'Byrne, a shawl over his feet, and the hood of the cloak drawn closely about his face. At sight of the door once more opening he started up, resting on his left elbow, his right hand grasping at something in his breast—something that glittered. Perceiving who it was, he fell back on the pillow with a smile, and answered my few inquiries with his usual dignified calm. He was quite comfortable, he assured me; did not feel the journey unendurably wearisome, and had not been at all disturbed by the visit of the officer. I told him that in a few hours we should reach Westport, whereupon he again smiled. I closed the door, and returned to my place on the box.

For some time absolute silence was preserved between myself and my neighbour. Finally, feeling a little curious to hear what further replies he would make to my inquiries, I turned again to Glynn.

'Colonel O'Byrne has a pistol also, I see,' I said.

He glanced at me for a moment. 'Has he so!' he replied.

'Yes, another silver-mounted pistol, the fellow of the one you possess. Sir Owen must have given it to him.'

'Maybe,' he retorted. 'Maybe he did indade.'

'You must know perfectly well that he did,' I said, not a little impatiently. 'What instructions did Sir Owen give you when he made over one of the pistols to you?'

'Instructions is it? That I was to take the best of care of it, bedad.'

'That was what he was telling you, I suppose, when you were watching him this morning in the hall?'

At that Glynn turned towards me with a sudden jump. 'And what would I be doing in the hall?' he asked quickly.

'That is what I wish to know. All I know is that you were certainly there, since I saw you.'

'Then if you saw me, you know all about it, and that's all there is of it.' With this he broke into loud tongue-clickings to the horses, by way, I presume, of intimation that no further information was to be extracted from him.

This truculence upon his part was quite of a piece with all my previous acquaintanceship with Master Glynn. From our first meeting he had always stood out before me as the only Irishman of any class or degree I had ever met who possessed thoroughly unpleasant manners. How far his objections to me as an Englishman were responsible for this incivility I could not tell, but as

far as I could gather, if rather more markedly uncivil towards me, his manners were almost equally unpleasing towards the rest of the world. On the other hand, there was a grim determination, a sort of bull-dog tenacity about the rascal, which was at least equally unusual, and which I could well believe might be of considerable value amongst a community where mental flaccidity was a rather marked characteristic. Had some of our sturdier Saxon blood got mixed in his case with the Celtic variety of that fluid? I wondered. Certainly he very much more resembled some 'dour' specimen of Lowland Scot such as one comes across on the Scottish border-counties, than the usual friendly easy-going Irishman of these regions. For any such investigations into the more intricate details of racial physiology, there was, however, obviously just then no time. As for the pistol problem, I was able to make that out for myself fortunately without Master Glynn's assistance. Plainly Colonel O'Byrne had approached Owen, as he had previously approached myself, for the means of making certain that whatever happened, a felon's death should not be his. As a kinsman no less than a soldier Owen had evidently responded to that wish, and between them they had worked out a further plan, so that, in case of failure on his own part, Glynn would be at hand with a second shot, the marked doggedness of the fellow's disposition making him an obviously suitable subject for so grim an office.

Meanwhile we had been making fair progress. The more hazardous part of the road lay behind us, and there seemed to be little probability, therefore, that either pistol would be called upon to

perform its office. We were now again approaching the coast, the edges of a number of islands of various shapes becoming visible at the mouth of the bay. In this direction the most striking object was a high, conical-shaped mountain, which stood out almost by itself against the edge of the sea-line. I remembered that I had already made its acquaintance from a long distance, having looked down at it from the high ground on my way from Castlebar to Killala, and had been then told that it was held in peculiar veneration by the local peasantry as having been the spot from which St. Patrick had preached Christianity to this part of Ireland, and was still in consequence the scene of yearly pilgrimages in his honour.

Yet another half-hour and we began to approach the outskirts of Westport, a small town or village of more pretensions and less squalid aspect than any that I had yet seen in this part of the country. A row of substantial-looking warehouses in the distance gave promise of a certain amount of commerce and prosperity; we passed a large gateway a little further on which opened into the park of some local magnate; while the inn before which we presently drew up, if not precisely inviting, looked more possible as a place of entertainment than any of those that I had previously noticed.

Having been provided by Kate with food sufficient for a small army, there was fortunately no need for us to apply elsewhere for provisions. The folding-bed upon which Colonel O'Byrne lay was probably more luxurious also than anything he was likely to find in an inn. The advisability of pressing on to Galway as rapidly as possible was present, more-

over, to all our minds. Upon inquiry it turned out that Miss Talbot's representative had already arrived. A pair of post-horses were also in readiness. There was, therefore, fortunately, no occasion for any further delay.

CHAPTER XXXI

FAREWELL

WHILE the Castle Byrne horses were being unharnessed, and before the post-horses that were being supplied were got in, the coach was drawn a little to one side under the shelter of some trees, out of reach of curious eyes. I chanced to be crossing the road a little later, whereupon Colonel O'Byrne perceiving me, beckoned to me to come over to the far side of the coach, upon which side he was then lying.

I had been growing not a little uneasy over the impossibility of calling in a barber, having noticed as the light grew stronger an increasingly dusky shade over our invalid 'lady's' lips and chin—a hue beyond what could be conceived as possible in even the swarthiest of European women. Luckily Micky Glynn, amongst his other unlooked-for accomplishments, proved to be acquainted with the use of a razor. Upon the excuse of arranging something in the interior of the coach, he had got inside, and, carefully closing up the curtains, had, with a borrowed instrument, operated with such success that by the aid of a silk scarf provided by Kate, which crossed the top of a high-crowned cap and formed a bow-knot under the chin, the invalid's face—if somewhat austere and strong-featured for an ideally

feminine type—could still, in the seclusion of the coach, fairly pass muster.

It was in silence that Colonel O'Byrne extended his hand to me as I approached, and it was in equal silence that I clasped his in return. Still without speaking he drew from the smallest finger of his other hand a ring, which he held out to me. It was, as I quickly saw, an antique, a deeply-cut intaglio of great beauty, engraved in an emerald of quite exceptional size and depth of colour. How he had contrived to save anything so valuable from the miscreants who had stripped him of all his other possessions filled me with astonishment, but I did not interrupt what he was about to say by stopping to inquire.

'If upon your return you will present this to your sister, Lady Byrne, and will ask her to accept it from the hands of her poor protégé, you will greatly oblige me,' he said, his deep voice rendered deeper than usual by the difficulty of breathing. 'It is, as you will perceive, a lady's ring, and seeing that it belonged to the being dearest to me of all beings in the world, I should be loth that it became the prey of some vile creature, or even went down with me into the Atlantic—the bourne which will probably be mine if, thanks to you, I escape from my official butchers.'

I was about to say something, but he held up his hand to arrest me.

'If you will accept my little commission, and will persuade your sister to do me this small favour, that is all I ask,' he added quickly. 'She will not, I think, refuse the last request of one who, when all is said, is at least some sort of kinsman of her husband.'

Feeling it to be the only way to please him, I expressed my acceptance of his commission in the briefest possible words, putting away the ring, as I did so, into a safe place in my waistcoat pocket.

Almost before our little transaction was completed it seemed as if the thoughts of the sick man had wandered away from it to other matters, for his eyes had by this time fixed themselves with a peculiar intentness upon a long ridge of rock which rose at some distance away to the south-east.

‘That little cleft, which you see below the ridge yonder, reminds me of another cleft very like it where I used to play myself when I was a child,’ he observed in rather a dreamy tone of voice. ‘My early childhood was not spent, you must know, at Castle Byrne, but in a cabin amongst the Curraun mountains, belonging to my foster-mother, Katty O’Flaherty, and her husband. They were of the fine old fighting clan of the O’Flahertys, her husband being, I believe, the last direct descendant of Rhoderick-ne-doe O’Flaherty—Sir Rhoderick, as in some crazy fit of reconciliation he had been created by the Government of his day. Despite this descent of theirs, they were nothing but peasants, ignorant of even a word of English—indeed, my own attempts in that tongue were at first mere struggles to render the Irish into its equivalent. Irish and nothing else was all I spoke up to the age of eight, when I was carried away kicking and yelling from Katty, and made over to the indifferent care of servants, or to the occasional, and to me very formidable, supervision of my mother.’

He dropped his eyes from the ridge, and let them linger for a while along the line of landscape visible

above the roofs of the houses of the village street; then turned them again to me.

‘A man as near to the brink of things as I am, Mr. Bunbury, comes to see life from an oddly different standpoint from the usual one. The things that are nearest to him grow dimmer and dimmer till they become almost invisible. It is the two extremes of life—the long past days—his own or his country’s—and the still unborn ones, that become really important, and really present to his thoughts. Lying here with no preoccupations to distract me, this Ireland of 1798, from which we have all of us been more or less suffering, seems to have all but passed away from my mind. It is those old days, the days which I spent with Katty O’Flaherty and her brood in their cabin amidst the Currauns, and the as yet unborn ones, the days and years of that century upon whose brink we stand—those are the two extremes that are the most vivid by far just now to my eyes.’

He paused. Then, with sudden vehemence—

‘If I could see a few hopeful signs for this country in those coming years, I should die a very much happier man. Inveterate foe of British rule as I am, I could accept even that if I could see any promise for the future under it. But I cannot! I cannot even pretend to do so. On the contrary, every succeeding decade seems to me to foreshadow a state of affairs ever worse and worse; greater and greater folly, grosser and grosser mismanagement. If it were even a rule of strong and energetic tyranny—brutal, but effective—I could feel more hopeful, but it is not even that. Weakness, weakness! Weak oppression, alternating with even

weaker concession; backwards and forwards, up and down; no attempt at understanding; no foresight; nothing.'

He paused again, then turned his eyes upon me with a peculiar intensity.

'Have you realized—have you ever thought out what would have happened had that astonishing first success of ours at Castlebar been followed by supports from France, as it ought to have been? Have you reflected what a real, a permanent French success would have meant for Ireland?' he asked.

'Well no, I cannot say I have,' I answered. 'I must confess that I have never even thought of such an event as a serious possibility.'

'And yet it was one!' he retorted quickly. 'A possibility? It was a great deal more than that. It was a certainty, had one tithe of the money or energy lavished upon other campaigns been given here to Ireland. Think what was accomplished by a mere handful of men—you saw it yourself at Castlebar, so cannot question the facts! If one thousand men—nay, by that time it was a bare seven hundred and sixty—achieved so much, what would twenty or thirty thousand men, tried veterans of the Republic, have done?'

—He answered his own question without waiting for me to do so.

—'They would have swept Lord Cornwallis and his ill-disciplined hirelings into the sea!'

'Even so, even admitting this—and I must own that it was at least possible—what then?' I inquired. 'What would have happened afterwards?'

'Afterwards? How can you ask?' he exclaimed.

'It would have meant an entirely new era—a positive regeneration for this country. Think, from the merely military point of view, of all the good material run to waste here. You saw something of that at Killala, and must have noted the improvement brought about by a very slight experience of discipline? Take those men who fought there so gallantly, so hopelessly, away from their bogs; drill them; teach them to shoot; put them under proper direction, and they would equal if not excel the best troops in Europe.'

'And you think they would appreciate that experience?' I inquired dubiously.

'I do not say whether they would or would not. Very likely not—at all events in the first instance. Compared to their present lot—sodden, miserable, sunk in poverty, in ignorance, in apathy—it would have been for them, I maintain, a new birth, a positive reincarnation. When they returned—such of them, you will say, as lived to return—they would at least know the world as it really is; not as fools, visionaries, and priests have pictured it to them. For them and for their sons it would be impossible ever again to sink down into the old ruts. Their eyes would be opened. They would no longer be dumb driven cattle, but *men*—men with all a man's heritage; his liberty, his knowledge, his magnificent and illimitable chances.'

'And you seriously believe that Ireland would have become a permanent portion of the French Republic?' I inquired still incredulously.

He hesitated a little. 'Permanent is a big word, Mr. Bunbury,' he replied slowly. 'Not being myself a Frenchman I naturally look at these matters from

a slightly different standpoint to that of my brothers in arms. To them there could be but one answer to your question. To them belief in the permanent supremacy of France—in her destiny as the fixed and final arbitress of Europe—has become a matter of course. It began to be so with the first successes under Dumourier, and every fresh victory, every new region annexed or united, has simply added certainty to that conviction. To me I must confess that this seems to be a somewhat exaggerated belief, grown out of a success so astonishing, so unprecedented, that it might well induce a somewhat heady and intoxicated way of estimating the future. Looking along the course of history, so far as I have been able to do so, I seem to see that other countries, other races, have had the same conviction, yet that after a time circumstances have forced them to relinquish it, and to fall back again within their old limits. Apparently Destiny, Fate—whatever we may agree to call it—does not intend that such supreme dominion should be the lot—at all events permanently—of any one race or nation rather than another. All this at the present time is, however, you will allow me to observe, a merely academic question. France is just now in the saddle, in a sense in which no other country has been for centuries past. Moreover, and apart altogether from this side of the matter, there is another, and to me a highly important point to be considered, Mr. Bunbury. Admitting that such an annexation to France as we have been speaking of would have been for Ireland but a temporary phase; that sooner or later, when peace came, she would have been restored to her original owner, even so, think of the vast, the

unspeakable difference that it would have made in her status; think of the advantage that would have been conferred upon her by such an act of separation and by such another act of reunion. It is the curse, the utterly intolerable curse and insult of that word "rebel," the brand as of a felon—that brand under which I myself writhe to-day—which constitutes for Irishmen the real bitterness, the real wrong and opprobrium of the situation. Had General Buonaparte followed up Humbert's successes; had he insisted upon the Directory despatching fresh troops—a lack of foresight which, mark my words, he will one day bitterly rue—not only would France have inflicted upon England the heaviest blow that has been inflicted upon her by any foe; not only would she have secured a *point d'appui* which in the coming years would have been invaluable, enabling her to attack her enemy at any moment upon two sides; not only all this, but—a vital matter for Irishmen, if for Frenchmen only incidental—she would have stood out for all time as the benefactor, the regenerator of this country. Whenever—and I admit that sooner or later it seems probable—Ireland was reunited to her neighbour, she would have taken her rightful place; she would have been received no longer as the rebel, but the friend—much as Genoa was received the other day by Italy. Henceforward she would have counted, as she has assuredly every right to count, as the equal in the British circle.'

His eyes shone with a gleam which seemed to make them glow within their hollow sockets. He lay back, looking straight before him. Plainly it was not what was there that he saw, but something which might

have been, something which in his opinion would have been, had evil Chance not interfered to destroy those hopes with which he had set out so confidently.

For my part I remained silent. Right or wrong, these convictions of his were obviously far too deeply rooted to be disturbed by me or any other man. They were no mere phase evidently, but the very centre of his life; bone of his bone, and breath of his breath; closer and more present to him than even his own broken health, his own ruined fortunes or ambition.

Meanwhile the preparations for the continuance of his journey had been all but completed. The post-horses had been brought out, and the postillion stood whip in hand ready to mount. Miss Talbot's representative—a red-haired young man with a friendly, rather sheepish face—was hovering close at hand, waiting respectfully for the interview between Colonel O'Byrne and myself to come to an end. Micky Glynn, too, stood by, eyeing me with his accustomed hostility, and evidently regarding me as responsible for the delay. Beyond these two a little circle of the village people had collected together, and were staring at us with open-eyed astonishment. A sense of something unusual seemed to pervade the air. With the exception of Glynn and myself, no one knew anything positively with regard to our traveller, yet there was evidently a suspicion of something important, something mysterious being afoot. Colonel O'Byrne himself appeared alone to be entirely unconscious of all this. He was clearly disinclined to part with me, and thereby to break through the thread of those thoughts and reminiscences which had so evidently engrossed him.

'It must seem odd, perhaps even ridiculous, to a

man like you, who looks at life from a practical point of view, that one who is, after all, no boy, and who has lived in the current of great events, should still hanker so persistently after these poor little potato ridges, these stretches of brown bog, and stony incorrigible hillsides,' he said, glancing up again at the landscape beyond the houses. 'I can perceive myself that it is not entirely reasonable—that there is something wayward and vagrant about it. Nevertheless, so it is. Were my health to be miraculously restored to me to-morrow, I should feel about it, I believe, just as I do to-day. It is, I suppose, what one calls instinctive, something apart from one's own volition, possibly antenatal therefore, and grown up in one's blood through a dozen bygone generations. It really seems as if this island of ours—blighted from the start, actually *before* the start, before man set foot on it—defrauded by Nature herself of those advantages in which its neighbour is so rich—it seems as if it had been endowed to make amends with a double portion of that capacity for inspiring affection which is possessed, I suppose, to a greater or less extent by every country over its own sons and daughters. So at least I have always explained the matter to myself. It clutches, grips and draws one, as a child is drawn to its mother, as I was myself drawn to Katty O'Flaherty that day I was being dragged away from her, as I told you, amongst the Currauns.'

He smiled a little, lifted his head, and as he did so, he glanced down over the immediate foreground. Then for the first time he became aware of the circle which stood awaiting him, and a look of slight embarrassment crossed his face.

'I have been very garrulous to-day, Mr. Bunbury,' he said in a tone of some apology. 'I am not often overtaken in that way. Your companionship—possibly even your friendly opposition—has stimulated me to talk. I am delaying, I see, your return to Castle Byrne, and others also are waiting for me. We must part, and finally. Even were my condition a very different one from what it is, the chances of our meeting again would, I expect, be small, nor perhaps is it wholly to be desired. Gratitude,' he went on—and again his deep-set eyes were fixed upon me with a look of peculiar intentness—'gratitude is a miserably poor word, and I will not insult you by using it. You have rescued me from what is to me, you know, immeasurably worse than death. I owe you, not my life, which just now is a poor thing, but my honour, which is to me, at all events, something very much greater. Farewell!'

We clasped hands. I stood back. The postillion mounted and gathered up the reins. Micky Glynn and Miss Talbot's young man clambered together upon the box. The big lumbering vehicle started in its usual noisy, rattling fashion, crunching against the stones on its way, and leaving deep ruts behind it as it progressed down the road. Watching it as it rolled and swayed clumsily from side to side, I caught my last glimpse of the dark head lying back amongst the white draperies as the coach turned the corner of the village street, before disappearing almost immediately afterwards along the road to Galway.

THE END

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