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THE HERMIT OF THE ROCK. A TALE OF CASHEL.

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CHAPTER V.—MARY HENNESSY HAS A VISIT AND BRYAN ANOTHER.

It was drawing towards Christmas, that is to say about the middle of December, when four gentlemen sat together over their wine in the comfortable dining-room of an old-fashioned house in Friar street, in the good city of Cashel.

Such was the venerable gentleman who occupied the head of Dr. Hennessy's table that day, a privilege everywhere accorded to him, and, indeed, to Irish parish priests generally, amongst their own parishioners of the middle class, especially where the guests are but few and all of the same circle, as was the case on that occasion.

'For my part,' said the host, 'I only wonder there aren't more of the landlords shot. Upon my word and honor I do! and I think the 'Tups,' bloody and all as they are, are not half so bad as people make them out—if they were, do you think Will Gartland would have died in his bed?—or—others, we know have escaped so long, with so many curses hanging over them like the sword of Damocles—ready to fall at any moment?'

'Well, I don't know,' said Moran, significantly; 'what or who you may consider in danger, Doctor, but I really do believe there's some one in danger not many miles from here. Dean, you do me more or less than justice—I could not, if I would, fix my mind on my pros and cons in any purely professional matter, where the feast of reason and the flow of soul are both at my command. The fact is, I have been in low spirits all day, and cannot, for the life of me, shake off a depression that is altogether unusual with me.'

Mary Hennessy entered, followed by Bella, both girls strangely excited, as they threw an eager, searching glance around the room. 'He is not here, then,' said Mary, pale as death, 'I told you so, Bella—I told you that was nothing earthly.'

'Did he not speak?' 'Speak, Mr. Moran! no, indeed, he did not.' 'Mr. Hennessy burst into a loud laugh. 'Of course he did not—I know well it was a shadow you saw. One of those dim, uncertain shadows, which are only seen by fire-light. Ha, ha, ha! One of the poets—Cowper, I think, describes them most graphically;—and he recited, with theatrical emphasis, those lines from 'The Task':

faun have concealed one from the other. The Dean proposed that they should adjourn to the drawing-room with the ladies, a motion which was eagerly adopted. Moran drew Mary's arm under his, and Hennessy, bowing with mock ceremony to Bella, asked with a dandified lip if he might be allowed the unparalleled honor of escorting her up stairs.

'Why, Mary, what's the matter with you?' cried her brother; Moran, almost as pale as herself, fixed his eyes on her with anxious scrutiny, but said nothing—'who are you looking for?'

stingy at times, and as cross as an old cat, saving your presence, sir! 'Pooh, pooh, man; never mind Mrs. Dwyer—when she's out of humor, laugh her into it and as to the stings, he laughed good-naturedly, 'we can easily manage that. Be sure you come, now, before you leave the neighborhood, for I want to bear some of the old airs that no one in Tipperary can play like you.'

It was not homeward the Dean turned his horse's head; following Friar street a little farther, he turned off in the direction of the Rock-gate, and rode slowly along carefully noting the cabins on either side, till at last, seeming to have found the one he wanted, he stopped at the door and without alighting, knocked several times with the butt end of his whip. No sound came from within, no light was seen to glimmer in the miserable hut. All was dark and silent as the grave.