

next was to fire: "dead men tell no tales."

He stopped!

"Who's that?"

"Who's that? What a hurry you're in! Wasn't I to meet you on the road? and 'tis hunting you I am."

Quirk was now reassured. It was the decreed companion.

They arrived at the court-yard. Sure enough a light steals through a window, looking towards the south. A ladder lies by the wall. All things have been arranged with diabolical accuracy. It looks like doom.

The house dog commences to bark, and from a bark commences a dismal howl—that cry so like the "keene" of a mute beast, who wants to wail out his sorrow by a grave.

"Catch that dog and choke him, or I'll fire!"

"Hush! do you want to send for the Peelers?"

The dog, somehow, seems to get careless. The ladder is laid to the wall beside the window. Steadily the murderer mounts, step by step. He thinks, in spite of himself, of the many men he saw ascending the steps of the gallows. He thinks of his uncle in the pauper's garb; and the cabin in ruins; and the family scattered over the world. Death is trodden out of view.

At last he has reached his vantage ground. All is still. He looks in at the window and plainly sees the bed and its occupier. Giffard D'Alton is on his left side. His head is turned somewhat downward and towards his pillow. The assassin has a plain and perfect mark, as well as a perfect aim! He collects himself for the deadly assault, and stands like a marble pillar. He seems to move the piece by hair-breaths. The rifle went off, but the ball glanced off the eave of the house.

At the moment of firing, a shot is heard. Quirk is struck by a ball from some one nearly in front of him, as he stood turned half round on the ladder; and he dropped to the ground a lifeless corpse!

Giffard D'Alton's hour had not yet come!

One second after the fall of the unfortunate man his companion appeared by his side; but only to snatch the rifle

from the stiffening grasp of Quirk, and then to take the ladder quietly from the window, and lay it flat on the opposite side of the yard. The man was then off in the thick darkness.

Having secreted the rifle, the same fellow made his way to the "right-hand man" and gave him the full particulars of the failure.

"'Tis no failure after all," replied the able coadjutor of Mr. Charles Baring. "We'll hang the man that killed our brother! We will!"

In half-an-hour afterwards the police were at the Crag, and in possession of the dead body. Quirk was well known to them; but why he came there, or who fired the fatal shot was a mystery.

CHAPTER XXI.

HOW THE POLICE DISCUSSED THE DEATH OF QUIRK—THE WITCHES OF THE GLEN ONCE MORE.

THE morning broke upon the whole country-side in a state of feverish excitement. As we have said the murdered man was well known to the police, and not at all of unblemished character. What brought him to Mr. Giffard D'Alton's house? Why did he seek access to D'Alton's yard; and why was he shot down on the premises? These were all questions which could only be answered by conjecture. But one thing was clear—a foul deed had been done, and justice should energetically pursue the assassin.

We may say, without disparaging the officials of the day, that the "energy" was sometimes stimulated by motives hardly akin to justice, and that many an honest man suffered by such zeal. "We have obtained five-and-twenty convictions," might be the boast of a Crown Solicitor or even of Mr. Attorney-General himself; and it would really appear that the administration, and even the bench, from time to time, measured the success of justice by the number found "guilty" more than by the merits of their trials; and every one who knows the history of the last half century is aware that hundreds fell victims to the activity which pursued its singular ends by questionable means—and enjoyed the rewards of public servants while they were a persecution and a plague.