

and everybody, of which a probability existed that they might reach. There never was an Irish fair without its pigs, and so once in the year, wherever the porcine crew crowded from, there were more pigs in the town of Kilshane than, we believe, could be assembled in the streets of any other town in Ireland. None of the fair goers seemed to be without an individual of the swinish multitude as an accompaniment, and some enjoyed the luxury of a dozen. This "once in the year" was always a great day in the little mountain mart, for all the days in the year it fell upon Christmas-eve. Everybody came down from the declivity of the hills around, for many a mile, to purchase or sell, and prepare for the festival of the morrow, in honor of the babe of Bethlehem. The poorest peasant, gaunt and worn with ill-requited toil, and lengthened days of hunger, had pinched himself for weeks before to buy that one candle we enjoyed in all the year, and whose light should burn that night of nights in the midst of his children; he came thither to buy, with the poor taper, the provisions of an humble feast, to cheer his meagre board, and do fitting reverence to the day of the Heaven-descended.

The more comfortable farmer journeyed there also, and chaffed, and joked, and bought and sold through the entire day, to go home in the dusk, not the most sober man in the world, as he sat upon his well laden truck car, bringing to the good woman at home store of meat and meal, spirits and spices; not forgetting the new-fangled but fascinating package of tea. Besides those regular drifts of humanity, there were irregular ones too, blown to Kilshane by all erratic winds of impulse, profit or promise, upon the yearly occasion. Beggars, particularly shrill in voice, and remarkably pious in sentiment; nondescript individuals, forming maimed portion of humanity, very lame, very blind and very ragged; some who enjoyed a loss of legs, some who enjoyed a loss of arms and throve in a remarkable manner on their deficiency; those crowded in what little room was unoccupied by cows and horses, pigs and dealers—and prayed or imprecated, and slandered or sneered, with the greatest ease, as it pleased them.

So went the day of the fair always,

and so it fared in Kilshane after its accustomed manner on the day our story opens. But with the fall of the night the snow lay in dirty heaps in the straggling street, where the cattle had trampled it into mud. The thoroughfares were empty of all the crowds that occupied them during the day, except the occasional passers-by, who journeyed homeward with their marketing. The little shops were filled with customers for their wares, and the taverns were crowded with those who had sold or bought in the fair of the day-dealers, farmers, and the usual etceteras attendant upon those occasions on such folk. Here there was noise and bustle, loud generosity or quarrelsome quarrelsomeness, as around the rude bar the freeze-coated crowd clustered in the mist, which arose from the steaming punch before them, or the fog of tobacco smoke which filled the atmosphere with its dense clouds, in which those individuals breathed somehow without being asphyxiated.

In one of those—the Kilshane Arms—as the name was inscribed on a creaky sign which swung from above the door, a larger crowd was assembled than in any of the rest. Behind the counter a buxom, good-humored looking woman, attended to the many calls made upon her by the uncouth waiters who came to the bar from time to time, and gave their orders, as they were bidden by the guests in various parts of the house. Filling measures, keeping counts, and receiving money, was giving the lively hostess enough to do, when a group of five or six persons entered from the street, among whom was a girl of twenty-four or twenty-five years old, modest in aspect, large eyed, and well-featured, but whose face was marked with a paleness as of much care. Her dress was neat, but worn, and she seemed to shun observation from the persons among whom she found herself, on entering the house; by clinging closer to an old man, whose coarse resemblance to her fair young face, indicated the relationship of a parent. She whispered in his ear, when he immediately went over to the woman in the bar.

"Mrs. Keogh," said he, "is there any where I could bring Mary until I make a settlement with Tom Corkran here?"