

after-marriage reformation. *I won't.* Didn't I reform you, Mike, of the shockin' habit you had of putting everything off to the last? and after reforming a brother, who knows what I may do with a lover! Do you think that Larry's heart is harder than yours, Mike? Look what fine vegetables we have in our garden now, all planted by yer own hands when you come home from work—planted during the very time which you used to spend in leaning against the door-check, or smoking your pipe, or sleeping over the fire: look at the money you got from the Agricultural Society."

"That's yours, Ellen," said the generous-hearted Mike; "I'll never touch a penny of it; but for you, I never should have had it; I'll never touch it."

"You never shall," she answered; "I've laid it every penny out; so that when the young bride comes home, she'll have such a house of comforts as are not to be found in the parish—white table-cloths for Sunday, a little store of tay and sugar, soap, candles, starch; everything good, and plenty of it."

"My own dear generous sister," exclaimed the young man.

"I shall ever be your sister," she replied, "and hers too. She's agood colleen, and worthy my own Mike, and that's more than I would say to 'ere another in the parish. I wasn't in earnest when I said you'd be glad to get rid of me; so put the ponch, every bit of it, off yer handsome face. And hush!—whisht! will ye? there's the sound of Larry's footstep in the bawn—hand me the needles, Mike." She braided back her hair with both hands, arranged the red ribbon that confined its luxuriance, in the little glass that hung upon a nail on the dresser, and, after composing her arch laughing features into an expression of great gravity, sat down and applied herself with singular industry to take up the stitches her brother had dropped, and put on a look of right maidenly astonishment when the door opened, and Larry's good-humoured face entered with the salutation of "God save all here!" He "popped" his head in first, and, after gazing round, presented his goodly person to their view; and a pleasant view it was; for he was of genuine Irish bearing and beauty—frank, and manly, and fearless-looking. Ellen, the wicked one, looked up with well-feigned astonishment, and exclaimed, "Oh, Larry, is it you, and who would have thought of seeing you this blessed night? Ye're lucky—just in time for a bit of supper after your walk across the moor. I cannot think what in the world makes you walk over that moor so often; you'll get wet feet, and yer mother'll be forced to nurse you. Of all the walks in the county, the walk across that moor's the dreariest, and yet ye're always going it! I wonder you haven't better sense; ye're not such a chicken now."

"Well," interrupted Mike, "it's the women that bates the world for desaving. Sure she heard yer stop when nobody else could; its echo struck on her heart, Larry—let her deny it; she'll make a shove off if she can: she'll twist you, and twirl you, and turn you about, so that you won't know whether it's on you head or your heels ye're standing. She'll tossicate yer brains in no time, and be as composed herself as a dove on her nest in a storm. But ask her, Larry, the straightforward question, whether she heard you or not. She'll tell no lie—she never does."

Ellen shook her head at her brother, and laughed. And immediately after the happy trio sat down to a cheerful supper.

Larry was a good tradesman, blithe, and 'well to do' in the world; and had it not been for the one great fault—an inclination to take the "least taste in life more" when he had already taken quite enough—there could not have been found a better match for good, excellent Ellen Murphy, in the whole kingdom of Ireland. When supper was finished, the everlasting whisky-bottle was produced, and Ellen resumed her knitting. After a time, Larry pressed his suit to Michael for the industrious hand of his sister, thinking, doubtless, with the natural self-conceit of all mankind, that he was perfectly secure with Ellen; but though Ellen loved, like all my fair contrywomen, *well*, she loved, I am compelled to say *unlike* the generality of my fair contrywomen, *wisely*, and reminded her lover that she had seen him intoxicated at the last fair of Rathcoolin.

"Dear Ellen!" he exclaimed, "it was 'only a drop,' the least taste in life that overcame me. It overlooked me unknownst, quite against my will."

"Who poured it down yer throat, Larry?"

"Who poured it down my throat is it? why myself, to be sure; but are you going to put me to a three months' penance for that?"

"Larry, will you listen to me, and remember that the man I marry must be converted before we stand before the priest. I have no faith whatever in conversions after—"

"Oh, Ellen!" interrupted her lover.

"It's no use oh Ellen—ing me," she answered quickly; "I have made my resolution, and I'll stick to it."

"She's as obstinate as ten women!" said her brother.

"There's no use in attempting to contradict her; she always has had her own way."

"It's very cruel of you, Ellen, not to listen to reason. I tell you a tablespoonful will often upset me."

"If you know that, Larry, why do you take the tablespoonful?"

Larry could not reply to this question. He could only plead that the drop got the better of him, and the temptation and the overcomingness of the thing, and it was very hard to be at him so about a trifle.

"I can never think a thing a trifle," she observed; "that makes you so unlike yourself; I should wish to respect you always, Larry, and in my heart I believe no woman ever could respect a drunkard. I don't want to make you angry; God forbid you should ever be one; and I know you are not one yet; but sin grows mighty strong upon us without our knowledge. And no matter what indulgence leads to bad; we've a right to think anything that *does* lead to it sinful in the prospect, if not at the present."

"You'd have made a fine priest, Ellen," said the young man, determined, if he could not reason, to laugh her out of her resolve.

"I don't think," she replied archly, "if I were a priest, that either of you would have liked to come to confession."

"But, Ellen, dear Ellen, sure it's not in positive downright earnest you are; you can't think of putting me off on account of that unlucky drop, the *least taste in life* I took at the fair. You could not find it in your heart. Speak for me, Michael; speak for me. But I see it's joking you are. Why, Lent'll be on us in no time, and then we must wait till Easter—it's easy talking—"

"Larry," interrupted Ellen, "do not you talk yourself into a passion; it will do no good; none in the world. I am sure you love me, and I confess before