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THE HERMIT OF THE ROCK.

A TALE OF CASHEL.

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CHAPTER X.—A MORNING ON THE ROCK.

January passed away with its cold clear days, and February duly fulfilled its allotted task of filling the dyke; snow had fallen in unusual quantities, making the farmer's heart glad with the prospect of rich fields and abundant crops. The first days of the month were so mild and fair that the country people were no little alarmed, because of an old saying amongst them that 'all the months in the year curse a fair February.' St. Bridget's Day, the first of the month, was a dry sunny day, only just enough to make out-door exercise agreeable, and as soon as old Bryan could get a mouthful to eat after Mass, he went up to the Rock to make his stations, which having done, he went about his work of restoration, talking to himself as usual. He had no lack of employment that day, for a storm which had raged with great violence for full twenty-four hours during the last week of January, had covered the surface of the sacred enclosure with fragments from the ruins. Notwithstanding that Bryan had been laboring for some days to repair what he could of the damage, many stones lay scattered around, some whole, some broken in their fall, while amongst them were seen not a few fragments from the rare old sculptures on the walls and arches; here a leaf from a tall Corinthian column, there the round cheek of a stone cherub from one of the corbels of the arches; again the corner of some mural tablet, or a piece from a monumental slab which, split for long, had at length yielded to the might of the storm, and wrenched from its home of ages, was hurled from on high to swell the heap of rubbish on the floor of nave or chancel, aisle or transept, as the case might be. Everywhere these wrecks of the recent storm met Bryan's eye, not so numerous, it is true, as they had been, but still enough to make the old man's heart's ache, the more so as many of the fragments were far beyond his power to restore, on account of the height from which they had fallen, and their hopelessly shattered condition.

'Well, well,' said Bryan, 'patience is a virtue, and if I can't replace them all, sure I will a good many of them. So in honor of the blessed and holy St. Bridget I'll begin my work this day.'

With all the ardor and energy of 'sweet five-and-twenty' Bryan addressed himself to that labour of love which to any other but a man of primitive faith and primitive simplicity would have appeared insufferably tedious, but to him who had grown gray in the loving service of the Saints of Cashel, preserving their monumental remains as far as one poor solitary mortal could from the deratation of wind and rain—to him it was happiness purer than the coarse, carnal-minded worldling ever knows to set about repairing the effects of every passing storm that shook the sacred walls of Cashel.

After working awhile in silence Bryan began, as he often did, to croon an ancient ditty on this occasion, an old Carmelite hymn, known and sung in every rural district of Ireland to the old, old air which Moore has wedded to the sweetly tender song—'Come rest in this bosom':

'Och, when the loud trumpet sounds over the deep, And wakens each nation out of their long sleep— Och, it's then you'll see thousands come crowding along To the valley of Josaphat, it's there we'll all throng—'

'Mayrone! what a sight that'll be—and maybe Cashel won't turn out the grand company entirely! If they'll only let poor Bryan Cullenan just walk behind them, a long ways off, when they're on their march to the valley—well, sure, it's great presumption for me to think of the like, but somehow I think they'll all have a gragh for poor Bryan that used to keep the weeds and the long grass from chokin' up their tombs, and take care of the fine old walls they built to the glory of God in the ancient days of Erin—'

'Och, there you'll see Carmelites in glorious array, And we will be with them if we work our way.'

'Well, that's a fine promise, anyhow. God grant us grace to work our way.'

Another while of assiduous work, and silent meditation, and then Bryan commenced again, to another old-world air both sad and dreary—

'Down by Killarney's banks I stray'd, Down by a floating wave, A holy hermit I espied, Lying prostrate in his cave—'

do go out a-boatn' on the lakes. I often hard the quantity that comes here on their tower talkin' about it, till my ould heart would be jumpin' out o' my mouth; and then I'd begin to think of the ould hermit—what a fine time he had of it there, and what a fine place it must be to make one's soul in—

'His eyes oft times to heaven he rais'd, And thus exclaimed he, 'Adieu, adieu, thou faithless world, Thou ne'er wast made for me.'

Poor man, poor man! that must have been when he was dyin', I suppose—och! and sure it is 'a faithless world,' and Bryan sighed dolorously; 'just go no farther than the poor young master—to think of him being shot like a dog, and by them that was on his own flure; and eatin' and drinkin' of his share for months and months.—Well, sure enough it was a horrid murder,' he went on, though in an undertone; 'in all my born days I never heard the likes of it. Och, my poor young gentleman! but it was the hard, hard thing for any one to take your life, and you so young, so handsome, and so good—so good. The Lord receive you in glory this day, I pray, through the intercession of the blessed and holy St. Bridget. As for him that cut your days short—well, well, I'll leave him to God—he's bad enough as he is, and I'll only pray that the good and merciful God may bring him to repentance. It's mighty strange that he can't be taken, and the people all again him as the are.'

'To thee, dear Lord! we recommend Our brethren late departed, Grant that their souls may ever be Amongst the saints and martyrs! O Virgin Mother, intercede! Protect them by your banner, And help them at the judgment-seat, O Lord have mercy on them!'

'Amen, amen, sweet Jesus! especially him that was taken so sudden! och, och, and more was the pity!' he muttered low to himself.

The heavy sigh, or groan, that accompanied the words was heard, though not the words themselves, by two young ladies who had just reached the spot, all unnoticed by Bryan.

'Bryan' said one of them, the taller of the two, 'I would wager a trifle that I know what you are thinking of.'

The old man started as though a cannon were discharged close to his ear. Turning hastily he looked at one and the other of his visitors, then smiled and took of his hat, and bowed very low.

'Well, I declare, Miss Mary, but you took a start out of me, you and Miss Power. But long life to you both, sure it's always proud I am to see you, especially up here on the Rock where I'm in a manner at home. But in regard to your knowing what I was thinking of, bebad if you do, you bate the women of Mungret all to nothing.'

'The women of Mungret!' repeated Mary Hennessy, for she it was, as may be supposed, whom Bryan addressed as Miss Mary.—'Well, I have often heard of the women of Mungret, but I really never thought of asking what manner of women they were whose wisdom has come down to us in the form of a proverb. Can you enlighten us on that point, Bryan?—I know you are a sort of walking repository of ancient lore.'

'Well, it's a folly to talk, Miss Mary, a body does see and hear a sight of things in threescore-and-ten years, but the most of what I know of ancient lore, as you call it, I learned here among the ould walls, from hearing the quality talking of all such things when I do be showing them round the Rock.'

'Well, I suppose you tell us all about the women of Mungret and their wisdom,—can you not?'

'In course I can, but I'm ashamed to see you and Miss Power standin' so long on your feet; if it was summer-time, now, you'd be at no loss for a sate,' and he glanced mournfully around on the fragments of plinth and capital that strewed the nave of the Cathedral.

'Oh, never mind us,' said the young ladies in a breath, 'we'd as soon stand as sit—but pray go on with your story.'

'Well, Miss Mary, I'll tell you the story as I—'

'The air of this old hymn of the people is exceedingly solemn and beautiful. There is some reason to think, however, that neither it nor the hymn is extensively known in Ireland. The author heard it once many, many years ago in her early days, under circumstances that fixed its wild sweet melody in her fancy for ever after. Passing with some friends the 'Chapel' of her native place—which stood in a solitary and beautiful spot, on the outskirts of the populous town—one fine summer's evening when day was fading into night, she was surprised to hear the sound of music from within, a thing by no means usual on week-days. Entering, she found a few pious persons singing this old hymn for the dead, and as the solemn chorus echoed through the deserted Chapel in the silence of the shadowy twilight, the effect was indescribably fine.

'So the country people always called the Le Poers, and that, I believe, was the origin of the name Power, now so common in the South of Ireland.'

hard Father Heenan of Killemaule tellin' it to two English gentlemen one day here on the Rock. A long time ago when there was a great college here at Cashel, and another at Mungret, in the County Limerick westwards, there was a power of fine larned men in both places, but Mungret got the applause all over Ireland, and even beyond sea everywhere for the wonderful great skill they had in all sorts of larnin', espacially what Father Heenan called the dead languages. Myself doesn't know what in the world sort of languages them can be,—barrin' they'd be what the priests spake to the evil spirits when they're layin' them in the Red Say, or anywhere. Anyhow, that's what Father Heenan said, I sartin sure of that. Well, Mungret being famous for the dead languages, and the fame of that house being noised abroad as I told you before, the heads of our college here—that's Cashel—took a notion that they'd send some of their best men to Mungret below to try the skill of the people there, or whether it was true what every one said about them, in regard to the dead languages. So when the head-men at Mungret got word of what was going on, they were a little daunted, you may be sure, for fear their students wouldn't be able to answer all the questions that 'd be put to them, an' that they'd be ruined entirely and disgraced for ever, in regard to the dead languages, so well becomes them, doesn't they dress up some of the best of the students in woman's clothes, and some of the monks that were great larned men entirely, like plain countrymen going to their work, and they sends them all off to scatter hither and thither along the road that the Cashel men were to travel on their way there. Well, what would ye have of it but when the fine, venerable ould gentlemen from Cashel got within three or four miles or so of Mungret, an' began to ask how far they had to go, or maybe which was the way when they'd come to a cross-roads or the like, they were always answered in the dead languages—'

'Oh nonsense, Bryan!' cried Miss Hennessy, a little impatiently, 'the dead languages are Greek and Latin, and some others not spoken now.'

'Well, well, miss, I suppose you know best,' said Bryan submissively; 'anyhow, there wasn't a man or woman they spoke to but answered them in—'

'Greek or Latin.'

'In Greek or Latin, then,—if that's what the dead languages manes—so the gentlemen from Cashel here began to look at one another, and shake their heads, and at long last they put their heads together, and says they where's the use in our going to Mungret? when all the country people around the Abbey—even the very women—speak the dead—ahem! Greek and Latin—as well as we do ourselves, what chance would we have with the monks and the students?—maybe it's worsted we'd be ourselves instead of puzzling them? So with that they turas on their heel and comes straight back to Cashel without ever going next or near Mungret—'

'And so—'

'And so, ever since then, Miss Mary, it's a by-word in the place, you're as wise as the women of Mungret,' more by token they weren't women at all, but fine well-spoken young students that were great hands entirely at the dead languages, and I suppose the livin' too, it there be such things.'

At this the young ladies laughed, assuring Bryan that there were such things as living languages—'and what is more, Bryan,' added Bella, 'you are speaking a living language yourself.'

'Is it me spakin' a living language?' and the old man turned on the fair friends a look of simple wonder that much amused them, accustomed as they were to his guileless ways. 'Oh, now I see it's making game of me ye are—as, in course you have every right to do—me spakin' a livin' language—well now, if that doesn't flog all. As if I could spake any language, either living or dead.'

The lesson which our hermit might have received in the interesting science of philology was presented for that time, at least, by the arrival of another party whose advent appeared to throw the young ladies into a pretty little state of excitement, a nervous tremor, as it were, that would have puzzled any observant spectator.—The party consisted of a pale, lady-like young person, very plainly attired, two pretty little damoisels of some ten and twelve respectively, a comely gentleman with a fine Pickwickian cast of countenance, a very white cravat, in the folds of which his soft fleshy chin, or rather chins, lay snugly unbedded, and an exceedingly smooth suit of black, the nether garments of that demure-length vulgarly called knee-breeches, with, to all these attributes of respectability superadded a goodly rotundity of that central region of the human corpus which in Shakspeare's 'justice' was said to be 'with good capon lined'—whatever the living might have been in the case be-

fore us, the exterior was undoubtedly both 'fair and round'; lastly, there was a tall, dignified personage of some thirty-eight or forty years, not remarkably handsome, yet strikingly noble in appearance, and with just what set of features which ardently express both superiority of intellect, and that consciousness of the same which in some faces might be set down as approaching to superciliousness; this, however, was by no means the case in the very marked face of the gentleman in question, whose manners withal were singularly unpretending though marked by a certain degree of reserve, and a coolness that might or might not be constitutional. This personage was no other than the Earl of Effingham, the fat gentleman, Rev. Mr. Goodchild, his chaplain, the two little girls his daughters, Lady Ann and Lady Emma Cartwright, and the young lady their governess, Miss Markham, whom our readers will remember as forming one of the pleasant party assembled on Hallow-eve Night under the hospitable roof of Esmond Hall.

'Bryan!' said Miss Markham, after she had shaken hands with the other young ladies, 'these gentlemen are desirous of seeing the ruins.—Will it be convenient for you to show them now?' And she smiled in her pensive way, well knowing that Bryan lived for nothing else but to care the ruins and to show them.

'Wisha, then, it is convenient, Miss Markham and why wouldn't it? What am I here for only to show the place to the ladies and gentlemen when they come on their tower?'

'My very worthy old man,' said the rosy chaplain, whose enunciation of words, syllables and final letters was remarkably full and distinct, 'my very worthy old man, I am told you are something of an antiquarian.'

'An anti-what, your honor?'

'An antiquarian,' repeated the chaplain slowly and with great complacency; 'I presume you know what that is?'

'Well no,' said Bryan with a gentle shake of his old head, 'I can't say I do. Maybe its anti-trinitarian you mane, sir?' he slowly added, as his thoughts reverted to the hedge-school of his childish days, and the word that looked so awfully grand and terrifically long at the head of the much-dreaded word of seven syllables somewhere near the end of his 'Universals.'

The ladies all smiled, and even the grave dignity of Lord Effingham was put to the test, but the good parson would have there and then undertaken to enlighten Bryan on the difference between 'antiquarian' and 'antitrinitarian' had not the peer interposed—

'We have heard,' said he, 'that there is no one now living who knows so much about these magnificent ruins as you do, that is, if you are the Hermit of the Rock?'

'Well, your honor,' said Bryan hastily, 'I believe there's some that calls me so, but its only a nickname, sir, that the quality gave me, for I'm no hermit, at all, you see, or anything in the wide world but a poor ould man that takes care of the ruins here, and shows the ladies and gentlemen through the place when they come from furin parts or anywhere to have a sight of it.'

The two little girls had been eyeing the hermit with much curiosity, and the elder of the two suddenly exclaimed, loud enough to be heard by all present:—

'La, Miss Markham, what a very funny-looking old man he is; and don't he speak queer? How much farther the young lady would have committed her party there is no saying, for Miss Markham, with a crimson cheek, drew her to her side, with a whisper 'Fie, Lady Ann! fie, fie!' that effectually silenced the young chatterbox for that time, at least.

'Miss Markham!' said the Earl with a grave smile, 'you forgot to introduce your young friends.'

'I excuse me, my lord, for I am sometimes forgetful'—she did not say what was really the case that she could not well have taken the liberty of introducing friends of hers to him—'permit me now to repair my unaccountable oversight.'

The peer bowed with lofty grace to Miss Hennessy, more condescendingly to Miss Le Poer, whose name arrested his attention.

'Le Poer!' he repeated, as his eagle eye scanned her girlish features, 'what! any relation to the ever-charming Countess of Blessington?'

'Not much of a relation, my lord,' said Bella, blushing to find herself for the first time in her short life in actual parlance with a peer of the realm; 'there is a relationship, I know, but of what degree I do not know.'

'Be it as it may, I am pleased to make your acquaintance, Miss Le Poer,' was the courteous reply, as the party prepared to follow Bryan, the chaplain, note book in hand, close at the old man's side.

preme contempt for all things popish. It is, I believe, a grievous thorn in the good man's side that the primary education of the Ladies Cartwright is entrusted to one who has lapsed from Anglicanism and turned her back on the Thirty-nine Articles! Do but listen to him and Bryan!

'Friend Cicerone!' began the low-church chaplain, 'I presume you have many distinguished visitors here from time to time.'

'Well, we do, then, have some very grand people now and then,' rejoined the hermit, 'but my name isn't Chris-rooney, or Clutch-roony, or or whatsoever that was you said—it's Cullenan, your honor, Bryan Cullenan!' with strong emphasis on the name.

'But, my good friend, you mistake me,' said the reverend gentleman apologetically, 'I did not mean to address you by name, just then, I merely said Cicerone, which means a guide.'

The explanation appeared to satisfy Bryan who was now putting on his official dignity.

'Who was the greatest personage you ever had here?—you have had the Primate, I suppose—I mean the Protestant Primate, of course?'

'Is it him? is it ould Beresford? oh, then, much about him, and far less!' cried Bryan indignantly; 'it's betwixt two minds myself when the ould rap was here, whether I'd show him the place or not, and I put a penance on myself or doing it—Primate inagh, it's the hopeful Primate he is.'

A low titter was heard in the rear, speedily suppressed, however, on the part of the young ladies by a side view of the Earl's face, graver and darker even than its wont. Lord Effingham was a staunch supporter of 'the Establishment.'

'My good Mr. Cullenan,' said the chaplain, his nose swelled with anger, yet his voice over-exceedingly calm, 'my good Mr. Cullenan! my very respectable old anchor—'

'I told you before,' said Bryan with a testiness foreign to his nature, 'that my name was Bryan Cullenan—now I tell it to you onst for all!—for a big man you have a mighty short memory!—now, to save you the trouble of askin' any more questions about the grand people that was here in my time, I'll just tell you who was the greatest man I ever showed over the Rock—an' that was Dan O'Connell!'

'Dan O'Connell!' cried Mr. Goodchild, recoiling from Bryan as if he had suddenly put forth the horns of Beelzebub; 'you must be losing your senses, old man!'

'Deed, then, I'm not, your honor! sure the world knows that the Counsellor is the greatest man in all Ireland, barrin' the Bishops and Archbishops—that's our own I mane, and it isn't much time they have to be travelling about, seein' sights—they have something else to mind, God help them! Another great man we had here one day was Father Tom Maguire—in course your honor have heard of him—him that had the great discussion with Pope—Pope and Maguire, you know.'

'I know nothing about the man,' fibbed Mr. Goodchild, with the perulence of a very froward child.

'Oh naughty Mr. Goodchild,' whispered Harriet to Mary; 'only hear what he says—he knows nothing about Father Tom Maguire!'

The chaplain had evidently got enough of Bryan's company, so he turned away to examine as he said, the architectural features of the building.

'Mind your steps, then,' quoth Bryan, 'for if you don't you'll be apt to get a toss over some of these stones that the storm brought down the other night.' Then stopping for a moment to look after the parson, he said as if to himself—'Well, now, where in the world did he come from? Sure I thought every one knew Father Tom Maguire. He's a mighty quare ould gentleman, anyhow, whomsoever he is!'

They were now in the Chapel, and Bryan pointed out to the Earl—the ladies were all familiar with the scene—the place where high altar stood of old, and near by, the tomb of Myler McGrath.

'Was he not Archbishop of Cashel?' said the Earl.

'Well, he was, and he was not,' replied the hermit.

'How is that, friend?'

'Why, your honor, he was only Queen Elizabeth's Archbishop, and in course Queen Elizabeth had no more power than you or I to make a bishop, let alone an archbishop—so we never give him anything but 'Myler McGrath,' and that same is too good for him, for he was a disgrace to his name, on account of sellin' his faith for a good livin'. Still there's some people says that he came back afore his death, so we pray for his poor soul, hopin' that God may forgive him his sins, and especially the shame and the sorrow he brought to all good Christians. The Lord forgive him, and I forgive him, poor unfor-