

"Then it is mine, and I will keep it till the day of my death. There is a sad note in it I don't like. What is it that troubles you—now that mother's health is restored? You should not be writing such sad stuff."

"It's the shadow o' pairtin', my man, an' here's the maister come to gie ye yer marching orders. I see it in his face."

Both rose as Mr. Bremner came through the gate and up the narrow path between the roses. It was Easter week, and they knew he was expected at Halliwell, though they had not heard of his actual arrival. He bade them good-evening pleasantly, and, standing a moment by the summer-house door, remarked on the picturesque house and the promising appearance of the garden.

"You ought to take nothing but happy and ennobling thoughts with you from this place, Robert," he said, with a keen, straight look at the young man's face. "I have heard of something which might suit you. Though it has some disadvantages, still, it is certain to be a stepping-stone."

"I said ye had come to gie him his marching orders, sir," said John Fletcher, and his face was sad.

"Well, Halliwell will not keep him, John," said the master, good-humouredly. "So it behoves us to do what we can for him. Well, Robert, I suppose you have heard of Captain Byrne, late member for South Meath?"

"Yes, sir, and I saw him here last autumn when he was visiting you at Halliwell," answered Rob, and his face glowed with eager expectancy.

"He's coming again presently, to-morrow; in fact, he has resigned his seat, and is retiring from