

NO SIGN.

BY MRS. CASHEL HOEY.

CHAPTER II.

ON THE HILL-SIDE.

The main street of the town of Narraghmore was intersected by a number of smaller streets, narrow and steep, which ended in a straggling suburb on the hill-side that had, in old times, been enclosed within the precinct of a monastery. A steep road wound round the mountain, up beyond the small houses, with their patches of garden, from which a fine prospect seaward and landward stretched before the observer. This road, was distinctly visible from the town for a considerable distance; and as it formed the mail-car route to the mountainous districts of the county—only the main line of railroad existed at the period I write of—people were in the habit of frequenting it about the time at which that vehicle passed round the shoulder of the hill, in the morning "out," and at evening "in." It was a tempting place for lounging in fine weather, with all the luxuriant and dreamy beauty of the land and mountain, the river and the sea, displayed before and on either side of one; for on the hill-side several detached masses of stone made convenient seats in the spring, half hidden by the golden gorse; and in the shifting light the prospect was as changeable as dissolving views.

It was late in the afternoon of a beautiful day in April, when the driver of the mail-car between Narraghmore and the villages of the mountain district beyond, pulled up on the turn of the road which has been described, to set down one of four passengers who formed his load on that occasion. The passenger, who carried no luggage, stood for a few moments looking after the car as it disappeared, before he stepped off the road, and seated himself on a flat block of stone embedded in the earth a few feet up the hill-side. He was a tall, athletic man, perhaps thirty years of age, with a clear, dark complexion, fine crispy, curling black hair, and eyes of the keen, sparkling blue, as much Spanish as Irish in type, which is most frequently found where there has been a mixture of the two races. He was a fine-looking man; and though without any pretension to the condition of a gentleman, had no vulgarity of face or figure. He was dressed in a suit of dark tweed, and wore a soft, broad-brimmed brown wide-awake hat, which became his dark face well. As he sat on the flat stone, he removed his hat, and passed his hand through the masses of his thick, dark hair, absently, like one troubled and perplexed.

A little later, when the road was quite solitary, and the shades of evening were gathering over the hill-side, a woman appeared, coming up from the straggling suburb of the town; and at sight of her the man rose, and stepped towards her. They met at the edge of the road, and the woman spoke first.

"I'm late," she said; "Mrs. Bellew kept me. They always think my time is theirs, for any nonsense they want it for. Well?"

"She is very ill indeed," replied the man.

They had not shaken hands, these two, or uttered any ordinary greeting; and now they walked side by side along the road, away from the town. The setting sun touched the woman's figure with light, and glanced off her shining hair. They were quite alone; not another figure was to be seen along the hill-side; the monotonous creaking of a cart in the distance, and the barking of dogs in the town below, were the only sounds to be heard. The woman pressed her hands together, and then, throwing them wildly open, as though she flung restraint from her, grasped the man's arm.

"Don't say it in that voice! Don't seem to be sorry, when you bring the best news—almost the best you could bring," she said, in a low, hurried voice. "What can be the good of our pretending to each other? Is it not enough to have to deceive every one else? At least, when we are together, let us tell the truth. She's very ill; tell me more of that. What chance, what hope is there, Dominick?"

She leaned against him; her face touched the shoulder of the arm she held—her fair face, with its brilliant eyes, wonderfully luminous, despite their lack of colour—and seemed to draw his dark face down to it by a spell; for, in the glance which fell upon her ere his lips met hers, there was repulsion which grieved the passion in his kiss. She clung to him for a moment with a murmur of the softest sound. "My darling, my darling!" she said; but the next she loosed her hold of him, and repeated her question—

"What hope is there, Dominick?"

"Don't say that; don't say that; it's unlucky," said the man, uneasily. "It frightens me when you say that, even if you don't mean it to the full. It is a bad thing to say of the poor woman, God help her! And His hand heavy upon her as it is; and, Kate, Kate—" (he caught her in his arms, regardless of any possible observation) "I've done her wrong enough as it is, without grudging her the little life that's left in her. I've brought a sad heart away with me to-day from the sight of her."

The woman tore herself away in a fury.

"And you've brought a false heart to meet me? Is that what you mean? You've done her wrong enough! And what wrong have you done me?" She spoke with the utmost vehemence, hurrying onward, as it seemed, unconsciously. "It's your place, indeed, I'm thinking, to read me lessons, and teach me my duty to the old woman that you married, God knows why, the old woman you would have been glad to get rid of before ever you saw my face! I'm no liar, and no hypocrite, Dominick Daly; and when I want to know a thing, I ask it;—more by token if I want to know it from you. I don't care what you think of the question, or whether you like it or not. Did you not talk of 'chance' or 'hope'? Or if you did not talk of them, who meant them but you? And now you have come from seeing her, and you are full of pity, and remorse, and things I don't understand. I understand nothing but the love of you, and the longing for life with you; and you are angry with me, because I go back to yesterday, and what we said to each other then."

"No, I'm not angry with you, Kate; I'm angry with myself."

"And for what? But you're not; it's my fault; it's all my fault. Didn't I see it in your face, and hear it in your voice, when I came to Narraghmore? Did you tell me it was an unlucky day for both of us? Unlucky! when I had managed to leave Athboyle without vexing my friends, and to get here without anyone's finding out why. I saw it, Dominick; I knew it. You could not deceive me, though you tried—you tried hard when you met me that night to persuade me it was only the surprise that ailed you. The surprise! Aye, indeed! But I tell you, Dominick Daly, it was more than surprise: it was fear that ailed you then, and it's fear that ails you now."

She had hurried on beyond him, and now she turned and faced him. The man looked at her, full of trouble.

"Don't say such things as that to me, Kate," he said, sadly. "If I was afraid, it was good fear for you and for me, for the harm that I had done you, and the harm you were doing yourself, my girl, all for my sake—all for my sake, by coming here."

"Not all for your sake," she said moodily, with a quick bending of her thick eyebrows; "much for my own. You could have lived without me, I could not live without you. I could not bear my life after you left Athboyle; I came to hate the place, and the children themselves, and if I had stayed longer with the Mangans we would not have parted friends. It's a slavish life I lead here, and it's none the pleasanter because the ladies have taken me up, but there's you to see in it, and our chances to watch; and if you had more courage, Dominick, I would not mind anything. But you vex me; you try my hot and headstrong temper. What's the good of not telling out the truth to one another?"

With the last few sentences her voice softened, the anger in her face died out, and she smiled faintly, a beautiful, persuasive smile.

"I know, I know," said Daly, tenderly, and drew her within his arm. "I believe I am the coward you call me, Kate. But I am not afraid for myself. I'd die for you, darling, and you know it well, without a murmur; but I'm afraid of disgracing you, I'm afraid of bringing you to shame. And you're headstrong, as you say, and above being cautious; but you mustn't be above it, darling, for it's only caution can save you from the danger I've brought you into. I can't save you, though I'd lay down my life sooner than you should come to harm."

"I will be cautious," said the woman, but with a touch of impatience in her voice; "I will do anything you like, if you will only be honest and outspoken with me, and not scruple

where it's too late for scruples. It will be easy to be cautious if it's not to be for long, and that's just why I'm asking you, what chance is there?"

With characteristic pertinacity the woman had come back to her first question. With characteristic yieldingness the man gave in to her importunity, and answered it, though she again put it in the form he had protested against.

"I found my wife very ill indeed," he said. "She has had three fits since Monday, and she is awfully altered. Mrs. Cronin says she doesn't think she can last six months."

"Six months!"

Genuine, undisguised disappointment was in the tone in which the woman uttered these two words; once more the momentary look of repulsion crossed Daly's face.

"She has suffered more than she ever did before. She fell on the fender in one of the fits, and bruised her face shockingly, and though she was all right to-day, she could hardly speak to me; she had bitten her tongue so severely, and it was so sore. Oh, Kate, it is a sorrowful sight to see her."

"Of course it's a sorrowful sight, and a scandalous sight too; for what brought a fine young man like you with a wife like that, and you only twenty-two years old when you married her?"

"I thought you knew, Kate. It was for my father's sake, to keep the bit of land for the old man; he'd have broken his heart if he'd lost it. Mary Kearney had the money, and she was not a bad-looking woman then; she was never a bad-hearted or a bad tempered one, and I never cared for any one. I never thought I'd see the face that would turn the world upside down for me; your face, my darling. And she was a good wife to me, and a good daughter to the old people until they went, and the sickness came."

"And you were good to her too, I'm sure of it; and it's no fault of yours that she's a poor creature now, with no life in her but misery. It's hard on you, Dominick, to be tied to the like of her, now that the old people are gone, and she an object, with the falling sickness, who can't enjoy her life; and it would be hard even if you and I had never met. But we have met, and you love me, not as I love you, though, that isn't in you; but I'm content that you love me as well as you can, and now it's hard on us two. That's all I mean, and nothing can be truer."

"I know, and I feel it too; but it was pitiful to see her to-day, Kate, with her poor white face, and her thin grey hair, and her hands all done up with rags, where she had hurt them."

"Disgusting! And you would try to keep her alive, and she like that; and you call that charity, and conscience. I'm sure she can't wish to live herself, when she is in her senses."

"Oh, but she does," said Daly, quickly. "She is very anxious to live, and to-day, as well as she could speak, she begged me to try and find a new cure for her. She clings to her poor life, Kate, as much as we cling to ours, with love and hope in it, and I daren't grudge it to her; it's unlucky to grudge life to any one. We mustn't build on, on that."

"What else have we to build on?" asked the woman, not fiercely this time, but with sad seriousness, as if appealing to his reason. "Just look at the facts, and tell me what else have we to build on? It has been wonderful luck for me to please the people here, and get the countenance of the ladies in spite of Father John, for he doesn't like me, though he does like you, and he suspects us both. Yes, take my word for that, Dominick, he suspects us both; and if things have to go on long as they're going, he'll make us feel his hand hot and heavy in our affairs. And if you lost your place, and I lost mine, where would we be then, when the time comes?"

"Where, indeed! Surely, it can't be that I'm to bring you into misery, if ever I have the chance of making you my wife?"

"It wouldn't be misery, anyhow, even if it was great poverty," said the woman, fervently. "Of course we must do our best to avoid that, but I would not mind it so very much. I think it never could be anything but heaven to me, just to be your wife. Oh, Dominick, darling, if she was only dead, that poor wretch whose life is of no use to her. Hush! there's some one coming along the road!"

"She started from him, and ran up the hillside to a point whence she could see for some distance, despite the gathering gloom. They had walked on a good way, and it was growing dark. Daly stood where she had left him, following her rapid movement with his eyes. She looked ahead, then crouched down behind a huge block of stone set in a circle of golden gorse, and peeping round its edge, said in a distinct, but cautious voice—

"It's Father John, he must not see me. Turn back at once, and go down towards town, he must overtake you; don't look back."

Dominick Daly promptly obeyed her, and she, drawing back her head, remained concealed by the block of stone. In a few moments the figure of a stout, elderly man, in the dress of a priest, mounted upon a powerful well-bred, well-fed brown horse, which he rode at a sober trot, came by the shoulder of the hill, and passed out of the watcher's sight. She allowed a few moments to elapse before she stepped down the hill-side to the edge of the Katharine Farrell could make out that Father John O'Connor pulled up to speak to the Clerk Dominick Daly walking by his horse's side.

(To be continued.)

CURRENT LITERATURE.

"THE CAPTAIN'S CABIN," by Edward Jenkins, M.P. Montreal: Dawson Brothers.

The Captain's Cabin has no purpose and not much by way of plot—but is a thoroughly readable story. This is scarcely the best kind of work Mr. Jenkins can do. He is more at home when he has some social evil to expose and condemn, as in the story of "Ginx's Baby," which he sets his hand. Many will think that this description of a voyage across the Atlantic is an exaggeration—especially as to the noise made on starting from Liverpool, the concern of crossed. The description of a storm at sea is almost perfect, and may well be compared with in tone, and by no means lacking in literary merit.

"LORD CLIVE," by Lord Maccaulay. (Harper's Half Hour Series.) New York: Harper, & Brothers; Montreal: Dawson Bros., 1878.

To pass a spare half hour well there can be nothing better than these little books. The series was commenced last summer to satisfy the desire for something substantial to read in the Harpers have succeeded in showing by this being the thirty-sixth number published, and that three more are now in press. The subjects are various, ranging from historical and biographical essays to primers of literature and finance and short stories by good authors. With few exceptions the selections are judicious; the present is certainly a good one, and "multum in parvo" may fairly be said of the series as a whole. We have much pleasure in introducing it to our readers, especially to those whose leisure and wish for information are not co-extensive.

DISCREET CHAMPIONS.—The enemies of the soul's immortality I do not fear; I know how often they have been vanquished before; and I am quite sure that they will be overcome again with a mighty overthrow, as often as they do appear. But I confess I have imbecility which shuffles away the plainest truths, and thinks the strongest of all causes wants the weakest of all aids. I shudder at the consequences of fixing the great proofs of religion upon any other basis, than that of the widest investigation, and most honest statement of facts.—*Sydney Smith.*