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## THE LAST IRISHMAN.

(Translated from the French of Elie Berthet, by C. M. O'Keefe, for the Boston Pilot.)

### CHAPTER IV.

The poverty of Ireland is certainly wonderful, but its opulence is still more extraordinary. No country in the world possesses such gorgeous mansions and magnificent parks. The parks of the Irish nobility are of prodigious extent, surrounded by prodigious walls and beautified and diversified by a prodigious variety of scenery. A vast scope of country is englobed within these grim unsightly walls—woods, plains, lakes, streams, swelling hills, and low-lying vales, jealously guarded and reserved for the exclusive enjoyment of the titled proprietor. There is nothing in Europe equal to these castles of indolence surrounded by those ample paradises, in which the face of nature is compelled, by the assiduity of industry to assume the most smiling flowery, and enchanting aspects. Outside these walls the real Irish nation fester and burrow in squalid hovels, amid dreary potato fields, or amid the pestilential emanations of dismal bogs, generating fever and ague. Inside those walls, the fortunate owner of the magnificent demesne lives in a costly palace, embosomed in delicious gardens; parterres of beautiful flowers spread beneath his feet, and the rarest exotics and evergreen trees tower above his head, while admirable rocks, topped by artificial ruins, rise in a perfect labyrinth of laurels, acacias, lilacs, and flowering plants. Thus it is not merely the editors of the Irish newspapers, but the very soil on which they tread seems to regard the aristocracy with smiles of flattery.

The park of Lord Powerscourt, embracing 1500 acres, might be regarded as the model of an aristocratic demesne. It was disposed in such a manner as to open on every hand perspective attractions and vistas of enchantment. Serpentine walks alternated with stately avenues of lofty trees—blue streams hurrying along through rocks, and azure lakes slumbering in tranquillity, girt in a selva of flowery verdure, and cascades foaming down forever, white as snow. It was a world in itself—a calm, cultivated wilderness.

Without heeding whither he was rushing, the stranger who had entered the park so mysteriously, strolled blindly along one of the many devious paths that wound through the plantations. He would have found it difficult, after a few minutes' progress, to retrace his steps, and arrive at the point from which he had set out. But, heedless of this circumstance, he continued still to stride forward, wrapped in a reverie, at the risk of meeting some servant of the household, or care-taker of the park. Whole herds of frightened deer occasionally swept across his path; such was the solitude of the place. In the boughs above his head flocks of birds sat chirruping like busy gossips, while others, like poets, sat apart chanting the beauties of spring or enjoyments of love.

These sounds proving the desert solitude—the utter loneliness which surrounded him—gave a greater scope to his mind and a greater depth to his melancholy. An opening in the wood—a vista in the branches—gave him a glimpse of a large pointed gothic window selvaged with ivy, and set in the gable end of a ruined church as in a rude frame. All was gone except the gable which, draped and garlanded with ivy, seemed to have triumphed over time, and this funeral festoon on its head seemed the sad crown of a melancholy conqueror. As the stranger gazed upon this ivied ruin—a venerable fragment of a monastic temple—he muttered half aloud:

"Well! well! How everything is changed in this place during a few years. This ruin, which lay outside the park, is now embraced within its widening circuit. The graves of the O'Byrnes were sheltered by its mouldering walls; but Lord Powerscourt—the spawn of traitors and assassins—doubtless deemed those holy monuments a blemish on his cultivated estate, and every trace of them has been swept away."

As these ruins were embedded in shrubs which embarrassed the stranger by their rank luxuriance, he found at first a difficulty in reaching the wall; he ultimately worked his way to a winding stair-case of stone which had been laid bare by the crumbling lapse of the outer masonry. When standing on this stair-case he found he could look into the interior through a hole in the inner wall, which the fall of a stone had left vacant. The floor had been levelled by the hand of improvement, and the consecrated temple converted into a summer-house, in which the family of my lord, and sometimes my lord's servants, surrounded by the summer foliage of the overhanging trees—trees alive with busy birds chirruping in the branches—were wont at times to

\* This is applicable to the great body of the Irish aristocracy, rather than to any individual; but many individual instances may be found. A church interior to Olermont Park, county Louth, was stripped of its tombs by Lord C., as the graves were memorials of the right owners of the estate.

drink tea. This profanation would have doubtless roused the anger of the fiery stranger, had he not been startled by the unexpected discovery of two females who occupied the interior, and whose conversation riveted and absorbed the attention of his soul. These two persons were Lady Ellen and Miss Julia, who had betaken themselves to this ivied retreat, in order to indulge that amiable passion for gossip which is characteristic of the sex. Lady Ellen was seated in a rustic chair, while Miss Julia, standing before her, seemed listening with a face of attention and flashing eye, as if anxiously straining to catch some unusual sound.

"Can the Queen of Glendalough be a coward?" exclaimed Lady Ellen, "does she tremble because a deer or a cow has shaken the shrubs below the window. What can the noble daughter of the Gael be afraid of? Is it the headless horseman of the temple, or the three-cornered winding sheet that towers at night in the windy gorge of Carrglass? Or have you heard the wail of the Beanshee floating on the sobbing breeze, or the magic strain of a fairy harp which no one else can hear, struck by the sad hand of some human minstrel whom the sighs retain in melancholy captivity, weeping in their green hills? What can it be?"

"Pray do not trifle with this subject, Lady Ellen," said Miss O'Byrne, with a slight shudder; "this spot has been always fatal to the O'Byrnes, and to jest in these ruins shocks my mind—it appears profanation. I thought I heard a step."

"Folly, child—who would come hither to disturb us?"

"I know not," exclaimed the alarmed Julia; "perhaps Sir George."

"Sir George indeed!" cried Lady Ellen, with a laugh, "believe me, he is the last person to break in on our solitude. If you were alone, indeed, or had any other companion, his intellectual face might dawn upon you; for he appears of late to honor you with flattering preference. He might favor you, in that case, with a full and particular history of the last hunt, or the tragic death of his favorite mare—the only disaster in the history of his life that ever moved him to tears. But have no fear, knowing we are together, he will shun our path, and go skulking off in some different quarter. You have not remarked that he is embarrassed in my presence, and happy in my absence?"

"Does that circumstance give you much concern?" asked Julia.

"Look in my face—am I not haggard with grief. Sir George is such a poetic mixture of the dandy and the horse-doctor that he must be, of course, the idol of the ladies. But I should not decry him," added the fantastic young lady, with a slight tincture of melancholy, "for Sir George is my intended, and will, I suppose be, some day or other, my lord and master."

"Your intended?" exclaimed Miss O'Byrne, with a visible air of anxiety. Lady Ellen darted a glance at her which seemed to penetrate her heart, and certainly paled her face.

"I thought everybody knew that. . . . . It is a favorite scheme of my father's, and is in some sort necessitated by the future and family exigencies. But I really never trouble my head about it. . . . . Were I to let my mind dwell upon it, I should get a megrim."

"But you do not appear to like Sir George, and gave me to understand that on his part—"

"I think it is only doing him common justice to say that he hates me more than any woman alive. . . . He cannot pardon those sarcastic observations which flow from my lips as spontaneously as water from a fountain. . . . But I am told that people may marry who cannot agree; and family interests should be paramount to individual caprices, and so on. . . . The Rev. Mr. Bruce plagued me with a tedious discourse on such fine things the other day. . . . As the Rev. gentleman spoke his sermon through his nose, he was enabled to employ his mouth in swallowing cough lozenges. . . . Owing, I suppose, to this division of labor, he harangued me during three mortal hours, and would harangue me longer had not his daughter, Sarah, entered, and whispered some news about tithes rent-charge, the pious man hurried away at once, forgetting two points in his discourse. . . . I really thought his ugly daughter became beautiful while delivering the message that relieved me from his presence."

Julia seemed more and more agitated—perspiration formed pearls on her brow.

"But, lady Ellen, you do not tell me, do you feel an invincible repugnance to obey the orders of my lord?"

"How you press me!" exclaimed Lady Ellen, with a slight appearance of anger—"you want me to tell you what I don't know myself—have I ever seriously reflected on the subject? When I think on what might occur, I mount Queen Mab, and gallop round the park. Nevertheless," she added, darting a glance at her companion, which was pregnant with feminine malice, "I would not advise any lady, on the

strength of my hesitations, to turn the poor head of Sir George—no very difficult feat. . . . . It would be useless to direct the fire of fine eyes upon Sir George, or address the most victorious smiles to him—smiles and glances will be equally useless—no one but myself can win his hand."

This allusion was so clear that Julia could not mistake it.

"Lady Ellen," she exclaimed, in a tone of wounded pride; but before she could finish the sentence she burst into tears, and covered her face with her hands. The effect on Lady Ellen was instantaneous, quitting her careless attitude she sprang to the side of her friend, and, ready to weep herself, embraced her with enthusiasm.

"Pardon me, Julia," she cried, "I am a mad-cap. I went too far—my vile tongue always misinterprets my mind. I did not intend to offend you, my best, my only friend. If you tried the force of your beauty upon that poor Sir George, it was an innocent coquetry natural to our sex. . . . If I must confess it, Julia, I have endeavored to put you on your guard against such a game; but I not think you capable of conceiving a serious passion for a fool and a puppy like Sir George. My father thought he saw some indications of an understanding between you and him, and he hates anything which appears to oppose his plans. You are too handsome not to excite his suspicions. At the slightest imprudence he would separate us, and put an end to that friendship which is the consolation of both. This is what I wanted to convey to you; but my unfortunate habit of railery has carried me too far—but you will forgive me, Julia—tell me you forgive me."

"From my soul," replied Miss O'Byrne, endeavoring to repress her sobs; "but I do not admit the reproach—"

"Enough," interrupted Lady Ellen, placing her handsome hand on the mouth of her friend—"do not say another word on that odious subject—we have no need of explanations—let us find something else to talk of, more agreeable than Sir George, or my father's plans. "Poor dear," continued she, embracing Miss O'Byrne, "how you tremble and palpitate—come, sit down near me here."

The two young girls sat down face to face. Lady Ellen held Julia's hands, and endeavored to cheer her with smiles. Miss O'Byrne responded to her kindness, but still exhibited some symptoms of confusion. They were both silent for a moment.

"Her Majesty, the Queen of Glendalough," said Lady Ellen with a joyous tone, while she rectified something in the costume of Julia, "sets so little value on the gifts of her humble subject that she has not deigned to ornament her royal person with them, even on the Sabbath day, or has she hung the modest gift into the Lake of Oblivion on Slieve Gullen, hoping that some handsome prince will dive into the water and fetch it sparkling to the surface."

"You speak, Lady Ellen, of the brooch of pearls that you gave me last Christmas. I had it this morning, but parted with it since."

"Have you lost it, Julia? They say to lose the gift of a friend is a bad omen for the continuance of friendship."

Julia related what she had done with the brooch. Lady Ellen became thoughtful for a moment.

"You have given me a lesson," she said; and after a pause she added, "but I cannot blame you for performing a good work with a useless trifle. With you, Catholics, charity is more than a mere demonstration of pride. I will see Mrs. Flanagan, and will take measures to hinder the brooch from getting into the hands of the hawkers who, in a few days, will come flocking to the fair. Julia, Julia," added she, with a melancholy air, "you Catholics are certainly better than we; and, though I appear full of levity, there are moments when my heart inclines me to side with the oppressed, who, perhaps, hate me, rather than with the oppressors."

"Oppressed and oppressors. What do you mean, Lady Ellen? To whom do you apply such denominations?"

"Oh, you understand me quite well," replied Lady Ellen. "Do you think I am ignorant of the manner in which you, the ancient masters of the soil, speak of us, the modern possessors of lands, riches, and influence? You think I am entirely ignorant of the Irish language, and cannot hum the *caoins* in which the fall of the Gaedhals is deplored, and the triumphs of the Sassenaghs lamented. Have I not trembled and wept at the recital of the melancholy legends which prevail in the Southern counties? In fact, Julia, my father was right when he reproached me to-day for my taste for those old songs and old histories. I feel too much pity for the conquered, and too much dislike for the conquerors. Do you think that since I learned the true history of the founder of our house, I believe in our right to these magnificent demesnes? No; the heroes of my race inspire me with a kind of horror, and I feel, on the other hand, a profound admiration

for the heroes of your race, such as the handsome and brave MacHugh, and all the descendants of the noble house of O'Byrne, full of dignity even in their fallen condition. There is not one of these poor ragged peasants for whom I do not entertain, at times, an ardent sympathy, when I observe their independence in the midst of poverty, their national feeling, and ardent attachment to the religion of their fathers. Even in their misery there is something noble, indicating a lofty origin."

Miss O'Byrne listened to this strange confession of her noble friend with no little surprise; at the last words she joined her hands, and exclaimed with fervor: "Oh! cherish such noble sentiments for the unhappy tenants of your father's estate; perhaps, at some distant period in the past, injustice and crimes were perpetrated by the people; but how can their rights be disrupted when consecrated by a long series of generations? As to these unfortunate peasants, whose misery has awakened the compassion of the universe, retain your generous sentiments towards the poor. A day will come when you will be the sovereign mistress; do not forget them—"

"What do you say, Julia? Surely, you ought to know that I shall never be mistress of Powerscourt demesne. But let us not dwell upon this painful subject. At present my power to lighten misery is unfortunately very limited. I will endeavor to do something, take my word for it. I do not know what induces me to love those poor people, whom my kinsmen abhor. It originated, I believe, in a circumstance which I feel half ashamed and half inclined to tell you."

"I am all attention," said Miss O'Byrne, drawing closer to Lady Ellen.

The latter paused for a moment, and rested her head on her hand.

"I do not know if I ought to breathe this secret even to my dearest friend," said Lady Ellen, with a blush. "What must you think of me, Julia? But I know you are as indulgent as you are beautiful. I confess to you that I have been long enamored of the customs, traditions, music and poetry of the Irish; but it was rather a passion of the head than of the heart. During some time past, however, my vague taste has turned into admiration and enthusiasm, and the change has been occasioned by a man."

"A man, Lady Ellen?" said Julia, with a blush. "And who is the man that engaged so good a friend in the cause of unhappy Ireland?"

"Now, you must not laugh at me, my dear Julia; but I really do not know who he is—I only saw him once, for a moment—I shall never perhaps, see him again, but I'll certainly never forget him."

Miss O'Byrne appeared to interrogate Lady Ellen with inquiring eyes.

"You know," resumed Lady Ellen, "that on the termination of the last session of parliament, my father set out from London for Ascot, and I returned to Ireland, attended only by my governess, Mrs. Jones, and Cleary, my lord's own man. While crossing St. George's channel in the steam packet, which plies between Holyhead and Dublin, we were overtaken by a tempest, no rare occurrence in St. George's channel. The heavy steamer swayed up and down like a feather, and, notwithstanding its powerful engines, toiled and struggled with difficulty through the foaming and splashing waves. The passengers had taken refuge, for the most part, in the state cabin, or retired to their berths, as there were many of them suffering from sea-sickness. Suffocated by the fetid odor, and desirous of enjoying the magnificent prospect of a tempest, I ventured to creep out in the gloom upon the deck. It was in vain that the captain, and even some of the sailors, implored me to go below. The rolling of the vessel was frightful, and the waves occasionally washed over the deck; but you know how obstinate I can be when my curiosity is excited. The magnificent scene, the grandeur of the elements, affected me almost to tears. Wrapped in my mantle, and grasping the railing, I sheltered myself as far as possible, against the lashing of the waves, and contemplated the lofty and sublime picture in contemplative freedom. A single passenger had ventured on the deck in addition to myself; it was a young man, with the appearance of an officer, who had seen service in the colonies; for his face was embrowned by the tropical sun. Covered with his petersham, his arms crossed he trod the slippery deck with firm steps; neither the howling of the wind, nor the howling of the waves, the deep groan of the engines struggling against the tempest, nor the lashing of the breasting waves which occasionally slapped over the deck, could disturb the calm firmness and regularity of his pace. Doubtless, thought I, this unknown, has experienced former tempests and sailed on other oceans. Some subject of profound meditation seemed to absorb his mind; his brow was burdened, as it were, with thought and care. From time to time, as he stood still in the fore part of the quarter-deck, his glance seemed to

penetrate the evening shadow, as if in search of the mystic island which was the object of our voyage. But the roughness of the sea, and the exhalations which issued from the agitated waters, prevented our getting the slightest glimpse of the land, and he continued his promenade, which he had momentarily suspended. While I furtively examined this imposing personage whose appearance inspired one with indefinable respect, I said to myself, the thoughts cannot be vulgar which that severe countenance reflected; the interests are not merely personal which engage such serious intelligence. His mind seemed to dwell on some object of high importance, such as the destiny of a nation or empire. The soul which the convulsions of nature could not disturb, must rise, I fancied, to a height unknown to common men. The ardent eye of the stranger flashed occasionally with impetuous light, which I regarded as the coruscation of genius. Ultimately, Julia, my imagination—(I know you will laugh at me)—built the most romantic suppositions on this extraordinary stranger. Without knowing his rank or his name; without exchanging even a word with him, I admired—and shall I confess it!—loved him—quite as much, at least, as one can love in a quarter of an hour.

The Unknown, absorbed in his reflections, had not even noticed my presence. The vessel gave a frightful lurch, and this sudden movement, and an exclamation which was elicited from me by jolting pitch of the vessel, attracted his attention; he darted a penetrating glance at me, while his face expressed astonishment, occasioned, doubtless, by seeing a young and delicate female in such an unusual place; but he put his hand to his hat, bowed, and resumed his promenade. From a mechanical feeling of imitation, I gazed in the direction which the ship pursued. The Unknown approached me, and saluted me with exquisite politeness—"Here is a beautiful daughter of Ireland," he exclaimed, as if addressing himself; "none but an Irish patriot would thus brave the winds, the waves, and the tempest to catch an early glimpse of Erin through the mists that surround it."

"I replied with embarrassment and reserve that I was indeed born in Ireland. A few Irish words which I pronounced appeared to ravish him with delight."

"Thanks, thanks," said he, with emotion; "it gives me infinite pleasure, after years of absence, to hear our beautiful language, so sweet and melodious, breathed from the lips of a female. My ears had become strangers to such sounds in the far distant lands from which I return; it already announces the presence of my native country, with its poetry, misfortunes, music, and traditions."

"The ice was now broken, the tempest somewhat appeased, and the traveller asked permission to sit down on a coil of cable, and we began to talk of Ireland—I say we—although my part in the conversation soon became purely passive. I confined myself to rare and timid observations; I permitted the stranger to speak, which he did alternately in English and Irish, with elegance, facility, and enthusiasm. Altho' he had quitted Europe several years before, he was ignorant of nothing connected with his native country. The customs, laws, manners, history, literature of Ireland—its splendor and decay—its heroism and its misery—he knew and appreciated all, while the elevation of his views, and the delicacy of his impressions, filled me with admiration. How ardently he loved Ireland. His brilliant, warm, and colored discourse differed entirely from the cold, flat systems of egotistical economy which I had often heard detailed and dribbled out with reference to unhappy Ireland. My eyes seemed to be unsealed, and seemed to have never known Ireland before; and this, though I had passed my life in it. I felt ashamed of the indifference with which I had hitherto contemplated the sad resignation and the hidden grandeur of my beautiful country. I could with difficulty repress my tears, as the traveller described the sufferings and afflictions of the vanquished race. I felt anger and hate crimsoning my face, as he enumerated the crimes of the triumphant race."

"During two entire hours I was subjected to the fascinating charms of his magic eloquence. The traveller deemed me, like himself, of Milesian origin; and such was the hatred of England, which escaped, if not from his tongue, at least from his eyes, that I felt ashamed and almost afraid to acknowledge my English origin. I was dazzled and fascinated. I fancied that whatever he said formed a part of my own mind, that he expressed ideas which I had long cherished and already conceived. I trembled with his anger, sympathized with his tears, and participated in his exultation. At first he only appeared to be a man of superior talents, now, however, I fancied him a supernatural being—the very genius of Ireland, arising in beauty and power, after the slumber of centuries."

"From that time, dear Julia, the generous and musical voice of the stranger seemed, night