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OONA MORIARTY.

AN INCIDENT IN IRISH PEASANT LIFE.

Those bold promontories and intruding bays, which so deeply indent the map of Ireland along its whole western outline, tell of a long and fierce struggle between land and ocean. How wild a warfare has the great Atlantic waged against our island-home along that iron-bound coast for nigh six thousand years. Those jutting headlands projecting so far into the deep; those rocky islets, left so far out among the wild waves by the vanquished and retreating *terra firma*; those jagged creeks and bays penetrating towards the very heart of the country, and searching out every nook where the solid granite, or the quartz, or the limestone was not at hand to resist the invading element—all these indicate the terrific power of the hostile forces, and the varying success of that everlasting conflict.

But none of those headlands forms so prominent a feature on the map, or one so interesting on many accounts, as the great peninsula which still rejoices in the euphonious old title of Corkaguiny, and of which the local chief place is the ancient little town of Dingle. All round from Malin-head to Cape Clear, without excepting even Achil or the tempest-shorn Mweelrea, there is not so grand a promontory as Brandon-hill, or one which breathes the Atlantic with a sea-precipice so steep and lofty. The shifting sands on the adjacent shore of Smerwick-harbor evince the recent inroads of the ocean, which threatens at no distant period, to insulate Sybil-head and the Three Sisters. The stormy Blasquets, far out in the south-western offing, are trophies at once of former conquest and of stern resistance between the struggling elements; and the sandy flats of the Magheres seem to be protected from total immersion only by the mighty bulwark of St. Brendan's mountain.

How many strange old places, and how many scenes of strange events, do we find in that stripe of land which we are describing. Some of the names we have mentioned are full of historic import. From the summit of Brandon-hill we behold objects which might indeed illustrate a large portion of Irish history. The mariner saint of the sixth century, whose name the mountain bears, sailed often from under its shadow on the ocean wanderings; and from this mountain he took his last bearing on that voyage in which he succeeded in reaching the transatlantic shores, nearly a thousand years before Columbus re-discovered them. Cloghanes, or stone-roofed cyclopean houses, the residences of primitive saints, small oratories and churches of the sixth and seventh century architecture, and some mediæval castles, are strewn over the neighboring districts. Smerwick-harbor, with its Dunaoir, has a doleful tale to tell about the fate of the chivalrous Geraldines and their unhappy Spanish and Italian allies; and in our own times the name of Dingle is painfully associated with efforts to use the sufferings of a famine-stricken people in the work of soul-traffic. Thus is the locality one of singular interest to the antiquary, to the lover of the grand and picturesque in nature, and, if you will, to the student of human nature.

Low-lying, at the foot of a ridge of healthy mountains, and about a mile from the eastern shore of Smerwick-harbor, stand the ruins of Kilmalkedar church, or 'Kiel,' as the name is pronounced in an abridged form in the neighborhood. The style of these ruins is peculiar, the architecture belonging to a period anterior to the introduction of the Gothic. In the ancient church-yard adjoining there are some head-stones inscribed with the mysterious ogham characters. The name of the church is derived from one of the immediate holy disciples of St. Brendan, and, altogether, the place has air of extreme antiquity. Close by there is a holy well, and in the immediate vicinity of the church are a few farm houses of the humblest class; but, notwithstanding the presence of these habitations, the place is exceedingly sad and solitary.

Near the aforesaid holy-well, several years ago, a pair of rustic lovers, on whose behalf we desire to enlist the reader's interest, often had the happiness of a casual meeting. Oona Moriarty was a widow's daughter of the vicinity. Her mother was miserably poor, the whole subsistence of the family, which consisted of herself, her daughter and a son, being derived from a small plot of bad land which that son, a boy too young for the laborious task imposed on him, cultivated with difficulty. But Oona, though so poor, was handsome. She grew up like a lovely flower blooming in a wilderness. Her large dark eyes, regular features, and graceful figure would have been considered beautiful even among the most refined classes; while maidenly modesty and an excellent though untaught understanding, were qualities which she possessed in a still higher degree than even beauty. Her favored lover, Ned Hurley, was as poor as herself. He was a young laborer whose residence was chiefly at Dingle, some four miles distant, but he contrived often of a summer evening, to hover about the old well of Kilmalkedar, where by some good

fortune, he never failed to catch a glimpse of the sweet Oona Moriarty, and if the opportunity were favorable, to have a little conversation with her. Ned was somewhat wild and unsteady in his habits, much more so indeed than Oona suspected, and as he felt that he would hardly be approved of as her suitor, he never introduced himself at her mother's cabin; so that their meetings partook of a clandestine character;—although this was perhaps in a great measure owing to the natural solitude of the place. The maiden merely abstained from mentioning them to her mother, without seeking specially to conceal them from her.

One evening as the sun, about to descend into the ocean, beyond the most northern summit of the Three Sisters, was gilding with his rays the venerable gables of the old church, Oona, who had just filled her pail from the crystal waters of the holy well, was seated on a stone combing out her long black tresses, when her lover abruptly made his appearance, and seated himself on another of the naked rocks which are strewn about in profusion at that place.

After their first greetings, their conversation being of course in Irish, the only language that either of them spoke, a short pause ensued, and Ned Hurley then observed, in a thoughtful manner: 'I am breaking my heart thinking, Oona, and I can't help thinking, that you don't care about me at all.'

'Then how can you say that, Ned? I never cared about any one in this world but yourself, except my poor mother and Tom; and I wish you would come to the house now, and let me tell them all about it.'

'If you care about me, then,' said Hurley, only attending to the first part of her answer;—'why don't you keep your promise? and you know 'tis long since you promised me that you would be my wife.'

The girl blushed deeply, and only made the sad rejoinder:

'But where will we go, or what will become of us if we get married?'

'As to that,' said Hurley, 'I don't know indeed; but still I don't see any chance that we will ever be one bit better off; and I am thinking of doing something terrible, Oona, if you only love me.'

'Something terrible, indeed, and what is it you would do, Ned?' inquired Oona with a smile.

'Nothing at all, I hope—if I can help it,' muttered her lover, 'but,' he added sorrowfully, 'I'd sell my soul to the Wicked One to get something for you, Oona.'

'God forgive you, Ned, for saying such a bad thing in this blessed place,' was her reply.

Another pause ensued, and Hurley observed, in a tone of apparent indifference:—'What pretty houses they have down there in the colony: were you ever in any of them?'

'What would bring me into one of them?—the Lord between us and harm,' exclaimed the girl.

'What harm is in it after all?' said Ned.—'I wish we had one of them, and the bit of land we could get with it, for a while, until we could find some other way to live.'

'Oh, then, the Lord between us and harm, again and again,' reiterated Oona, crossing herself. 'I never heard you talk that way before, and I hope I never will again. If it be the will of God that we are to be married, something will happen in our favor, Ned, and don't fear;—but sooner than do what you say, I would rather a thousand times be buried this moment in the bottom of the ocean.'

These words were uttered with great energy, and another pause ensued. Ned then rose to depart, and appeared deeply afflicted.

'I am only telling you, Oona,' he said, 'that it is breaking my heart to go on in this way, and that I am ready to do anything in the world for your sake.'

'If you love me, then, don't do anything wrong, and don't talk the way you talked this evening; but as I was saying, you must come to my mother's house now. It is a long walk from Dingle, and a long walk, back again, and you must eat a few potatoes with us before you go.'

Ned declined the invitation. He appeared gloomy and sorrowful. Oona's heart also was heavy; and in this unhappy state of mind they parted.

It was some days after this interview between Oona and young Hurley, when Owen O'Leary, the son of a small farmer of the neighborhood, paid a visit to the house of the widow Moriarty. The family were congregated outside the cabin door, variously occupied, as it was a genial evening at the close of the month of August; and O'Leary proceeded to tell them whatever news he had. He was an ardent admirer of the fair Oona, and as such was highly acceptable to her mother, although to the daughter he was an object of cold indifference; and the principal item of intelligence which he had to relate was soon obvious enough.

Having exhausted the topics of the weather,

and of the manner in which the crops of oats and potatoes had so far thriven with the neighbors, he said, I am told there are people joining the soupers in Dingle still, in spite of all that Father O'Sullivan says about it every Sunday.'

To some of our readers it may be necessary to explain that the name of 'soupers' is a term of opprobrium applied originally in the south of Ireland to those unhappy creatures who are known to change their religion for some worldly consideration; the word being derived from the meat-soup which it has been usual to deal out to them on fast-days, and which is at once a test of the sincerity of their conversion, and an instalment of the creature comforts held out to them as a reward. The groups of cottages built for their exclusive accommodation in the outlets of the town of Dingle are known as the 'colony'; and hence the horror expressed by Oona at the mention of that place by her friend, Ned Hurley, and the general expression of indignation with which O'Leary's report was now received.

'There are some joining them,' he continued, 'that have no right at all; for,' he added, looking significantly towards Oona, 'I am told that a boy of the Hurleys, who is well able to earn his own bread, and has nobody depending on him, has turned souper.'

O'Leary spoke in the plural, as if Hurley were one of several who were acting in the manner he described, but this was only a figurative way of expressing himself, as it was his rival alone to whom he alluded. Oona blushed like scarlet at the news, and as the words were so pointedly addressed to herself, she should speak, and she therefore remarked that 'some people are always telling lies about other people; and there is no believing half of what we hear.'

'And who is the boy himself?' inquired the widow Moriarty.

'I have often seen him over in this of the country,' said O'Leary.

'I saw him two or three times talking to Oona, here, at the well,' said her brother laughing.

'And who is he, Oona?' asked her mother.

'All I know about him is, that he is a decent, honest boy; and I don't believe a word that Owen O'Leary here says about him,' said Oona, while the tell-tale blushes mantled more deeply in her face.

The mother thought it more prudent to await another opportunity for explanations from her daughter. Tom Moriarty still laughed at his sister's embarrassment; and O'Leary, anxious to vindicate his own veracity in the matter; said: 'Why, then, all I know about him is, that I saw him myself in the colony, and that I am told he is trying to get a house there from the minister, and that he was half a dozen times at the preachings; that is all I know, and if you don't call that turning souper, I don't know what it is.'

'I suppose many a one that is not a souper has occasion sometimes to go to the colony; and you don't know whether anything else about him be true or not?' said Oona, arguing in her lover's favor, like a true woman.

'What is it to you what he does? What business have you to take his part?' rejoined her mother, somewhat sharply.

The subject here dropped, and O'Leary soon after took his leave. Tom also absented himself for some time, and the widow seized the opportunity to demand an explanation from her daughter of the meeting with young Hurley. She then forbade her to meet him any more; and Oona said, with great sincerity and honest pride, 'You may be sure, mother, I will never speak to him if the story told about him be true; but I must see him once, at least, to make sure whether it is or not.'

Another week elapsed and Oona on going, as was her wont, a little before sunset, to her lonely well, found her lover there before her. Her manner towards him was reserved, and on his side too the meeting seemed to produce some embarrassment. The following dialogue ensued:

'And so, Ned, you went to the colony after all.'

'Sure any one might go there, I suppose.'

'Ay, Ned; but what brought you there, Ned?'

'And who told you I was in it at all?'

'O I heard it; but what brought you there, tell me?'

'Well, I suppose if you heard I was in the colony, you heard what business I had there too.'

'I don't mind what I hear from any one about you, Ned; I'd rather hear what you tell me yourself; but what brought you among these bad people?'

'Nothing at all, then.'

'You wouldn't lie to me, Ned?'

Hurley was silent.

'O then, 'tis true after all that you turned.'

'Tell me who said anything against me to you, and I'll have his life.'

'That is more of it. I thought you loved me, Ned Hurley.'

'Didn't I tell you that I would sell my soul to the demon for you?'

'And I suppose that that is the reason you turned souper. O God, have mercy on us!'

''Tis not true,' said Hurley, in a violent passion.

'Oh, I am afraid it is too true, Ned; you went to the preachings, and you tried to get a house in the colony from the minister; O, it is too true.'

Ned hung down his head in silence.

'Ned, I am ashamed of you. When I heard the story about you, I said it was a lie. O, I wished it was a lie; but my heart misgave me when I remembered the way in which you spoke to me here the last time; then I was afraid it might be true, and now I see it is. O wirru stru! wirru stru!' and poor Oona wept and hid her face in her lap.

'Tell me who it is that told you any stories about me, Oona, and I'll surely have his life before I go to bed?'

'What matter who told me if it be true; and why would you take any one's life, you unfortunate man?'

Hurley had not a word to say.

'You brought disgrace upon yourself and me,' resumed Oona, after a while, 'and I have promised my mother that I would never see you again.'

'O, don't say that, Oona, or I'll go mad. It was for your sake I did it. I only wanted to get a house and some little means for yourself and myself from that cursed crew, and we would fling it back to them in a year or so, when we could do anything else for ourselves.'

'And is that honest? And do you think, Ned, that I would marry you with the curse of God on us both, and be disgraced and lost for ever and ever? O no; I told you at this holy well before that I'd rather a thousand times be buried in the bottom of the ocean than do such a thing; and now, Ned Hurley, God be with you and convert you; there is no use in our meeting any more in this world.'

'Oh, for God's sake don't leave me that way, Oona, or I'll surely go mad, and do something worse than ever I did. Oh stay with me, Oona, for another minute, and I'll never come near you again, if you wish.'

At this moment Oona's brother, who had witnessed the meeting from a distance, and hovered round lest any harm should come to his sister, having observed Hurley's loud and excited manner, approached nearer, and commenced whistling an air.

Oona was anxious to break off the interview; she said she could not stop, and that after the way in which he had acted, she should keep the promise she had made to her mother; and so, praying that God might change his heart from evil, she turned away; but only for her brother's approach she might have tarried a moment longer, and have spoken some kind and encouraging word before she left.

Hurley rose up gloomily, and walked slowly away. He was dark and wayward in his disposition, and was capable of feeling as much of the bad passion of pride as a person in a much higher position in society. He felt galled at Oona's refusal; fancied that her manner towards him arose from a change in her affection; and imagining that the best way in which he could be revenged upon her was to do the very thing which she most disliked, returned the next day to the Dingle colony, associated henceforth with its inhabitants, learned some of their religious cant, and attended their place of worship, while all the time he loathed and despised them and their system.—Thus he acted the part of a consummate hypocrite, until all that was in any way good in his heart or disposition became sophisticated and corrupted.

Oona, who did not understand the actual worthlessness of her lover, or learn anything of his subsequent conduct, soon forgot and forgave in her heart the faults for which she had upbraided him. She blamed herself for her harshness towards him. Whatever he had done wrong she now thought how it was for her sake he had done it, and perhaps after all he had not gone so far as she had been told; and now who knows, she said to herself, what might happen him, or into what misfortune her unkindness might hurry him. Thus she tormented herself with her own thoughts; night and day she grieved and fretted, her visits to the holy well were at once sources of grief and melancholy consolation to her; her songs over her spinning-wheel became inexpressibly plaintive and heart-touching, and they were often interrupted by deep-drawn sighs, followed by long intervals of silent thoughtfulness; she became pale and careworn; and yet all this while no one knew the secret of her affliction, or seemed to observe that she was rapidly wasting away with grief. Her mother was too dull, and too much engrossed in the care of their humble household, to perceive any change in her daughter's health or state of mind; and thus poor Oona was pining away without attracting the notice or sympathy of any friend.

Weeks passed away, and not a word of news reached her ears about Ned Hurley. She did

not allow his name to escape her lips, and no one else thought of alluding to him. Weeks passed, and the stormy month of October set in. One night in particular it blew a terrific gale from the south-west. First the wind came moaning through the old walls and along the hillside, rising and falling fitfully; and the sun at setting tinged the clouds for a while with garish yellow. The night was moonless and starless; black masses of clouds swept over the sky from the ocean, and the fitful gusts of the evening were changed into the sustained fury of a tempest.—The storm raged as if the very mountains would rock upon their foundations—the distant roar of the Atlantic could be heard for miles into the country, and its spray, carried off by the storm until it mingled with the clouds, covered the surface of the land with salty crystals. It was one of those storms which can only be witnessed on our western coasts, when nothing seems safe from the tempest, and the horrible uproar of the elements appears to threaten nature with another chaos.

'God help any one that's on the sea to-night!' said Oona, who sat so paralyzed by the fury of the storm that she was unable to ply her wheel as usual.

'Oh, wirra weaher! sure nobody would be on the sea such a night as this,' ejaculated her mother, shuddering at the very idea.

'If there is any one on the sea, they'll soon be under it, anyhow; 'tis hardly one is safe on the land itself in this storm,' chined in Tom.

They crowded more closely round the fire, trembling lest the roof of their cabin should be swept away, as the creaking rafters seemed to threaten. To retire to rest was out of the question. No one could sleep in such a storm; and the few lighted embers on the hearth added to their sense of insecurity; for if the roof fell in, the thatch would catch fire, and their all would be consumed in the flames. They could do nothing but pray the live long night, and while the storm howled and threatened above and around them, they sat or knelt with panic-stricken hearts, imploring from Heaven mercy for themselves and others.

Thus the dismal night wore away, and with the returning morning the tempest subsided.—The sun rose red and angry looking—the clouds were torn and jagged—the few gleams of sunshine which they permitted to appear were lurid—the wind was still high, and the storm was evidently only lulled for a while, and not blown out. Still it was a relief after the dreary night. Tom Moriarty went out to his work; Oona returned to her spinning-wheel, and sang over it one of her most plaintive ditties, and her mother was engaged tidying the house. Just then, a little ragged girl entered at the open door, and after standing for a while silent, with her back against the wall, at length said, as if casually, 'There was a boat lost last night out near Bally-david.'

A cry of horror and pity escaped from the mother and daughter at the news.

'They say 'twas a boat of the soupers,' added the little girl after a while; and the statement elicited a fresh exclamation of horror.

Another neighbor now stepped in, and observed that it was easy to know the *d*—was at his work last night—a whole boat load of soupers was lost! The boat itself was on the rocks inside Bally-david Head, and two of the bodies were washed in on the sands at the head of Smerwick harbor; but there were four or five others in the boat, and no one knew where their bodies were. It was quite plain at all events that none of them could have been saved.

Oona waited to hear no more, but wrapping an apron tightly about her head she glided out without speaking, and hastened towards the shore.—A few other persons might be seen proceeding in the same direction, struggling with the contrary blasts and a small group of people were assembled below on the sands. At the place where these latter stood lay the bodies of two men stretched on the sand in the ghastly rigidity of death. No one seemed to know their names, and no one wished to touch them; but all were aware that the lost boat belonged to soupers, and the horror which the spectacle inspired was increased in the minds of most of them, by a fear for the fate of the unhappy men in the other world.

A young girl with her head tightly muffled in an apron was seen approaching the bodies, and looking closely into their features; and as she gazed upon the face of one, she uttered a low shriek.

Tom Moriarty, who had come down to the shore, recognized his sister, but said nothing; and all that day a low, bitter wailing might be heard within the sacred old walls of Kilmalkedar, where the poor mourner sought to hide her grief among the graves.

Such was the sad document of the love of Oona Moriarty and the unfortunate Ned Hurley. If we follow the fate of the former, however, a little longer, we shall find that in the lapse of years she became sensible of the grievous faults