

out av us," cried the widow, plaintively. "I wish we wor all lyin' at rest in the ould grave yard : shure 'twould be the blessed exchange!"

"It would, indeed," said the old man, solemnly. "It would be the cowld world that wouldn't be better than this."

"Take care it won't be wus, thin," said Tade Ryan, gloomily. "We have the ould cabins over us yet as bad as they are, an' be all accounts we won't have 'em long."

The blacksmith rose melodramatically, and lifting his cap high in one hand, flung it vehemently to the ground, exclaiming :

"I allus sed so—there's nothin' for it but the pike ather all!"

And having delivered himself of this emphatic dogma, he relapsed into impenetrable silence.

Tade's eyes gleamed brightly at the declaration : a half desponding sigh of assent came from the rest.

"Hush, hush!" cried the knowledgeable woman, with a doubtful survey of the forge. "Tis dangerous to let the shtones thimselves hear ye spakin' these times. How do ye know but Jur Murphy, the villin, may be havin' his ear to the key-hole this minnit, thyrin' to earn his dirty goold be hangin' an' murderin' us?"

"Wisha thank God, there's no key-hole to have his ear to," laughed Ryan. "Howsimever, if we stay discoorsin' all our troubles, we'll be shure to plot thrayson, so the sooner we separate the better for all of us. Who's goin' to give Jacky the fiddler a bed an' a sup to-night? *Mo lair!* there was a time when you wouldn't be wantin' a bed in the three parishes, nor a warm tumbler into the bargain, Jacky."

The old fiddler smiled feebly, and for the fifty-first time that evening, "God be wid the ould times?" went the round of the company.

"Niver mind! We have the heart still, av we had only the manes—bad luck to 'em for dirty manes! Kitty an' I will give you a shake down in the shraw, Jacky,—'tisn't as good as I'd like it, but 'tis what we all have to put up wid those days."

"Heaven's blessin's on ye all!" said the blind man fervently.

Tade turned to his little wife and put his arm round her neck :

"Kitty, you'll lade Jacky down to the cabin' an' give him what's left o' the pratics?"

"I will to be shure, asthore, but aren't you comin' home wid us?" and the rosy lips pouted reproachfully.

"I can't, girsha, I can't," said he resolutely.

"Oh! Tade, this is the third night that you left baby an' me alone be ourselves, an' I niver closed me eyes till I heard your foot at the step o' the doore in the morning."

"Kitty, I towlt you before I couldn't help it. You needn't be a bit lonely or onaisy."

"But I am, asthore. Can't you tell me what keeps you out? Shure you ought to have no saycrets wid me."

Tade kissed the anxious face tenderly.

"Some time or other you'll know, me darlin'," he cried, with a dash of enthusiasm in his tones. "But indeed, the saycret isn't my own to tell you."

"God send it isn't the public-house has anythin' to do wid it, for that's the last av all?"

"Kitty, it isn't : there now for you."

"Nor the painted hussy inside the counther?"

"You silly little crayture!" and for further answer Tade only hugged the jealous sceptic to his heart and kissed the baby, who crowed like a whole poultry-yard in its father's strong embrace.

"Yo won't be *very* long any way, Tade?" pleaded the young wife tenderly. "You know how lonely I'll be till you come home. Though I don't know why you're afeard to thrust me wid yer saycret—I that 'ud die for you."

"Mavourneen, you'll know it all afore long. There, now, Jacky is hungry an' waitin' for yer company. Good-bye!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE WESTERN WING.

All the neighbours dropped off one by one to their wretched homes until Tade Ryan and his worthy father-in-law were left alone together in the forge.

Tade lingered about the forge, fiddling with the sledge-hammer, while the blacksmith was engaged in shutting-up shop—an operation of the utmost nicety, which consisted in bolstering up the shivering old door with a most intricate machinery of car wheels, stones and bars, as if such a property needed all the force of locks and bolts to baffle the world's cupidity! A little crib near the bellows formed Mat's nightly retreat, and thither he was plodding in his own *al fresco* way, after a successful fortification of the doorway, when, in the most unexpected manner possible, he stumble across Tade Ryan; and then it *did* occur to him, after stopping a moment or two for deliberation, to ask :

"Why aren't you at home?"

Tade nodded to the door, and whispered :

"There's no wan to hear us, is there?"