

"It will, father: I know it will."

"I hope so, my boy, I hope so. Even if it does not we shall know how to bear it."

How did he bear it? For when he returned to Kilsheelan, he knew he was virtually its master no longer. The mortgage debts were just falling due, and there was no prospect of meeting them. Mr. Artslade's triumph was assured.

The bright Spring covered the valley with flowers, and the woods with green youth, and painted the hoary Galtees in royal purple. Its life and joy ran to a travesty of the death and bright hovering in the air.

In the Village Parliament it began to be whispered, then talked of, then sighed over in grief's own language, that something was wrong at the Castle. The old huntsman declared with tears in his eyes that the hounds would go out no more. The grooms said the horses were dying in the stables. Never a rifle shot startled the deer. Not a carriage-wheel pressed the grass-grown avenue. At first, some of the old gentry would call at the Castle, and, seeing nobody, would call no more. The place was deserted save by the rooks that crooned in the ivy, and the owls that made dismal concert in the night.

"The Lord betune us an' all harm; the Masther must be sick."

Sick! He did not complain. He had no doctor to attend him. To the servants he was still the same kindly gentle master.

Yet there was that about him that made the tears come to the servants' eyes when they looked at him, and made them walk noiselessly and speak in whispers when he was near.

O'Dwyer Garv was "not the same man" as he used to be; he was only the proud, calm shell of his old self. His days were spent in the great dining-hall of the Castle. It had a singular fascination for him. At first he would pace its great length over and over again, stopping betimes to look out over the valley which lay like a picture beneath the wide bay-windows. One morning he thought he would not walk any more, and had his own arm-chair drawn to the bay-window. There he would sit the live-long day without a murmur. Sometimes he would watch the deer gambolling in the Park, or the children at play in the village; sometimes he would question the old butler as to each particular villager—how much wheat one tenant was putting in—whether another had sold his little cow—how the youngsters of a third were getting over the measles.

"Poor people!" he would say, with a sigh, "I hope they'll be as happy when I'm gone."

Then, as night fell, he would have his chair wheeled over to the great fireplace, and there he would sit musing in the gloomy firelight, watching the shadows, now as they glanced along the ancient fret-work of the roof, now as they played among the empty chairs round the great table like ghosts of the revellers that revelled there no more. Doubtless he peopled the vacancy himself with many an antique phantom. And so the hours travelled till the great hall-clock ushered midnight through the silent house.

One day came in the mail-bag a formal notice from "Mr. Jordan's, London office," reminding O'Dwyer Garv that the period of repayment of the mortgage-debts would expire within fourteen days, and that, if they were not at that date discharged, immediate possession of the Castle and estate would be required.

"So it has come to at last," said the old man, without a quiver in his voice.

At the same time, glancing over his newspaper, his eye fell on the following paragraph under the head of "Fashionable Intelligence":

"His majesty has been graciously pleased to confer the high honour of baronetcy on Mr. Albin Artslade of Ashenfield House, County Tipperary."

"My world is changing sadly," was his only exclamation. "T'won't be so hard after all to leave Kilsheelan—the sooner the better, I'll go to Dublin on Saturday and then—"

He paused, and rested his head wearily on his hand. Then! Out into a world where all he knew were bowed and broken—all he loved, gone? Beggar, who had been prince! Stranger among strangers! To weep at the grave of dead ideas, and shrink from the triumphant path of Novelty, like some unburied ancient!

The Angel of Mercy forbade it. He never left Kilsheelan!

Saturday saw him consigned to bed in utter prostration, and then at last he told them send for Gerald, for he saw a dim country on the horizon, and he knew he was going home. And a cold weight lay on every heart in the valley: its sun was going to rest.

Gerald O'Dwyer was deep in his laborious studies in his College chambers when a noisy altercation on the staircase arrested his attention.

Presently his door was burst open, and, after a final protest from the College servant, a man covered with mud and perspiration rushed into