

have strengthened certain vague notions that occasionally flitted through his mind on this same subject.

For, though both of them were children in innocence and artlessness of thought, they were old enough in years to excite the comment of a world they hardly dreamed of. Gerald O'Dwyer was verging on seventeen, and only a deep spiritual nature saved him from knowing more of the world and its ways than Kilsheelan's simple ethics could teach him. As for Cressy, she was for years without a mother, almost without a friend; and now, at the age of fourteen, in the first engaging bloom of girlhood, she was as artless and impulsive in her likings and dislikings as though she were still a baby.

They knew only that it was sweet to go to the wood for flowers together; to romp in the park together; to climb the blue Galtee mountain together, and look at the children playing in the village below. What recked they beyond, save only of the thunder storm that might spoil their rumbles, or the winter that might shrivel up their trees and flowers?

"Cress, I must be off," said he at last. "The primroses will wait till to-morrow morning."

"But you'll be going to that horrid college."

"Not before I pluck you the primroses. Hallo, Cress, why shouldn't Charlie go with you? Here he's up the lane."

"Oh! he'll do lovely," cried Cressy, running down the lane to meet a dull-looking boy at whose heels yelped an ugly bull puppy. "Charlie, you must come to the wood with me to pick primroses."

"Very well," said Charlie Sackwell, staring leisurely at Cressy and her companion through his large blue eyes.

"You're a darling."

"But I must feed the pup first," said Charlie, in his own simple way.

"You're a brute!" cried the girl, with a pert shake of the head.

"Very well," said the impassive Charlie. "Come Snoozer." And he turned to go.

"You're not; you're not," she cried, running after him. "You're a dear Charlie, and so is Snoozer."

"Will we go picking the primroses so, Cressy?" said the boy. "Snoozer can wait for his dinner. Can't you, Snoozer?"

Snoozer said he could, as graciously as any bull pup of his weight and age could say it. So Cressy and Charlie and Snoozer went to the wood for primroses, while Gerald scampered over the fields to Kilsheelan Park, and in the

twinkling of an eye was seated firmly in the saddle among a myriad of boisterous fox-hunters.

CHAPTER II.

PLOTTING.

Mr. Albin Artslade, when he left the breakfast-room in rage, took refuge in the sanctum, which, for want of a more appropriate name, he called his study. It was a well furnished room with no other pretence to the character of a study than a few musty law books and pile of dirty sheets of vellum heaped around an escritoire near a window gave it. Into a chair he flung himself doggedly, and buried his face in his hands.

It is time for us to let the reader know all that was known of him. Mr. Albin Artslade was an upstart—not one whose nobility had triumphed over circumstance, but one who had cunning and unscrupulousness to advance a vulgar ambition. Such account of his antecedents as reached Kilsheelan, averred that he had amassed money as a low attorney and money-lender in London. About a year before our tale opens, he came to Tipperary as the purchaser of Ashensfield—a large tract of the estate of the Lord of Kilsheelan, forfeited on a mortgage debt by his wild improvidence. He did all that money could do to embellish the place and add to his own consideration. But the stamp of vulgar pretension was on everything he did. Besides, the reckless, caste-loving squires of Tipperary resented his intrusion as a menace to themselves; for they, too, had their encumbrances and their mortgages to make them sympathise with O'Dwyer Garv of Kilsheelan, the very pattern of the Irish gentlemen of his day. They put himself and his money-bags in a social quarantine, whence all efforts of flattery, or menace failed to release him. He found himself shunned and despised—his uncouth vulgarities laughed at; his wealth, even, a reproach. The one advance he obtained in political dignity, made him only the more obnoxious to his neighbors. He was by the influence of the government, made member of parliament for the close borough of Pethard—a post that none of the native gentry would accept, since it involved acquiescence in the detested project of a Union. Mr. Artslade had no such scruples, and, if he had, would have immolated them cheerfully to so tempting a prospect of advantage; but the result was that the magic words M. P., far from unlocking society to him, left him in still colder and more hopeless isolation.