

MARY LEE or The Yankee in Ireland

BY PAUL PEPPERGRASS, ESQ.

CHAPTER IV.

LANTY'S PROPHETIES.—WEEKS INTRODUCES HIMSELF INTO THE LIGHTHOUSE.—FINDS THE KEEPER ENGAGED SHOOTING HOLLAND HAWKS.—TAKES A CRACK AT ONE HIMSELF.—ASSURES THE KEEPER YANKEE BOYS CAN HIT SWALLOWS WITH A RIFLE BALL.—RECOMMENDS THE IMPORTATION OF YANKEE LECTURERS TO SMARTEN THE IRISH NATION.

It wanted still two hours of sunset, when Lanty Hanlon left the lighthouse with the mallard wing in his pocket for Uncle Jerry. His pace was now more hurried and purpose-like than when last seen wending his way through the dark glens. His song too had entirely ceased, and he held his blackhorn staff no longer carelessly under his arm, but grasped it firmly in his hand, like a traveller resolved to let no grass grow under his feet till he had accomplished his journey.

On passing the road below Elise Curley's cabin, however, he looked up to see if the old woman was in sight, that he might make her a sign of friendly recognition; or perhaps it was a wholesome dread of a second unceremonious visit from Nannie, that made him turn his eyes in that direction. Be that as it may, neither Nannie nor her mistress could be seen, but in their stead, and much to Lanty's surprise, appeared the tall figure of the stranger, issuing from the door of the little mud cabin, and making his way down the hill, in the direction of the lighthouse. Lanty stopped suddenly, not well knowing what to think of this. He had seen the stranger, a full half hour before, quitting Lough Ely, and setting off towards Crohan, and naturally concluded he was by that time far on his way home. A moment's reflection, however, convinced him that the man must have hid himself behind some rock or hillock, and waited till he could venture up unobserved, to pay his usual visit to Elise Curley.

This maneuvering was by no means satisfactory to Lanty; on the contrary, it served greatly to confirm the bad opinion he had begun to entertain of his purpose in hovering so constantly about Araheera Point. Lanty Hanlon was not a man remarkable for an extraordinary amount of shrewdness—it was the very reverse with him; shrewdness was not an ingredient to mix with the mercury of his nature at all. But the stranger's conduct was so palpably suspicious that he could not for an instant resist the idea of some plot between him and Elise Curley. In the first place, the man had been only two days in the country when he found the old woman out—may, went as straight to her cabin as if he had been sent there on a message, and since that time visited her every day, remaining with her often whole hours together. As for his pretext of fishing, it was the flimsiest in the world; for no one who saw him cast a line in water could ever imagine he cared a grain for the pleasure it afforded. Then his close and frequent inquiries about the Lees, and his knowledge of certain private affairs of the family, already communicated to Elise Curley—these, we say, put together, were clearly suggestive of some secret purpose on his part, and quite enough to raise suspicion in minds far less constructive than Lanty Hanlon's. Besides, Mr. Lee was himself a stranger in the place, having resided but eighteen months at the lighthouse, and during that time had seen but little company. The peasantry of the neighborhood, indeed, looked upon him at first as one who disliked society, preferring a quiet life at home to making and receiving visits. Hence they seldom troubled him, except on matters of business, and then only as little as possible. To be sure, the officers of the ballast board called on him three or four times a year, but that was on a business footing, and he was seen, too, sometimes trotting down in that direction, with his saddlebags bobbing behind him; but Mr. Lee was a Catholic, and Father John was the priest of the parish. All this was very natural. But it soon began to be whispered about that Captain Petersham, of Castle Gregory, was seen occasionally stepping ashore at the point when our yachting on Lough Swilly, and what looked strange still, taking Miss Lee with him up the lough to visit his sister. This latter circumstance led the good people, by degrees, to regard Mr. Lee as somewhat above the rank of a common light-keeper, for Tom Petersham was the crack gentleman of the county, and (though somewhat reduced himself) always felt a peg or two above associating with the squire and newly-fledged baronets of the district. So they concluded, after various speculations and gossip on the matter, that Mr. Lee must have been once a real gentleman, whose reverse of fortune had obliged to accept his present humble situation as a last resource. And so they continued ever after to regard him, saluting him with every mark of respect when they happened to meet about the lighthouse, and never presuming to intrude on his privacy except to settle their little business transactions, or when he chose to employ their services about the lighthouse yard.

Now, Lanty Hanlon saw all this long ago, and regulated his intercourse with the family to suit the case precisely. He asked no questions, made no apologies, came and went just as he pleased; and yet, as he often was heard to say himself, knew as little about Mr. Lee, or his private affairs, as the blackest stranger in the kingdom!

Young, active, and fond of recreation, Lanty always found Araheera Head a capital spot to indulge in his favorite pastime of gunning and fishing, and shortly after Mr. Lee's arrival found that gentleman quite as fond of the sport as himself. And thus an intimacy grew up between them all at once—an intimacy, by the way, which each felt it his interest to cultivate; Lanty for the sake of the light-keeper's influence with the neighboring gentry, in whose

power he often unfortunately found himself, and the light-keeper for the sake of Lanty's skill as a sportsman, in his frequent excursions on Lough Swilly. Besides Lanty kept a pair of black greyhounds, the best ever ran on four feet, and the terror of all the game-keepers in the three baronies. These enabled him to supply his friend with "hare's ear" for his files, and if the truth must be told, with haunches, for his table, occasionally without troubling his conscience greatly about the infraction of the game laws. Then he was moreover an excellent shot with either rifle or birding piece, and could bag a brace of grouse or wild ducks on sea-side or mountain as prettily as the best landlord's son in the parish—always remembering to reserve the wings for Mr. Lee's and Uncle Jerry's fly hooks. Sometimes, too, the light-keeper would find a white trout for breakfast of a morning, or a salmon for dinner, without any distinct recollection of having caught them himself, or bought them from any particular fish-hawker of the neighborhood. For reasons such as these, and others quite unnecessary to mention, Lanty soon became a constant and welcome visitor at Araheera Head, and indeed finally grew to be so special a favorite with the light-keeper that he could hardly prevail on himself to take his boat or his gun without Lanty at his elbow. He even offered him a salary larger than his limited means could well afford, to live with him altogether; but Lanty invariably refused, preferring a free foot on the hill side after his dogs, and a ramble on the sea-shore with his rifle, to all the inducements he could offer. These rambles, however, often brought him into trouble; but if they did, he always depended on Mr. Lee to get him out of it. On such occasions the honest light-keeper would bluster and swear as stoutly as a Dutch burgomaster never to speak another word in the villain's behalf, should it save him from the gallows, and often even went so far as to order the members of his family never to let the scoundrel inside his doors again; but somehow or other these resolutions never held out—all his indignation seemed to vanish in his sleep, and before the sun got up on the following morning, he was sure to despatch a note to Tom Petersham, or some other gentleman of the neighborhood, to beg their interest in the unfortunate fellow's behalf. Lanty, in fact, was never out of scrapes for a week together since Mr. Lee first saw him. He had either fallen foul of a bailiff, or beaten a policeman, or cudgelled a game-keeper, or spread a salmon by torchlight, or stole a game-cock, or—something was always sure to be wrong, whenever he was absent three days at a time from Araheera lighthouse.

Intimate, however, as Lanty was with the family, he knew nothing of their history save what he picked up from an odd word dropped now and then between Mary Lee and the light-keeper, or between himself and old Roger O'Shaughnessy, when they went up the tower of an evening to chat and trim the lamps together. What he learned from the latter, however, was never very satisfactory, for Roger considered himself too respectable and important a personage to hold much confidential intercourse with a light-headed scatterbrain like Lanty Hanlon. But whilst Roger said little of the family connections directly, he indulged frequently in little sneers at the pretensions of the Donegal aristocracy, wondered where in the world they found the arms of their carriage panels, and if they didn't one and all inherit their gentle blood from "Shemus Sallagh" or Oliver Cromwell. This contemptuous way of speaking about his neighbors was plain enough, and Lanty understood it. The nobler families of the south was a subject on which Roger loved very much to descend in a sort of colloquial tone, when he sat down of a summer's evening in the lantern to burnish up the reflectors, with Lanty at his side. Many a long sigh would he draw, talk of his own olden times, when real lords and ladies used to throng the halls of a certain castle in the south (surrounded by their servants in splendid liveries), to drink the choicest wines and dance to the music of the old family harp; and if his companion ventured to inquire the name of the castle or of its owner, little information would he get from Roger O'Shaughnessy. Still, studiously averse as Roger was to the revelation of family secrets, and if they didn't hide from his quick-witted companion the conclusion warranted by his frequent though indirect allusions. Besides, Roger always wore a curious old-fashioned coat when serving dinner, which contrived more, perhaps, than anything else to enlighten Lanty as to the antecedents of the family. This coat was once a bottle-green of fine texture, as might be seen by those shabby little corners here and there, where the sun had not been able to peer, nor the wear and tear of half a century entirely to reach. With a few redeeming spots like these, however, excepted, the rest of the garment was faded, threadbare, and polished as the cuff of a sailor's jacket. The high, stiff collar, the buff facings, and the long tails would have plainly showed it had once been livery, even if the two lonely gilt buttons on the high waist behind, bearing the family crest, had been lost and gone with the rest of the brotherhood. Every day, before the little bell rang for dinner, did Roger divest himself of his working-dress, brush over the few white hairs that still remained to cover his polished scalp, and then put on his bottle-green livery with as much care and tenderness as if it had been wove of spider's web. Poor Roger! many a scold he got from Mr. Lee for keeping such ridiculous old notions, and many a laugh had Mr. Petersham at his profound salutations, when he came to visit the family; but laugh or scold, it was the same to Roger; on he went, practising the same old habits, despite every remonstrance.

This obscurity in which the history of the Lees was involved, coupled with the mysterious conduct of the stranger, led Lanty Hanlon to suspect some deep plotting between him and Elise Curley. As for the latter, he had little fear she

would take part in anything directly tending to bring misfortune on the light-keeper or his family; but still she might meddle so far with the danger as to bring them into trouble without actually intending it—and all for the sake of gold, to obtain which he supposed the miserly old creature was prepared to run any risk, even that of her salvation. "Hooh!" he muttered, "for that matter, she'd go to the devil's door and sing her old bead at the key-hole to earn a sixpence; and as for you, my anguungh!" he continued, gazing after the retreating figure of the stranger, "ye've the cut of a schamer about ye, any way. Be all that's bad, I never saw ye with a fishin rod in yer hand yet, but ye put me in mind iv one I've seen big long-nosed cranes down there standing up to their knees in the water, waiting round for the little innocent shiners to make a pounce on them. F'eth, may be it's some sworn enemy I've the family eye, keeping their trail all the time since they left the south; or may be it's a sheriff's officer ye'd be in pursuit of an odd debt; or, by janny king, who knows but yer some discarded sweet-heart sneak iv ye after Mary Lee. If yer that, I'd advise ye lave the country or buy ye coffin. But whatsomever ye are, so, may swee! bad luck attend ye, acholla, and that's my prayer for ye, night and morin, sleepin and wakin;" and Lanty shook his fist at the stranger as he disappeared over the brow of the hill; "and since odd Elise has tuck ye in tow," he concluded, spitting on his sickle and again heading for the mountains "I'll just stand by and look on; but one thing I'll be bound to tell ye both, cute and all as ye are, that by the power of the powers that be, I'll be sure to get him out of it if ye hope to get the blind side iv one Lanty Hanlon."

Leaving Lanty to pursue his journey across Benraven, we return to the stranger. After examining for some time the structure of the narrow iron bridge over the chasm called the "Devil's Gulch," he raised the latch of the gate, and finding it unlocked, pushed it open. The light-keeper's lodge, facing him directly as he entered, was a long low cottage fronting full on the sea. The light tower rose up close by its side, with its great round lantern on top, to the height of 150 ft. from the rock, as smooth and white as marble. The door, walls, and window sashes of the lodge were also white and clean as human hands could make them; even the black stone steps by which he ascended to the hall door shone bright and spotless as polished ebony. The place, however, notwithstanding the care and trouble it cost, looked still and deserted. For full ten minutes the stranger stood in front of the house gazing round him, and yet no one came to bid him welcome. A little white bantam on the grass plot before the door, scraping up the greensward and calling his family round him, was the only sign of life to be seen. In such a remote spot he naturally heaped the presence of a stranger in his garb would draw some one from the house; but he was mistaken. At length, tired of waiting, he advanced to the door, and knocked; still there was no answer; he knocked again, and yet no one came. Then turning the handle and opening the door, he stepped over the threshold, and found himself all at once in a long passage or entrance hall. On either side of this hall hung several spears and fowling pieces, here and there, fishing rods resting in brass sockets against the wall, and suspended from the ceiling, half a dozen or more reels of jack lines, with hooks and leads attached, ready for use. It was evident from their superior quality, and the excellent condition in which they were kept, these articles were used more for amusement than profit. Beyond, however, and near the opposite extremity of the passage, hung two light oars of beautiful finish, and close beside them a small sail of Russia duck, with its little sheet curled carefully round it, and if one might judge from its appearance, but long over the top of its mast, still and deserted. For full ten minutes the stranger stood in front of the house gazing round him, and yet no one came to bid him welcome. A little white bantam on the grass plot before the door, scraping up the greensward and calling his family round him, was the only sign of life to be seen. In such a remote spot he naturally heaped the presence of a stranger in his garb would draw some one from the house; but he was mistaken. At length, tired of waiting, he advanced to the door, and knocked; still there was no answer; he knocked again, and yet no one came. Then turning the handle and opening the door, he stepped over the threshold, and found himself all at once in a long passage or entrance hall. 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