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A TALE OF CASHEL.

BY MRS. J. SADLER.

CHAPTER III.—SHAUN THE PIPER.

The next day being All Saints' Day—Hollantide day amongst the Irish peasantry—was, of course, a holiday of obligation. The tardy winter's morning rose clear and cold. The high wind of the previous night had dried up the clammy earth, and towards morning a sharp frost began to whiten the bare brown pastures and stubble-fields, giving the first positive indication of the near approach of winter. The red light of the dawn was just appearing over the Kilough heights eastward when old Bryan Cullenan might be seen wending his homeward way from the chapel where he had just heard Mass through one of the narrow by-streets leading off from the Main Street of Cashel. The old man was alone, as usual, and as he paced with slow and uncertain steps the rough pavement of the old borough, his head and shoulders bent slightly forward, and his hands crossed at the wrists in the loose sleeves of his coarse and faded brown coat—of that make known in the rural parts of Ireland as a 'big coat'—with a large cape, namely, and a small collar turning over it—his sharp and rather wasted features composed and thoughtful, and his grey sunken eyes fixed on the ground as if in meditation, he looked the solitary man he was. The men and women he met all accosted him with kindness and respect, and the children as he passed smiled and whispered to each other: 'There goes Bryan, the old man of the Rock!' The urchins regarded him with a sort of feeling that was not fear, but rather something more akin to reverence. The noisiest and most mischievous of them all kept silent and demure while Bryan was in sight, and it was a notable fact that no one living remembered to have seen an ash-bag appended to the rear of Bryan Cullenan on an Ash-Wednesday. That exemption, which he shared with the priests, speaks volumes for the high estimation in which the Hermit was held by the ragamuffins of Cashel town who, like all other ragamuffins in Irish towns, take a malicious pleasure in carrying out the title of the day, by ornamenting the coat-tails and other such rear appendages of the passers-by with tiny paper bags filled with ashes. Which one of our Irish readers can boast that during their Irish life they went to Chapel and got home again on an Ash-Wednesday without hearing from some one passing by the sly announcement—then a startling one, too—'you have got an ash-bag on your back.'

Well, Bryan Cullenan enjoyed, as we have said, this very important immunity, when others of a similar nature, from the juvenile inhabitants of Cashel, which was the more remarkable on account of the old man's self-imposed office of expelling all such intruders from the sacred precincts of his domain on the Rock. Going home from Mass that Hollantide-day, Bryan was moving along at a pace somewhat quicker than usual, with that sliding gait peculiar to the aged, saying his prayers the while for the repose of the souls who were that morning recommended to the charitable remembrance of the congregation. Amongst them was one which would single itself out in Bryan's mind from all the others, as if demanding special attention, and though Bryan prayed fervently for all, he did, undoubtedly, offer up an extra *Pater* and *Ave* for that soul in particular. It was Kathleen Murtha, the mother of a poor family whom all the country-side knew to have been ejected off the lands of Harry Esmond, sen., of Rose Lodge, some two or three weeks before. The case of these Murthas made a great noise at the time, from the exceedingly trying circumstances in which they were placed. The father of the family, a thatcher by trade, had fallen off the roof of a house he had been thatching, full three months before, and had lain ever since in a helpless condition, one of his thighs having been broken, and also his collar-bone. He was a poor man, just barely supporting his family by his daily labor, and having no time to cultivate a farm, he was obliged to plant potatoes by 'con-acre' in Mr. Esmond's ground, and to rent a small adjoining cottage from the same wealthy proprietor. Well, it so happened that Tim Murtha's long illness and the want of earning, consequent thereon, had completely ruined his poor family. His wife could not leave him to go out to work, even if work were to be had, and the children, three girls and one boy, were too young to be of any service; and the doctor had to be paid, and that even could not have been done were it not that the neighboring farmers made up the amount amongst themselves; the potatoes, which remained of them, were seized by Mr. Esmond's bailiffs for the 'con-acre' money, and the pig that was fattening for the next fair in Cashel, was sold at auction, with a goat that used to give the children milk, and a little kid, whose gambols often made them forget

the hunger that was wasting away their young life. All was gone,—poverty was becoming starvation, and still, on his bed of pain, lay the so-lately strong man, his heart torn with anguish at the sight of his heart-broken wife and her thin pale little ones cowering over the smoky embers of some brambles which the children had picked up around the fields. Nor food nor drink did the cottage contain, except the can of cold water that sat on a table where the 'dresser' used to be—the 'dresser' itself was gone, with the pewter plates and dishes and wooden vessels, which it had been poor Kathleen's pride to keep 'like new pins.' Only the shelter of the roof remained to the destitute family, and that remained not long, for on the very day that Tim Murtha crawled out of bed for the first time, Mr. Esmond's bailiffs came with certain members of 'the crow-bar brigade,' turned Tim out on the wide world, the helpless father, the frail, drooping wife, and the wan, emaciated little children, and levelled to the ground their poor, but well-loved dwelling, because 'his honor didn't want such cabins so near the big house,' and was glad of the opportunity to get rid of one of them.

Prayers, and tears, and expostulations were all in vain—Tim Murtha knew that well, so he neither wept, nor prayed, but sat, with his terror-stricken family clinging around him, on a large flat stone which Kathleen's feeble arm had helped him to reach, watching with stony eyes the work of demolition that left them all homeless on a chill October day. He thought, with a swelling heart, of the time when his own hands had built that little cottage to bring Kathleen home to—a bony bride. He thought of the light heart that was in his breast then, and the bright hopes that danced before his eyes like fairy visions; scarce ten years had passed since then, and lo! the bright hopes were fled—hunger and cold had their grasp on his heart, and, worse still on the heart of Kathleen and her children,—and the walls that had witnessed their humble joys, and the years of comfort his honest toil had earned, were now ruthlessly battered down before his eyes and erased from the face of the earth.—What other thoughts came into the tortured mind of Tim Murtha, to the tune of the crashing walls and fallen rafters of his home, God—and the Devil—only knew. That night the forlorn family were sheltered under the roof of a kind neighbor, himself a poor cottier, too, and next day a few of 'the boys' came together and threw up a shed against the side of the old Rock amongst the huts where Bryan had his home.

Not quite three weeks had passed since the Murthas were evicted from their old homestead, and now Kathleen was dead, and gone to rest. Many a visit old Bryan had paid to their dreary place of refuge during those long tedious weeks, and, truth to tell, two bright half-crowns had passed, at as many succeeding visits, from his pocket to that of Tim Murtha. That was a crown of 'the Counsellor's guinea,' but what of that,—if it helped to keep the life in the poor things, it couldn't be better spent. Oh how Bryan rejoiced then that he had divided his share with those who were more in need than himself.

But still he kept thinking of the solemn words of the priest who said Mass that morning—'And brethren, I recommend to your prayers in an especial manner the soul of Kathleen Murtha!'

'Ah!' said Bryan to himself, 'there's where God's holy Church differs from the world. The poor are her care, and the more despised they are by the rich and the proud of this world, the dearer they are to the heart of that good Mother—if they only lived as Christians. Well, that's one comfort, anyhow!' he said as he reached his own door, which was opened by Cauth with great alacrity, that singular specimen of womankind having been anxiously waiting his coming.

'And what is that?' said Cauth, as she stooped to blow up her smouldering fire; 'what's the comfort now?'

'Why, just this, Cauth,' said the old man, taking his seat by the welcome fire that was now beginning to blaze up cheerily, 'that the poor have one friend that never deserts them—a powerful friend, too—and that is Religion!—If it wasn't for Religion, and the good, kind priest that brings her smile with him to the hovels of the poor, how could you, or I, live at all—or poor Kathleen Murtha, that's gone home now? What would become of the poor, Cauth, if it wasn't for Religion, and the hopes she keeps alive in their hearts?' Bryan, from his solitary habits and his almost uninterrupted communion with the spirits of the dead in the relics of their mortal bodies and the mouldering works of their hands, had acquired a certain solemnity in the expression of his thoughts which at times amounted to dignity. His speech was, moreover, thickly strewn with metaphor, and assumed now and then quite a poetical character. This was only, however, when the old man spoke in

Irish, which he generally did with Cauth: but even his English was rather choice from his frequent communication with the gentle-folks from abroad who visited the ruins on the Rock. His grave and sometimes even lofty thoughts Cauth could not, of course understand, but his style of talking, when he did talk freely, commanded her entire admiration and caused her to look upon the aged Hermit as something far beyond the common run of people. Be it known to the reader that Bryan and Cauth did not stand to each other in the relation of husband and wife as might be supposed; they were strangers to each other, only a year or two before, when Bryan at the recommendation of Mrs. Esmond, and with her kind assistance, commended house-keeping, with Cauth as *femme de charge*, for before that time poor Bryan had not a roof he could call his own, and spent most of his nights as well as his days amongst the lone mansions of the dead on his beloved Rock, coming down only to hear Mass on Sundays and Holydays, and to receive from the willing hand of charity the little sustenance which he required. It was only when the inclemency of the weather drove him for shelter to the plan below that he ever asked a night's lodging. He used to say himself, when any one expressed surprise at his remaining over night on the Rock, that he had the grandest sleeping-room in all Ireland, and that was 'in the king's own house.' But it was not in the old palace of the Munster Kings that Bryan Cullenan oftener sought repose; he preferred the choir of the old Cathedral, just by the tomb of Myler McGrath, or the shade of the deep Saxon arch that separates the nave from the choir in Cormac's Chapel.

As for Cauth, old Bryan knew no more about her than just what he saw. Who she was, or what she was, she carefully kept to herself; and Bryan, being nowise addicted to curiosity, seldom thought of what there was peculiar about her manner, unless when some wild expression, to him 'unaccountable,' set him thinking of the probable cause of her odd ways, and the strange fits of moody thought that would come upon her at times without any apparent cause.

Her humor was somewhat caustic that Hollantide-day, and she snapped at Bryan like a cross cur when he alluded so feelingly to Kathleen Murtha's deserted state.

'She wasn't trusting to the priest, anyhow,' said she stopping a moment with the skillet—(an iron pot of the smallest size is so called in Ireland)—in her hand, from which she was pouring out on a wooden trencher the stirabout—(outmeal porridge)—intended for Bryan's breakfast—her own share being left in the pot.

'And sure I know that well, Cauth!' said Bryan with much feeling; 'sure I know who made her bed and kept her close an' comfortable ever since she came about the Rock—Oyeh, one most as poor as herself,' he added as if to himself.

'Deed, then, it's little I could do for her,' made answer Cauth; 'but there was them that could an' did give her comfort—may they never know the want of it themselves, I pray God.'

'And who were they, Cauth?'

'That's a saycret, Bryan,' said Cauth, a little softened; 'but—but—I think you might guess.'

Bryan looked up from his stirabout at the shrewd, keen-looking face of Cauth, and his old eyes twinkled. 'I think I do, Cauth, I think I do.'

'Well, if you do, keep it to yourself, for if it came to the ears of some people—you know who I mean—it 'd make bad blood betwixt them all—so the darling says herself, an' she's fearful of having anybody's ill-will, espically when it's in the family.'

'And more's the pity, Cauth, that is in the family. I declare that man's a disgrace to all belonging to him.'

'Ay, an' if it wasn't for them he'd a got his oats long ago,' said Cauth with bitter emphasis.

'Whisht, whisht, Cauth, don't say that!' cried Bryan quickly, and he glanced around as if fearful that some one might possibly be within hearing.

'But I will say it, Bryan,' said Cauth doggedly, 'and I say, too, that there's many a one has got settled with before now that wasn't any better entitled to it.'

Bryan dropped his spoon and looked up again, his pale wrinkled face was flushed, and a light was shining in his aged eyes that Cauth had never seen there before.

'Woman!' said he in a grave solemn tone, 'who has made you the judge of that man's, or any other man's, evil doings? There's One above that'll judge us all.'

As if a blow had stunned her Cauth dropped heavily on the stool beside her, and buried her face in her outspread hands, murmuring in a half-audible voice: 'Who am I? Ay, sure enough, who am I to judge any one? Oh wirra, it's myself can tell that!'

'Bryan, alarmed as he always was by Cauth's strange soliloquies, began to express his sorrow for what he had said, assuring her that he didn't mean to hurt her feelings, 'but then, Cauth, I couldn't listen to the words you said and hold my peace. No, Cauth, I could not, I could not, for murder is murder be it as it may, and the Lord in heaven says, 'You shall do no murder.''

At this Cauth started to her feet, and flung back the long gray hair that had fallen from under her close linen cap: 'An' who has done murder, Bryan Cullenan?—who has shed blood? You needn't look at me with them old fiery eyes of yours—as if there was blood on my hand—see there; see there!' and she stretched both her hands towards him, but suddenly drew them back, and sank again on her seat with a low plaintive moan and a shudder.

'Christ save us!' ejaculated Bryan in an under tone, 'I b'lieve it's losing her senses the woman is. I'd best get out of her sight, I'm thinking.'

Unnoticed by Cauth he reached for his hat, where it hung on a peg, and softly opening the door left the cottage. He was taking his way, as usual towards the Rock, and had already reached the gate leading into the hallowed enclosure when the cheerful sound of the bagpipes struck upon his ear, and the old man paused with his hand on the latch to await the approach of the wandering minstrel, in whom he recognised an old friend. Surrounded by a troop of ragged urchins, for whose special entertainment he evidently blew his chanter at that particular moment, the piper, a little old man of three-score-five or thereabouts, moved along with the slow pace peculiar to his tribe, gladdening the hearts of his juvenile audience—and most likely his own, too—with "The Reel of Tullochgorum." Ever and anon his course was impeded by the rushing and crushing of the young tatterdemalions who formed his guard of honor, each one trying to make his way nearer to the great centre of attraction; little scrupulous, moreover, as to the means employed, so that kicks and cuffs were more plenty than 'hapence,' as the piper good-humoredly observed. But still he played on the crowd increasing by little and little as the cortege passed along, the merry heart of the old man growing lighter and lighter, and his music cheerier, as the acclamations of his noisy escort grew more and more uproarious. Now and then the music would suddenly cease, and the piper's voice make itself heard in tones of remonstrance, rather than rebuke.

'Athen, childer, how can I play if you don't keep off my elbow? See that now—bad cess to me but you'll break my pipes, so you will. Well now, I tell you this, if you don't keep off o' me I'll not play another tune, and that's the end of it, now.'

But it was not the end of it, as the young rogues well knew by old experience; for the piper's face belied his words, and the more he protested against playing any more, the faster and merrier went the pipes, amid the joyous shouts of the rosy urchins who went frisking like kids to the sound of the music.

It required more than a passing glance to make a stranger sensible of the fact that the merry face of the piper wanted the light of the eyes, for the organs themselves, clear, full and blue, gave no other indications of the visual darkness than a tremulous motion of the lids which might possibly have proceeded from some other cause. But then there was a little dog, a wiry, hard-favored terrier, which trotted along a pace or two in advance of the piper, to whom it was evidently bound by affection still more than by the cord, one end of which encircled the neck of the animal, whilst the other was fastened to the button-hole of its master's old frieze coat by a piece of stick run through inside the garment; patiently and gently the dog moved on, suiting its pace with wonderful sagacity to that of its master, and maintaining a sort of official gravity that was proof against every trial, the effect, doubtless, of long familiarity with the noisy plaudits that usually followed the performance to which he probably considered himself a party. It was clear, then, that the piper was blind, and it was also clear, that his privation sat lightly upon him, even with the weight of his sixty odd years, and his houseless, homeless poverty. Shaun the piper, was indeed one of the happiest men in all Ireland, for, like the Claddagh boatman in the ballad—

"His heart was true, his wants were few,"

and his pipes made him welcome wherever he went to a night's lodging and the best fare the peasant's cot or the farmer's house afforded.—Even his dog—misnamed Frisk—was as welcome a visitor as himself, especially to the junior members of the humble households where he oftentimes sought rest and shelter. Shaun, like most persons suffering under a like privation, had a wonderfully-keen sense of hearing, and could tell people by their voices just as others do by their faces. He also knew with unerring precision, every foot of ground in Tipperary,

and could make his way, with Frisk alone, through many parts of Limerick, Clare, and Waterford. He had even crossed the Knockmeledown mountains, and extended his 'tramp' into Cork; but somehow Frisk's sagacity failed him there, and the pipes never seemed to sound the same, and Shaun made up his mind that he and Frisk had better keep to 'the old art,' so they never crossed the wild mountains again.

But we have left our friend Bryan standing too long at the gate, especially as the weather was cold and the iron latch felt like ice under his hand. A grim smile puckered his visage as he watched the triumphant approach of the minstrel who suddenly stooped short in the middle of a bar, and turned his sightless eyes toward the Rock.

'Childer,' said he, 'we ought to be near the gate now—I wonder is old Bryan Cullenan alive yet?'

'Oyeh, it's himself that is—sure he'll never die.'

'Alive? why wouldn't he? sure he's a ghost himself, if there's one on the Rock?'

'Whisht, you sprissawn, there he is at the gate.'

Here the crowd of chattering gaffers fell back right and left to make way for Bryan, who came forward with outstretched hand to greet his old acquaintance.

'You're welcome back to Cashel, Shaun,' he said in Irish; 'I needn't ask how you are for your face tells that story, and your foot is 'most as light as it was five-and-twenty years ago when you danced the Foxhunter's Jig for the quality the night of the old master's wedding. Frisk! my poor fellow! I'm proud to see you again.'

Frisk acknowledged the compliment by wagging his tail demurely.

'Wish, Bryney the Rock, is this yourself?' was the piper's hearty response as he eagerly seized and warmly shook the old man's hand; 'I was just a-thinkin' to myself that if you were still above ground I'd soon hear your voice.—Well! I declare I'm glad to see you.'

He forgot that he didn't see him, but the mischievous eyes around, all eyes and ears, quickly detected the slip of the tongue.

'O murder! do you hear what he says?—he's glad to see him! This was the signal for a roar of juvenile laughter, that drew a mild angry rebuke from Shaun, and a whole-angry one from Bryan, both of which only tended to increase the merriment of the wagging crowd.

'Put up your pipes, Shaun!' said Bryan, 'and come in and have some breakfast—I've a little piece of my own now.'

'Do you tell me so, Bryan? And where is it, agna?'

'Only a step or two back from here—come now—be off home with you, childer! Shaun will play no more this bout.'

This unwelcome news had to be repeated by Shaun himself before it was received as true, and even then the youngsters were not got rid of till the door of Bryan's cottage hid the piper, his pipes and dog from their eager sight.

'That was a pleasant night you were speakin' of, Bryan,' said Shaun as they entered. 'But I didn't know that you were there.'

'Deed an' I was, then—wasn't the whole country there? An' full an' plenty there was for everyone. A darlin' fine young gentleman the old master was then—the heavens be his bed this day! for it's himself was always a good friend to the poor, an' liked well to see them about him.'

'Pity all the Esmonds weren't like him,' said the piper with a sudden change of manner.

'His son is as good as ever he was!' said Bryan, as he took the pipes and placed the piper on a stool near the fire.

'But his brother isn't,' returned Shaun with a degree of excitement altogether unusual. 'If there's vengeance in heaven it'll come down on him, as sure as his name is Harry Esmond!'

'Pooh! pooh, Shaun, don't be so hard on the old gentleman!—don't now, and God bless you, for I don't like to hear anything bad laid out for one of his name. They're a good stock, you know yourself.'

'I do well, Bryan, an' that's the very reason why old Harry shouldn't act as he does. A body doesn't wonder at the upstarts that's takin' the place of the rare quality to be hard on the old tenants, an' trate God's poor like dogs, but, I tell you, Bryan, it's against nature for an Esmond to make a brute of himself.'

'A brute, Shaun—oh vo! vo! what's comin' over you?'

'I say he is a brute, Bryan—take it as you will—if he wasn't, he wouldn't turn the piper from his door, and kick the piper's dog.' This last came out with such strong emphasis that it was clearly the greater offence of the two.

'An' did old Mr. Esmond do that?' questioned Bryan anxiously.

'He did, Bryan, as I'm a sinner, an' if I was to die on the roadside of hunger—myself an'