

"You have no suspicion that they would league with the assassin."

"They would not—impossible."

"Would any of them be found to defend you?"

"Ah," said Father Ned, "one sees where such question as that lead; and I think Mr. D'Alton is hardly prepared to answer them."

"Your nephew has some evidence of importance," remarked the Inspector.

"He was not on the premises at all."

"Oh, nevertheless—but I beg your pardon. I want to further the ends of justice by bringing guilt to condign punishment; and nothing shall be left undone to explain the mysterious death of Quirk."

"The police Inspector withdrew, and the clergymen and old Mr. D'Alton closed around a small table.

Father Ned was the first of the little group in Giffard D'Alton's room to break the silence.

"This inquest will end in nothing," was his remark. "They are making up a case, and will say nothing till the whole plan has been completed."

"Plan?" asked Father Aylmer.

"Plan," repeated Father Ned. "Did you remark the observation about Charles Baring?"

"Yes—certainly."

"And the question about the Hayeses and their feelings?"

"Yes."

"And that although Mr. Baring was not on the premises that night, he had 'important information'?"

"True," said D'Alton.

"You have Baring and the Hayeses, and Maureen Bour brought into this thing by some one, and occupying the Inspector's mind; that is the shadow of a plan."

Old D'Alton seemed to awaken. He struck his thigh with his right hand, and commenced to say and repeat, "I see."

"The verdict," continued Father Ned, "will be an open one. The victim will be put off his guard, and when they have the whole conspiracy shaped and coherent, they will try to hang an innocent man."

"Crichawn!" cried Father Aylmer.

"Crichawn!" echoed Giffard D'Alton; "surely——"

"Well, we shall see; we shall see."

As regards "the open verdict," Father Ned was right. The patent facts, and only the patent facts, came out at the inquest. The mystery was wrapped up in the following finding:—

"We find that James Quirk came by his death from a gun-shot wound, inflicted by some person unknown, but who was on the premises of Mr. D'Alton of Crag, on the morning of the 30th of October, 1848."

That same night Crichawn found himself in the familiar quarters of *Shivawn na Chomhairle*, quietly sitting by the peat fire, and indulging in what O'Connell used to call the poor man's luxury—a smoke of the pipe. The younger of the female occupants was busily engaged at the flax wheel, while the elder kept industriously knitting, and the company was completed by a man whom they called Liam (or William.)

They had been talking of the inquest, and of the attack upon old Mr. D'Alton.

"Well, *bhean a tigh*, who killed Quirk?" asked Crichawn addressing Shivawn.

The old woman was true to the Celtic tongue, and allowed all around her to indulge the bad taste of speaking the Saxon. She answered:—

"Oh, you know too much to come for knowledge to *Shivawn na Chomhairle*, and I am certain the knowledge is between yourself and Liam there, at any rate."

"Maybe," Liam replied, "it was the man that got the pison from Shivawn."

"Pison!" exclaimed the young Pithoness; "my mother never had an ounce of pison in her life."

"And what did that man get that made his way straight to the Crag some time ago in the dark of the morning?"

"He got pounded starch," was the answer.

"Arrah, didn't Tom here go to Nelly up at the house, and nearly frighten her to death by telling her to watch Charles—that he bought a lot of pison from *Shivawn na Chomhairle* to kill the old master. Didn't you?" he demanded turning to Crichawn.

"I did," was Crichawn's answer.

"And did you think I gave pison to—"