

## The Family Circle.

"Home, Sweet Home."

## Brian Taafe's Will.

BY CHARLES READE.

In a certain part of Ireland a long time ago lived a wealthy old farmer whose name was Brian Taafe. His three sons, Guiliam, Shamus and Garrett, worked on the farm. The old man had a great affection for them all, and finding himself unfit for work, he resolved to hand his farm over to them and sit quiet by the fireside. But as that was not a thing to be done lightly, he thought he would just put them to their trial. He would take the measure of their intelligence and their affection.

Preceding this order he gave each £100 and quietly waited to see what they would do with it.

Well, Guiliam and Shamus put their £100 out at interest, every penny; but when the old man questioned Garrett where his money was, the young man said, "I spent it, father."

"Spent it?" said the old man, aghast. "Is it the whole £100?"

"Sure I thought you told us we might lay it out as we pleased."

"Is that the reason ye'd waste the whole of it in a year, ye prodigal?" cried the old man, and he trembled at the idea of his substance ever falling into such hands.

Some months after this he applied the second test.

He convened his sons and addressed them solemnly:—

"I am an old man, my children; my hair is white on my head, and it's time I was giving over trade and making my soul."

The two elders overflowed with sympathy.

He then gave the dairy farm and hill to Shamus, and the meadows to Guiliam. Thereupon these two vied with each other in expressions of love and gratitude. But Garrett said never a word, and this, coupled with his behaviour about the £100, so maddened the old man that he gave Garrett's portion, namely, the home and the home farm, to his elder brothers to hold in common. Garrett he disinherited on the spot and in due form. That is to say, he did not overlook him nor pass him by; but even as spiteful testators used to leave the disinherited a shilling, that he might not be able to say he had been inadvertently omitted, and it was all a mistake, Brian Taafe solemnly presented young Garrett Taafe with a hazel staff and a small bag. Poor Garrett knew very well what that meant. He shouldered the bag and went forth into the wide world with a sad heart but a silent tongue. His dog Lurcher was for following him, but he drove him back with a stone.

On the strength of the new arrangement, Guiliam and Shamus married directly and brought their wives home, for it was a large house and had room for all.

But the old farmer was not contented to be quite a cypher, and he kept finding fault with this and that. The young men became more and more impatient of this interference, and their wives fanned the flames with female pertinacity. So that the house was divided and the very home of discord.

This went on getting worse and worse, till at last, one winter afternoon, Shamus defied his father before the rest, and said: "I'd like to know what would please ye. Maybe you'd like to turn us all out as you did Garrett."

The old farmer replied with sudden dignity: "If I did I take no more than I gave."

"What good was your giving it?" said Guiliam. We get no comfort of it while you are in the house."

"Do you talk in that way too?" said the father, deeply grieved. "If it was poor Garrett I had, he wouldn't use me so."

"Much thanks the poor boy ever got from you!" said one of the women with venomous tongue. Then the other woman finding she could count on male support suggested to her father-in-law to take his stick and follow his beloved Garrett, adding: "Sure he'd find him beggins about the country."

At the women's tongues the wounded parent turned at bay.

"I don't wonder at anything I hear you say. You never heard of any good that a woman had a hand in—only mischief always. If ye ask who made such a road, or built a bridge, or wrote a great history, or did a great action, you'll never hear it's a woman did it; but if there's a duel with sword or gun, or two boys cracking each other's crowns with shillalaws, or a secret let out, or a character ruined, or a man brought to the gallows, or mischief made between a father and his own flesh and blood, I'll engage you'll hear a woman had some call in it. We needn't have recourse to history to know your doings; its under our eyes; for 'twas the likes of ye two burned Troy, and made the King o' Leicester rebel against Brian Boru."

These shafts of eloquence struck home. The women set up a screaming, and pulled the caps off their heads, which in that part was equivalent to the gentle folks drawing their swords.

"Oh, murder! murder! was it for this I married you, Guiliam Taafe?"

"Oh, Shamus, will ye sit and hear me compared to the loikes? Would I rebel against Brian Boru?"

"Don't heed him, avourneen," said Shamus; "he is an old man."

But she would not be pacified. "Oh, vo! vo! If ever I thought the like 'ud be said of me, that I'd rebel against Brian Boru!"

As for the other, she prepared to leave the house.

"Guiliam," said she, "I'll never stay a day under your roof with them as would say I'd burn Throy. Does he forget that he ever had a mother himself? Oh! 'tis a bad apple that despises the tree it sprung from."

All this heated Shamus so that he told the woman sternly to sit down, for the offender would go; and upon that, to show they were of one mind, Guiliam deliberately opened the door. Lurcher ran out, and the wind and rain rushed in. It was a stormy night.

Then the old man took fright and humbled himself.

"Ah! Shamus, Guiliam, achree, let ye do as ye will. I'm sorry for what I said, a'ra gal. Don't turn me out on the highroad in my old days, Guiliam, and I'll engage I'll never open my mouth against one o' ye the longest day I live. Ah, Shamus, it isn't long I have to stay wid ye, anyway. Yer own

hair will be as white as mine yet, please God! and ye'll be thanking Him ye showed respect to mine this night."

But they were all young and of one mind, and they turned him out and barred the door.

He crept away, shivering in the wind and rain till he got to the lee side of a stone wall, and there he stopped and asked himself whether he could live through the night. Presently something cold and smooth poked against his hand; it was a large dog that had followed him unobserved until he stopped. By a white mark on his breast he saw it was Lurcher, Garrett's dog.

"Ah," said the poor wanderer, "you are not as wise a dog as I thought, to follow me." When he spoke the dog fondled him. Then he burst out sobbing and crying: "Ah, Lurcher! Garrett was not wise either; but he would never have turned me to the door this bitter night, nor even thee." And so he moaned and lamented. But Lurcher pulled his coat, and by this movement conveyed to him that he should not stay there all night; so he crept on and knocked at more than one door but did not gain admittance it was so tempestuous. At last he lay down exhausted on some straw in the corner of an out-house; but Lurcher lay close to him, and it is probable the warmth of the dog saved his life that night.

The next day the wind and rain abated, but this aged man had other ills to fight against besides winter and rough weather. The sense of his sons' ingratitude and his own folly drove him almost mad. Sometimes he would curse and thirst for vengeance; sometimes he would shed tears that seemed to burn his withered cheeks. He got into another county, and begged from door to door. As for Lurcher, he did not beg. He used to disappear, often for an hour at a time, but always returned, and with a rabbit or even a hare in his mouth.

Sometimes the friends exchanged them for a gallon of milk, sometimes they roasted them in the woods. Lurcher was a civilized dog, and did not like raw.

Wandering hither and thither Brian Taafe came at last within a few miles of his own house, but soon he had cause of wishing himself further off from it; here he met his first downright rebuff, and, cruel to say, he owed it to his hard-hearted sons. One recognized him as the father of that rogue Guiliam Taafe, who had cheated him in the sale of a horse, and another as the father of that thief Shamus, who had sold him a diseased cow, which had died the week after. So, for the first time since he was out of his home, he passed the night supperless, for houses did not lie close together in that part.

Cold, hungry, houseless, and distracted with grief at what he had been and now was, nature gave way at last, and, unable to outlast the weary, bitter night, he lost his senses just before dawn, and lay motionless on the hard road.

The chances were he must die; but just at death's door his luck turned.

Lurcher put his feet over him and his chin upon his breast, to guard him as he had often guarded Garrett's coat, and that kept up a little warmth in his heart, and at the very dawn of day the door of a farm-house opened, and the master came out upon his business, and saw something unusual lying in the road a good way off. So he went towards it, and found Brian Taafe in that condition. This farmer was very well-to-do, but he had known trouble and it had made him charitable. He soon hallooed to his men, and had the old man taken in; he called his wife, too, and bade her observe it was a reverend face, though he was all in tatters. They laid him in hot blankets, and when he had come to a bit gave him a warm drink, and at last a good meal. He recovered his spirits, and thanked them with a certain dignity.

When he was comfortable, and not before, they asked him his name.

"Ah! don't ask me that," he said piteously. "It's a bad name I have, and it used to be a good one to. Don't ask me, or maybe you'll put me out as the others did for the fault of my two sons. It's hard to be turned from my own door, alone from other honest men's doors, through the viliyns," said he.

So the farmer was kindly and said, "Never mind your name; fill your belly."

By and by the men went out into the yard, and then the wife could not restrain her curiosity. "Why, good man," said she, "sure you are too decent a man to be ashamed of your name."

"I'm too decent not to be ashamed of it," said Brian. "But you are right; an honest man should tell his name though they draw him out of heaven for it. I am Brian Taafe—that was."

"Not Brian Taafe, the strong farmer at Corrans?"

"Ay, madam, I'm all that's left of him."

"Have you a son called Garrett?"

"I had, then."

The woman spoke no more to him, but ran screaming to the door. "Here Tom! Tom!" As Lurcher, a sympathetic dog, flew to the door, and yelled and barked fiercely in support of this invocation, the hullabaloo soon brought the farmer running in.

"Oh, Tom, asthore," cried she, "it's Mither Taafe, the father of Garrett Taafe himself."

"Oh, Lord!" cried the farmer in equal agitation, and stared at him. "My blessing on the day you ever set foot within these doors." Then he ran to the door and hallooed, "Hi, Murphy! Ellen! come here!"

Lurcher supported the call with great energy. In ran a little boy and girl. "Look at this man with all the eyes in your body!" said he. "This is Mr. Taafe, father of Garrett Taafe, that saved us all from destruction entirely." He then turned to Mr. Taafe and told him a little more calmly that "years ago every haporth they had was going to be carted for rent; but Garrett Taafe came by, put his hand in his pocket, took out £30, and cleared them in a moment. It was a way he had; we were not the only ones he saved in that way, so long as he had it to give."

The old man did not hear these last words; his eyes were opened; the iron entered his soul, and he overflowed with grief and penitence.

"Och, murder! murder!" he cried. "My poor boy! What had I to do at all to go and turn you adrift, as I done, for no reason in life!" then with a piteous apologetic wail, "I tuk the wrong for the right; that's the way the world is blinded. Och, Garrett, Garrett, what will I do with the thoughts of it? And those two viliyns that I gave it all to, and they turned me out in my old days, as I done you. No mither!" and he fell into a sobbing and trembling that nearly killed him for the second time.

But the true friend of his son Garrett nursed him through

that, and comforted him as he recovered. But, as he did live, he outlived the tender feelings whose mortal wounds had so nearly killed him. When he recovered this last blow he brooded, but never shed another tear.

One day, seeing him pretty well restored, as he thought, the good farmer came to him with a fat bag of gold. "Sir," said he, "soon after your son helped us luck set in our way. Mary she had a legacy; we had a wonderful crop of flax, and with that plant 'tis kill or cure; and then I found lead in the hill, and they pay me a deal o' money for leave to mine there. I'm almost ashamed to take it. I tell you this to show you I can afford to pay you back that £30, and if you please I'll count it out."

"No!" said Mr. Taafe. "I'll not take Garrett's money; but if you'll do me a favor, lend me the whole bag for a week, for at the sight of it I see a way to—Whisper."

Then with bated breath, and in strict confidence, he hinted to the farmer a scheme of vengeance. The farmer was not even to tell it to his wife, "for," said old Brian, "the very birds carry these things about; and it is knowing ones I have to deal with, especially the women."

Next day the farmer lent him a good suit, and drove him to a quiet corner scarce a hundred yards from his old abode. The farmer got down and left him. Lurcher walked at his master's heels. It was noon and the sun was shining bright.

The wife of Shamus Taafe came out to hang up her man's shirt to dry, when lo! scarce thirty yards from her she saw an old man seated counting out gold on a broad stone at his feet. At first she thought it must be one of the good people or fairies, or else she must be dreaming; but no! cocking her head on one side she saw for certain the profile of Brian Taafe and he was counting a mass of gold. She ran in and screamed her news rather than spoke it.

"Nonsense, woman," said Shamus, roughly, "it is not in nature."

"Then go and see for yourself, man!" she replied.

Shamus was not the only one to take this advice. They all stole out on tip-toe, and made a sort of semi-circle of curiosity. It was no dream; there were piles of gold glowing in the sun, and old Brian with a horse-pistol across his knee; and even Lurcher seemed to have his eye steadily fixed on the glittering booty.

When they had thoroughly drank in this unexpected scene, they began to converse in agitated whispers. But even in talking they never looked at each other—their eyes were glued on the gold.

Said Guiliam: "You did very wrong, Shamus, to turn out the old father as ye done; now see what ye have lost by it. That's a part of the money he laid by, and we'll never see a penny of it."

The wives whispered that that was a foolish thing to say.

"Leave it to us," said they, "and we will have it all one day."

This being agreed to, the women stole towards the old man, one on each side. Lurcher rose and snarled, and old Brian hurried his gold into his ample pockets, and stood on the defensive.

"Oh! father! and is it you come back!—Oh! the Lord he praised! Oh, the weary day since ye left us, and all our good luck wid ye!"

Brian received this and similar speeches with fury and reproaches. Then they humbled themselves and wept, cursed their ill-governed tongues, and bewailed the men's folly in listening to them. They flattered him and cajoled him, and ordered their husbands to come forward and beg the old man's pardon, and not let him ever leave them again. The supple sons were all penitence and affection directly. Brian at last consented to stay, but stipulated a certain chamber with a key to it. "For," said he, "I've got my strong box to take care of as well as myself."

They pricked up their ears directly at mention of the strong box, and asked where it was.

"Oh, it is not so far, but I can't carry it. Give me two boys to fetch it."

Oh! Guiliam and Shamus would carry it or anything else, to oblige their long-lost father.

So they went with him to the farmer's cart, and brought in the box, which was pretty large, and above all was very full and heavy.

He was once more king of his own house, and flattered and petted as he had never been since he had given away his estate. To be sure, he led to mysterious hints that he had other lands besides those in that part of the country, and that, indeed, the full extent of his possessions would never be known till his will was read; which was safely looked away in his strong box—with other things.

And so he passed a pleasant time, embittered only by regrets, and very poignant they were, that he had heard nothing of his son Garrett. Lurcher, also, was taken great care of, and became old and lazy.

But shocks that do not kill undermine. Before he reached three-score and ten, Brian Taafe's night-work and troubles told upon him and he drew near his end. He was quite conscious of it, and announced his own departure, but not in a regretful way. He had become quite a philosopher, and indeed there was a sort of chuckle about the old fellow in speaking of his own death, which his daughters-in-law secretly denounced as unchristian, and, what was worse, uncanny.

Whenever he did mention the expected event he was sure to say:

"And mind, boys, my will is in the strong box."

"Don't speak of it, father," was the reply.

When he was dying he called for both his sons, and said, in a feeble voice:

"I was a strong farmer, and come of honest folks. You'll give me a good washin', boys, and a grand funeral."

They promised this very heartily.

So there was a grand wake, and the virtues of the deceased and his professional importance were duly howled by the old lady who excelled in this lugubrious art. Then the funeral was hurried on because they were in a hurry to open the chest.

The funeral was joined in the churchyard by a stranger, who muffled his face and shed the only tears that fell upon that grave. After the funeral he stayed behind all the rest that mourned, but he joined the family at the feast which followed, and behold! it was Garrett, come a day too late. He was welcomed with exuberant affection, not being down in the will; but they did not ask him to sleep there. They wanted to be alone and read the will. He begged for some reminiscence of his father, and they gave him Lurcher. So he put