

THE WILD BIRDS OF KILLEEVY

BY ROSA MULHOLLAND (LADY GILBERT)

CHAPTER XVIII.—CONTINUED

Kevin returned the look of his friend, without fully comprehending what was meant. But the older man was satisfied with the glow of innocent joy and enthusiasm, unclouded by any small self-consciousness, which flushed into his manly face.

"The Critic is a good paper," continued Mr. Honeywood, "and the man who wrote that notice is a sound opinion. Let us read what he says:

"It gives us surprise to see a ballad from an unknown pen filling so large a space in the Current Century, which generally eschews poetry, and is hard on the poets. Yet we cannot quarrel with the exception it has made. The poem has all the quaintness, picturesque-ness, and vigor of Rossetti's best ballads, with the purity of Tennyson, yet we cannot mistake it for the work of any known living poet. There is about it a mark of distinct originality, influenced rather by ancient than modern models. If this remarkable ballad be the production of a young man, we venture to declare that a new poet is rising up amongst us."

Having read aloud these words, Mr. Honeywood lighted a fresh cigar, and walked away to the mantelpiece, where he stood smoking and observing the young man who was the subject of this praise. Kevin was trembling with agitation; his face was pale and his eyes moist. He sat quite quiet, and seemed to have almost forgotten where he was. In reality, he was carried him; on the island among the sea-gulls with Fanchea. Had her song really begun to flow from his lips? This was the question which, in some dim shape, arose in his mind.

"Well," said Mr. Honeywood at last, "what do you think of it? Or rather, where have you been?" added he, smiling.

"I have been away—at home," said Kevin.

"Good! Let me know when you have quite come back, for I want to talk to you."

"I am all here," said Kevin, returning the smile that was given to his simplicity.

"I agree with all that is said in the review. Now what I want to say to you is this. Having struck a high note, keep it to it. Don't fall in love with your own voice and sing for the pleasure of hearing it. Continue your studies, and be a severe critic of your own work. Do not rush out and cry, 'Here I am; I am the new poet'; but stay in your quiet corner until the world drags you out. Live as temperately as you have ever done, and never take to stimulating your imagination with wine and writing feverish verses in the small hours of the night."

Kevin laughed. "I cannot help laughing! I have so little temptation to such a way of going on."

"You don't know what you may be tempted to. There is a great deal in you that has never yet been drawn out. Be on your guard. And now having preached my little sermon, allow me to congratulate you."

He removed his cigar, walked up to Kevin, and shook him warmly by the hand.

"You are too good to me," said Kevin. "How am I to thank you for all the interest you take in me?"

"My dear fellow, give me your regard. I am an odd chap, and do not take to everyone; but you are a friend after my own heart."

Thus the gay, dilettante, and slightly cynical man of the world, as he was called by many, entered into the bonds of friendship with the young peasant-poet from an Irish mountain side.

One hot evening in July Mr. Honeywood had pushed his writing-table, with its permanent heap of disordered papers away from the window that overlooked the park, and in its place a great china jar, full of fresh roses stood on the polished floor. With a literary newspaper, his paper-knife, and his cigar, he lay on a couch waiting; and ordered coffee when Kevin appeared. As the young man came in, he looked at him attentively, noting his gentlemanly appearance, the noble cast of his features, and the air of natural refinement that hung about him. He had observed this refinement of manner grow rapidly upon Kevin during the weeks of their acquaintanceship, had seen how each new store added to his thought and experience, each fresh contact with all that was delicate and beautiful had left a visible trace upon him.

"Kevin," said Mr. Honeywood, abruptly, "you do not mean to stand behind the counter of an old book-shop all your life. What do you mean to do with yourself?"

"I do not know," answered Kevin. "At present I have but one idea. There is a purpose in my life which I am bound to fulfil."

"To ripen into a scholar and a poet?"

"I was not thinking of that," said Kevin. "If such a hope has arisen in me it is since I began my search. I am seeking for a creature whom I love and have lost. This was the reason of my leaving home; it is why I am in London; it was the cause of my meeting with you."

"Go on," said Mr. Honeywood, regarding him with much surprise.

"At home on our mountain I was a stupid, heavy boy, with ordinary people pitied, and my own mother could not call bright or attractive. My father thought me almost a fool. I hated school-books, and there was scarcely a creature I could talk to. Do I tire you, talking so much of myself?"

"You interest me greatly."

"I was so in love with all that is bright and vivid in life that my own dullness horrified me, and despair would have ruined me, only for the love and faith of a little child. Her mother, dying, left her to my care; but it was the little child who took care of the big lad. She was not a common child; she had the voice and spirit of a bird along with her human soul, and even as a baby she filled my mind with thoughts which I never could have dared to express. She opened to me a world in which I lived happily in spite of my natural disadvantages and the contempt of others; and she soothed me into having patience with myself. All this she did with the sweet artlessness of childhood, though she was quite aware of the power she possessed over me. It was wonder and joy to her little heart that she could give me beautiful thoughts and make me delightfully happy. So we lived together a life no one could comprehend but ourselves, and I know now that under her spell my intellect grew, and my soul expanded within me. I reached manhood, and became every day more conscious of powers that were struggling within me, and more and more I clung to her for sympathy and light, and inspiration. And then I lost her. Gipsies coveted her for her remarkable voice, and stole her from my mother's home while I was absent. After what I have told you, you will understand how my life was warped, my heart broken, my mind clouded without her. Even if my own need of her had not drawn me out into the world to look for her, my promise to her mother, my pity for her own unhappy fate, would have forced me to spend my life in searching for her."

"Why did you not tell me anything of this before?" said Mr. Honeywood.

"Because I had grown ashamed of telling my story so often that I was like a bird with only one note, I often wished to tell you, though I fancied you would not, from your position in the world, be likely to be able to help me. I believe I have tracked her to London, and I have been advised to search for her in public places where children sing—not the highest places, such as you are accustomed to go to."

Mr. Honeywood walked up and down the room thoughtfully. "Your story affects me very much," he said, "and curiously enough it strikes me as the echo of something I have heard before. It touches upon an incident I have experienced; something I cannot recall. Well, that does not matter. It will not interfere with the search you are so anxious to continue."

Mr. Honeywood stopped in his walk, and Kevin fixed his eyes on him eagerly.

A humorous twinkle came into Mr. Honeywood's eyes, as he glanced over his shoulder towards his writing-table. "You see that mass of papers," he said. "Since you have begun to come here you have never seen them altered in any way; and yet, you may not believe it, but I do think there is in them the material for a not quite frivolous book. What I have jotted down and scraped together is hardly altogether in vain; but it wants a patient mind and a steady, industrious hand to sift the wheat from the chaff, and put the atoms of usefulness together. That you can do for me, if you choose to undertake the task. Come and live with me and be my secretary, and look on me, not as your master, but your friend."

Some moments passed before Kevin could answer. "I think I must be dreaming," he said at last. "Surely you cannot mean it!"

"My dear fellow, I am not a man of many words, but I always mean what I say. I have had this in my head for some weeks past. I will give you such help on the way as I can. Your mind and heart are alike worthy of the highest culture. Let us seek it together as we go along."

"It is too delightful," said Kevin; "I am dazzled and bewildered. To live and work with you!"

"Don't be so sure it will be delightful. I may turn out an old man of the sea for all you may know. Yet come and try me. Now, is all that arranged?"

It was quickly settled. In a short time afterwards Kevin said good-bye to his friends at the old book shop; and with many good wishes and rejoicings at his better fortune, loudly and pleasantly expressed by Bessie, he departed with Mr. Honeywood, and turned over a new page in his life.

Established in his new way of life, he felt no ungrateful contempt for what he had left behind. He thoroughly valued the advantages furnished by his sojourn in the old bookshop, and yet no words could express his intense appreciation of the change with which fate had surprised him. Instead of the dusty, dingy den where he had "pored," with all London surging

and roaring around him, he lived in Mr. Honeywood's elegant apartments, where everything suggested repose, and delicate objects of beauty soothed and satisfied the eye. The green park lay beyond the window at which he worked; the odour of books, so sweet to bookish people, was crossed by the scent of flowers; the only noise was a hum of life, sufficiently remote to be pleasant and stimulating, "without jar to an excitable brain. Then, in exchange for the kindly but vulgar Mr. Must, he had the companionship of a refined and educated man, who spared no pains to turn everything to account for his pleasure, education and improvement. Together they went to concerts, to picture galleries, to the opera, and found some little time Kevin found himself introduced to assemblies of intellectual and interesting people, where a whisper from Mr. Honeywood had the effect of winning him smiles and encouraging speeches. And the strangest part of all to him was this, that though he found himself thus drawn further and further away from the sphere in which he had lived with Fanchea, yet in all his approaches to what is most refined and most cultured in life, he seemed only drawing nearer to her, instead of widening the distance between them; for the centre of all ideal refinement lay, to him, within the clear eyes, and was expressed by the pure voice of the little peasant-maid who was still the chosen idol of his imagination.

Mr. Honeywood mused a good deal over Kevin's story and the touching purpose of his life. "Poets must always have an ideal mistress," he said, "and this charming ideal of his boyhood will keep him safe, I hope, for many years to come. The worst is, that the end may disappoint him. Either this child may never be heard of again, or, when later in life she is, perhaps, discovered, he will find her but a coarse and unfaithful likeness of the creature he imagines to exist. What can be expected from the training of such experiences as she will meet with, the association of such companions as those with whom she will live? Heigh-ho! What a harvest of disappointment lies in wait! But all the sweeter is it to light on anything so ingenious as the heart of my friend Kevin. If years spoil it—well, I must let it go with the rest; but in the meantime I will indulge myself by placing him where he deserves to be in this world where things are generally upside down."

"You must give me a complete description of your little girl," he said to Kevin. "Our best plan will be to put an advertisement in the Times, offering a reward. Yes, I know; that you can repay me afterwards; but I will advance it now."

Kevin's description of Fanchea was, it must be said, more suited for a poem than a newspaper paragraph, but Mr. Honeywood picked out a few common facts which he put together in the most matter-of-fact way.

"Eyes as blue as violets, but curled black, so thickly shaded with lurid dark lashes, that some go into about three words. Something wonderfully expressive and sensitive about the mouth. Ah, well, I fear her captors, or even ordinary lookers-on will not be so observant of that characteristic. The voice will be a good mark, if it be really so remarkable as you think, and not an ordinary child's pipe. Don't start. Love is apt to exaggerate."

Stolen by gipsies. Known to have been going about with them, singing and dancing at their entertainments. Last seen at R—, and believed to have escaped and come to London—

"Stay," said Mr. Honeywood, breaking off abruptly. "I have got the clue to what puzzled me before in this affair. Was it not last year? Yes; I was at L—, with some friends, and we saw gipsies one morning during our ride. And a little girl danced with a tambourine, and sang with a guitar. She was a picture to look on, poor little soul! and her voice was wonderful, and she sang in a strange language. She interested me strangely, and I went back the next morning to try and learn something about her; but when I arrived I found the gipsies had moved on in the night. They were gone, tents, and baggage, and all. I was disappointed at the moment, but afterwards, it all passed away from my mind."

As Mr. Honeywood proceeded with this speech he became more and more in earnest, and throwing down his pen, looked steadily at Kevin, who had risen and come towards him as if expecting that he was going to tell him where the child was to be found, but at the last words fell back with a look of bitter disappointment.

"My poor boy," said Mr. Honeywood, "I have seen your Fanchea; but unhappily my news is only another flash of the will-o'-the-wisp in the swamp. I know no more of her than you do. I can only say that I am now more fully able to realize your feelings with regard to the child. A more interesting creature I never beheld."

It was some time before Mr. Honeywood could satisfy Kevin's eagerness to know every detail of that morning's experiences, could answer all his questions as to how Fanchea looked, what she did and said, and how the people she was among appeared to treat her; it was long before Kevin could think

calmly of the incident and make it the subject of sober conversation.

"How strange," he said at last, "that I should twice have met with people who had seen her, twice have come so near that I seem to touch her, and yet lose her again each time, unable to find any further trace of her!"

"The turns and twists of fate are, indeed, wonderful; but they have sometimes curious meanings when looked back upon. Let us try to console ourselves with this, and hope for the best."

"It is hard, when one thinks of a child—a girl—alone in the world of London."

"We do not know that she is in London. Do not look so unhappy; she may be better placed than you fear. At all events, I am going to help you to find her. I have considerable faith in this advertisement."

Kevin was cheered, and returned with new hope to his work. The advertisement appeared every day in the Times, and in the meantime Mr. Honeywood took care that all their hours should be fully occupied. Literary work in the mornings, study of the arts in the afternoons, and in the evenings seeking the world in the social sense; thus was their time filled during the later weeks of the London season. Every day the Times was feverishly scanned by Kevin, and at last one morning a cry broke from him as he opened the paper.

An answering advertisement had appeared:

"Fanchea is well and happy, with those who will continue to care for her. Her friends may hear of her later in life, but at present she is not to be found."

After this blow had fallen, Kevin felt all the reaction from hope to despair, and became restless, and agitated, and afterwards dejected in the extreme.

"It is a blind. It comes from cruel people who desire to satisfy our fears and only want to induce us to leave off searching for her," he said gloomily.

"It may not be so," said Mr. Honeywood. "Try and hope the reverse."

But he felt very doubtful himself, and began to think of taking Kevin abroad, so that in the novelties and delights of foreign travel he might regain the natural hopefulness of his mind, and escape from painful thoughts through the pleasures and excitements of the imagination.

TO BE CONTINUED

AT THE CROSS ROADS

By Anna C. Minguo in St. Anthony Messenger

Miss Burke was growing old. To none was the fact more apparent than herself. No longer were her hands swift and steady at her sewing; no longer was her mind alert and ready to grasp the ideas of those for whom she worked. Patron after patron had abandoned her. She had even been forced to take a position in the alteration room of one of the department stores, and then, when the rush was over, she was the first one to be dropped. Still she got an occasional week's work, making enough to tide her over the intervening time of idleness. So far she had not had to draw on her savings. If she could hold out for another five years, she would not worry. She would be seventy then. Hardly could she live beyond eighty. She need not fear starvation, or what was worse, charity, for ten years.

But it was not right, she was beginning to tell herself in bitterness of spirit. Back there in her young womanhood, she had put love and happiness and provision against lonely old age away from her, because of a fatal duty. For that sacrifice this was her reward: alone, old and miserable about the future.

Tears blistered her eyes. She rose rebelliously from her knees and left the church. Around the corner, she had a little room in a furnished house. She had the privilege of cooking on her tiny gas stove, so she stopped at a bakery to buy a loaf of bread. A little girl was trying to open the door. When Miss Burke lifted the latch for her, she looked up and thanking her, smiled. Their simple purchases made, they passed out together.

"Do you live near? And what is your name?" asked Miss Burke, noting the child's ill-fitting frock.

"Marie, madame, and I live at No. —"

"We are neighbors, then," said Miss Burke, as she stopped at her doorway. "Are you French?"

"No, madame, but my daddy was in France a long, long time, and he teaches me French every evening."

"Have you a mother?"

"Yes, madame, but she is up in Heaven. So I am taking care of Daddy."

Regularly thereafter Miss Burke encountered Marie at the baker's shop, and it touched her strangely to note the pleasure it gave the little one to walk back with the tall lady. She soon learned all of Marie's simple history. Her father had been among the first called to the colors, when the United States entered the World War. While he was abroad, her mother had died. The relatives would not take the child, and when the father, after the armistice, returned and found his child in an orphan asylum, his wrath was terrible. He had claimed her and left his home. They traveled from place to place. He was not well and he was unhappy. And he would not go to church.

"But you go, I hope, Marie?" inquired Miss Burke.

"Oh, yes, Miss Burke! Daddy brings me to the church door on Sunday, and some days during the week, I go by myself. I love to go to church! It's so—so heavenly!"

The child began to interest Miss Burke. The lapse from the practice of religion by the father distressed her. "I wish I could do something," she thought. The child's clothes at last became unbearable to the artistic modiste. There was that pretty piece of silk which she had bought years ago and which she never had had the time to make up, until it was too late. How lovely Marie would look in it! She bought a pattern and commenced work. When it was ready to be fitted, she asked Marie to come to her room. The frock was for a little friend of hers, whom she intended to surprise, she explained.

"How happy your little friend will be, Miss Burke!" cried Marie, and there was no envy in the lisping voice. The frock was finished, but as it lay on the bed it demanded other things, a pretty hat, dainty underwear. Again Miss Burke thought of muslin and embroideries in her trunk, but before she could commence the rest of the outfit, she was recalled by a former patron. The new dressmaker was ill and someone was needed immediately to finish the spring sewing. Miss Burke, hiding her resentment, answered the summons, and for two weeks Marie saw nothing of her friend.

"I have enough for a month," thought Miss Burke, counting her money. "No, three weeks," she corrected, "for Marie must have a hat." She hastened back to her little room. But suppose, she thought, as she mounted the stairs, the father had gone off again! She went to the bake-shop to make inquiries, and felt a rush of happiness when they told her the little girl still came.

"Marie, I wish you would come with me to select a hat for my little friend," said Miss Burke the next day. Not for years had the woman experienced such delight in shopping. Finally their choice of a hat was made, and then, to complete the celebration, Miss Burke went to a restaurant for their luncheon together. When thought of her extravagance came, she thrust it aside, "I will cut out the fruit and pastry," she promised herself.

She bade Marie to start earlier for Mass on Easter Sunday and stop at her room. When the child learned that the admired frock and hat, and dainty under-garments were for herself, she flung her arms around the woman's neck and began to cry.

"My own sweet little girl!" whispered Miss Burke, holding her fast. In a short time the transformation was made and with another kiss for her friend, Marie tripped down the stairs to where her father was waiting. That afternoon Marie returned. Her father wanted to see Miss Burke. She put on her hat and went down. She saw a young man, with a cruel scar across his face. They started to walk, Marie between them.

"I can't thank you for your kindness to Marie," the father said. "She has told you about her mother's death and all—but I must not accept all this from you. I earn good wages, I can afford to dress the child—only I don't know what to buy for her. But you must allow me to pay you."

Miss Burke was smiling. What a big boy he was!

"You may pay for the hat," she said. "The other things were bought long, long ago, and all the money you have could not pay me for the pleasure I found in making them for her. I am a lonely old woman, sir!"

"And I am a miserable young man, Miss Burke!" he cried. They had entered a small park, and he dropped wearily on one of the benches. "I am sick," he went on, "I'd be glad to die, if it were not for Marie. To leave her alone! Sometimes I think I will kill her and myself."

"Such thoughts are unworthy of you—a soldier!" she cried, sternly. "They are blasphemous in a Catholic!"

"I was a good soldier," he cried, with dim eyes. And I was a good Catholic. I gave up everything for my country—I offered my life freely to God—and how was I treated? They made no effort to save my wife, she had to go to work in a factory, and they put my baby in an asylum, and the ones who did this were patriotic Americans and good Catholics—"

He seemed fairly to spit out the words.

"I hate them! I hate my country! I hate God!"

He lay back on the bench, exhausted by his passion, and the woman looked pityingly from him to the tearful child, her happiness flown. And the woman understood. She had known such bitterness, if not so strong and sinful. She too, had complained that she had not been fairly dealt with. Sitting there in the little park, with the Easter Sunday crowd passing and re-passing she talked with him; and something of the hope which no human bitterness could touch, reached out and enfolded him. It was late when they rose and she was glad to see a smile on his face, as he said:

"I am going to take you and Marie to dinner, and then we are going to a picture show!"

Three other Sundays they spent

together, and after each day Miss Burke felt herself like one being girded for a battle. He was falling rapidly. She knew that he was holding on by will alone; when it could no longer command the feeble body—what then? Drifting around as he had done, he could not have saved money. His pride would not permit him to become a public charge, even if he could have consented to separation from Marie. She must do something—she must save the man from that rash act he did not deny having contemplated. But how? She could not earn enough to support herself properly—not by dress-making, but at the factory where shirts were made they needed hands and paid good wages. But as in other times when the thought of that solution for her difficulty arose, she cast it off. She, who had once had her own establishment, to work in a shirt factory!

She always went to Communion on Friday. She was returning from the altar railing, when she saw Marie running down the aisle.

"Oh, please come, Miss Burke. Daddy is sick!"

Pride, self-consideration, resentment because, in her old age, a new sacrifice was expected of her, fell from Miss Burke like dead leaves before a November wind. Her mind planned quickly: after she had seen him, she would go down to the factory and apply for work. His faith in humanity, in God, must be restored!

But one glance at his face told her the end was at hand.

"I am done for, Miss Burke," he said. "That is why I sent for you. Will you take Marie?"

"Not an instant did she hesitate. Thank God, there was work to be had at the factory!"

He closed his eyes and she saw a light come to his face.

"God has not forsaken me!" he then said. "Get me a priest!"

"Run, Marie, for the priest!" she cried, while over her mind flashed the thought: "If I had refused!"

The funeral was over. The service in the little church had been attended by members of the Legion, and the priest had paid tribute to the dead soldier. Now, with flowers covering his low bed, he slept under the May sunshine. Miss Burke and Marie had come back to the parsonage and, with the priest, were partaking of the refreshment which his housekeeper had provided. The priest took a paper from his pocket. She remembered that the doctor had asked for pen and ink the morning that Marie's father had died.

"This is our poor friend's will, Miss Burke," now the priest began. "He told us that you had expressed your willingness to take Marie. So you are appointed her guardian. He kept up his life insurance with the Government and she inherits ten thousand dollars."

Miss Burke's brain, which through all the preceding days had been alert and clear, grew suddenly dazed.

"Ten thousand dollars?" she repeated. "Then she does not need me now!"

"She never needed you more!" he said, not knowing the thought in her mind. "He asked me and Dr. Brown to invest it—"

His voice went on, but Miss Burke did not hear him. Instead, she saw herself buying with her own money a cottage in the suburbs, long admired, and with a garden and chickens and flowers, and Marie, ending her days in peace and happiness.

THE CATHOLIC'S DUTY

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