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THE HERMIT OF THE ROCK.

A TALE OF CASHEL.

BY MRS. J. SADLER.

CHAPTER XIX.—(Continued.)

Before another word was spoken, the parlor door opened, and a servant appearing, said that the old man of the Rock, and a woman he had with him, wanted to see his honor on very particular business.

'Let them go to—Halifax!' cried Mr. Esmond, his rage concentrating on the unhappy man who stood so unblushingly before him.

'You'd best let them in,' said Pierce coolly, 'I believe it's comin' to lodge information agin me the woman is—to let you know where you'll find Jerry Pierce.'

'Silence!' roared Mr. Esmond, and he motioned to the servant to show Bryan and Cauth into the office.

'Why not have them in here, Harry?' said Mrs. Esmond.

'Ay, that's always the way with you women, snapped her brother, 'you want to see and hear everything.'

'Well, I confess,' said Dean McDermott, 'I was just going to make the same objection; however, if you have any particular objection—'

'None in the world, Dean, though I really cannot understand why any of you should wish to have these old people brought in, you shall be gratified by a sight of them. Show them in, Dick! Mr. Moran, have the goodness to send word to the barrack for Captain Dundas to send some men immediately.'

'Well, if it's plasin' to your honor,' said Pierce, twirling his hat between his hands, and looking at it sheepishly, 'I would wish to have the business settled as soon as convenient—in regard to the reward that's promised for the takin' of Jerry Pierce.'

The ladies, more than ever disgusted by the man's audacious hardihood, raised their hands and eyes in horror, and uttered exclamations of terror and amazement, with the exception of Mrs. Esmond, who, having somewhat recovered, stood up, and taking Mary Hennessy's arm, prepared to leave the room, carefully avoiding the sight of Pierce. Moran, as if forgetful of the important commission given him, stood motionless in his place—Uncle Harry, between rage and astonishment, found himself incapable of uttering a word—Dean McDermott stood with folded arms watching the unhappy criminal from between his half-closed eyelids with an undefined expression of intense interest. As Mrs. Esmond passed him with tottering steps, he calmly and quietly laid his hand on her arm and said in a significant tone:

'I think you had better remain.'

'Oh Dean, I cannot—I cannot—it would kill me—indeed, indeed it would—oh, my God!' and she burst into a passionate flood of tears, 'to think of me being in the same room with the murderer of my darling, darling Harry.'

'But sure you're not, Mrs. Esmond dear—sure you're not in the same room with him, at all? It was Pierce himself that spoke, and his voice was broken and tremulous.'

'Oh, the murderin' villain, hear to what he says,' cried Cauth from the corner where she and Bryan had placed themselves, 'the murderin' villain; isn't it a wonder the earth doesn't open and swallow him up after tellin' that black lie, and his reverence to the fore, and the poor mistress?'

'Silence,' cried again the stern voice of Mr. Esmond, 'leave the wretch to me.'

'Well, but your honor, Mr. Esmond, persisted Cauth, 'doesn't the whole country know he done the deed? And didn't I come here myself a purpose to let you know that I seen him last night on the Rock above? An' wouldn't I a-travelled every fut o' the road to Duolin, and back again to prove agin him, the onlucky vagabone?'

Mr. Esmond was turning fiercely on Bryan to ask how it happened that Pierce came to be seen on the Rock, when he and all present were struck dumb with amazement by the sudden change that had come over his niece. From the moment that Pierce spoke those strange words, she had stood as if transfixed, her soft hazel eyes dilating with wonder as they penetrated farther and deeper into the soul of the supposed murderer of her husband, through the big bold eyes that never quailed a moment under that searching glance, but seemed rather to invite it.

There the two stood—face to face—immovable—mute as statues—gazing into each other's eyes, whilst not a word, nor breath from any of the spectators broke the awful silence. At last Mrs. Esmond drew a long sigh, like one recovering from a swoon, her pale lips opened, and some broken, tremulous words were faintly heard:

'Do you mean to say, Jerry Pierce, that you are not the murderer of my husband?'

And Pierce answered with the same unshrinking confidence—'I do, Mrs. Esmond. That's what I mane to say, an' I take God to witness this blessed day, and sure His beautiful bright sun is goin' down there behind the mountains, he raised his arm solemnly and held it aloft, 'that what I say is truth and no lie.'

'Great God! is it possible?' cried Miss Esmond.

'Dear, dear!' said her sister-in-law. Mary Hennessy said nothing, she was too much intent on watching the principal actors in the deeply exciting scene. Moran rested his hand on the back of a chair, in a position to examine Pierce's countenance, himself partially hidden by the gooly bulk of Mr. Esmond. The latter stood trembling like an aspen leaf with the fierce passion that was brewing within him.

'Then you didn't murder him, Jerry Pierce?' said the widow in softening accents: 'you didn't murder your good master?'

'If you don't believe me, ma'am,' said Pierce, the tears choking his utterance, 'ask his reverence there—I'll engage he doesn't misdoubt my word.'

Almost involuntarily every eye was turned on the Dean, and Mrs. Esmond in particular fixed an anxious look on his benevolent face where some deep emotion was setting every muscle in motion.

'I believe him, Mrs. Esmond,' said the venerable man with that calm dignity which never forsook him; 'I believe in my heart he tells you what is true.'

'I don't believe him then,' cried Mr. Esmond vehemently; 'I'd as soon believe the father of lies, that was a murderer from the beginning! His voice was hoarse, and his face livid with rage. 'I tell you both he's an incarnate fiend, that same Jerry Pierce, and it's burned he ought to be—burned instead of hanged. But hanged he'll be, if there's law or justice in Tipperary.—I'd—hang him myself if there was no one else to do it! I would, by—' the oath that was on his foaming lips never passed them—it died away, unspoken, beneath the stern glance of the Dean.

'Well! all I can say is this, Mr. Esmond,' said Pierce, in a firm, manly tone, 'that if you knew but all, you'd be the last man alive to say that of Jerry Pierce.'

'What do you mean, you villain?' thundered the enraged magistrate.

Here the elder Mrs. Esmond uttered an exclamation of surprise, and looked significantly at Moran.

'I mane this, your honor—that only for poor Jerry Pierce—villain and all as he is, you would not be here now to call him so, but moulderin' away in the vault above beside my poor dear master, God rest his soul in glory!'

'This is more of your atrocious lies,' cried Mr. Esmond: 'do you take me for a fool, you scoundrel?'

'Well I don't, Mr. Esmond, becase them that 'd buy your honor for a fool, 'd be apt to lie a long time out o' their money. Howsomever, you ought to remember me of all people, for if I hadn't been out on my thramp the night your horse wanted to put you and the mistress in the quarry beyant, and one that wasn't a horse, but a poor heartbroken man, had a pistol in his hand at the limekiln, I'm thinkin' it's little trouble the world 'd be to you now. And listen nither, Mr. Esmond,' he added slowly and emphatically, 'that pistol was the very one that shot your nephew—the light of heaven to his soul—and the same hand that pulled the trigger that black and dismal night, was going to pull it then, and would too, Mr. Esmond, only for the voice that said 'Remember!' and that voice was Jerry Pierce's.'

Various exclamations of astonishment escaped the listeners; the younger Mrs. Esmond alone remaining silent. She had sank on a chair opposite Pierce, and sat with her hands clasped and her head bowed down beneath the crushing load of newly-retired sorrow.

'Do you hear that, Mrs. Esmond?' whispered Mary Hennessy. 'You see it wasn't poor Pierce that did it, after all.'

'I heard it, Mary—I heard it,' she listlessly replied, 'but it makes little difference to me who did it. Some one did it—that's certain.'

For several moments Mr. Esmond and Jerry Pierce stood looking at each other—in silence—the one with a look of blank amazement, in which a certain tinge of incredulity was strangely mingled—the other with the same unshrinking confidence with which he had before confronted the widowed wife of young Harry Esmond. The Dean and Moran exchanged significant glances intimating to each other the prudence of keeping silent for the present.

When the old man spoke again his face was paler than its wont, and there was a husky tone in his voice, yet he labored hard to keep up his usual sternness of voice and mien. 'I know it doesn't hurt you much,' said he, 'to trump up a story—'

'Harry,' said his wife, suddenly breaking si-

lence, 'he didn't trump up that story, anyhow—he saved our lives that night as true as he's standing there. I suspected as much the moment he came into the room in that costume, and I would know among a thousand the tone of the voice that uttered that word 'Remember!' for it has rung in my ears ever since, sleeping and waking.'

'And who was he,' resumed Mr. Esmond, in the same half-incredulous tone, as if scarcely noticing the interruption, 'who was he that, according to your showing, would have made away with another of the Esmonds? You are not going to keep his secret, are you?'

There was a long pause, during which the heavy features of Jerry Pierce were convulsed as by some inward struggle. Every ear was strained to catch the answer, every eye was fixed on the man's face—even Henrietta Esmond had started into sudden animation as the important question reached her ear, and she leaned eagerly forward with her very soul in her eyes. Moran and the Dean shifted their positions so as to get a fuller view of Pierce's countenance, but neither spoke.

Slowly at last spoke Jerry Pierce, and his lips and his cheeks were ashen white as he hussed out the name of Tim Murtha, then covered his face with his hands as though to conceal the shame of that moment.

'Tim Murtha?' was repeated from mouth to mouth in tones of horror and disgust, while each one looked into their neighbor's face to read the effect of the announcement.

'Take care how you answer me, fellow,' said Mr. Esmond, speaking with difficulty, some strange emotion quivering in his frame; 'are you sure—sure it was Tim Murtha?'

'As sure as I am that there's a God in heaven,' answered Pierce, solemnly and reverently.

'Dean—or you, Moran, question him,' said the old man in a choking voice, 'I—I can't go on with it; and he sat down beside his niece.

The Dean motioned to Moran to speak for even he was more agitated than he cared to show. Moran bowed assent.

'Then we are to infer from what you say, said he, 'that it was Tim Murtha who shot young Mr. Esmond?'

'Wisha, God pity him and me, it was, sir—and the tears came trickling from between the big, hard, sinewy fingers that still covered Pierce's agonised face.

Moran raised his hand gently to enjoin silence on the listeners.

'And what motive,' said he, 'induced him to perpetrate so foul a murder? What ill feeling could he have against Mr. Esmond?'

Here Mr. Esmond raised himself in his chair, and fixed a look of searching scrutiny on Pierce. And Pierce, before he answered, turned a deprecating, almost a compassionate look on the old man.

'He had no motive, at all, in killin' him, Mr. Moran,' he slowly replied, 'nor no ill-will that ever man had—and he no more meant to kill him that night than he did to kill me or you.'

'Great God! how was it then?'

'He mistook him for another.'

'Ha!' cried Miss Esmond, starting to her feet, 'I knew it—I knew that no one ever meant to kill our darling Henry?'

'Glory be to God!' cried Cauth, advancing a step or two from her corner.

Still the widow stirred not, nor did Mr. Esmond.

'But how—how—' said Moran, after an embarrassed pause, 'how did—such a mistake occur?'

Jerry Pierce avoided looking at Mr. Esmond, though he felt that his piercing glance was on him, reading his very soul.

'It was the horse he rode—and the name he had—that caused his death—and saved another.'

'Merciful heaven!' cried Aunt Martha, as her own secret misgivings, and the often-biased suspicions of her sister-in-law were thus to the letter justified.

Moran came to a dead pause—turned a troubled, anxious look on Mr. Esmond, and seemed as if uncertain whether he ought to continue.

'Go on,' said Mr. Esmond, rightly interpreting his hesitation.

'Pardon me, Mr. Esmond,' said the kind-hearted lawyer, would it not be better—to postpone the further hearing of this strange and mournful tale?'

'Go on, I tell you!' was the stern reply.—'Ask him how it happened? It will all be soon known to the whole country!'

'You hear what Mr. Esmond says,' said Moran, addressing Pierce.

'I do, sir, and if he wants to hear it, I'll tell it, though I'd sooner not.' But still he hesitated—looked askance at young Mrs. Esmond—wiped his eyes with the sleeve of his coat—coughed—looked again—then fairly burst out crying, and said as well as he could for the choking in his throat: 'There's no use tryin' any more—I can't do it—and the mistress to the

fore—I can't—it 'd kill her dead, so it would. Mrs. Esmond raised her head and looked at him with a ghastly smile, as she replied—'No fear of that, Pierce—it is pretty hard to kill me—and I must hear what you have to tell, one day or another, so in God's name tell it now while I am able to listen.'

Here the tramp of marching men was heard outside, the parlor door was opened stealthily and the cadaverous visage of Ned Murtha made its appearance, followed by his lank body. He looked at no one, seemed to think of one but Jerry Pierce who stood near the door, and to him he whispered in a tone of horror and alarm, 'The peelers, Jerry—the peelers is without and Sargent Kellett.'

'Well, what o' that?' said Pierce, though his cheek blanched at the dreaded name. 'Didn't I know they'd be takin' me, and didn't I give myself up?'

'Sure I know, Jerry dear, I know—but—och, och! Lord help us!'

'Leave the room, sir,' cried Mr. Esmond sternly, 'how dare you come in here unbidden?'

'Perhaps it were well to let him remain,' suggested Moran, 'we may want him.'

'Humph! want him?' growled the surly old man, not in dissent, however—'go on you, Pierce—Mr. Informer! I suppose we may call you now—giving up your associate in crime to save your own worthless life—eh?'

The evil spirit was coming back on him, and Pierce glared on him like a tiger preparing for a spring. Fire flashed from his eyes, and his face was suffused with a burning glow. Words sharp and bitter were on his lips, when young Mrs. Esmond rose, and approaching him, to the surprise of all present laid her hand on his arm.

'Pierce,' said she, 'there's something telling me that you have spoken truly in denying the murder of my poor husband—if you were not accessory to it, tell us, I beseech you, what you know about it, and how you came to know it.'

'I will, ma'am, as I have God to face, I'll tell all about it,' said Pierce more firmly than before, as though braced up to greater hardihood by the wanton attack of Mr. Esmond—

'I said before that it wasn't my poor master Tim Murtha meant to kill, but—'

'But his uncle?' put in Mr. Esmond with a bitter sneer.

'You're just guessed it, Mr. Esmond,' said Pierce turning on him almost fiercely; 'it was his uncle and nobody else. An' if the truth was knowo, maybe it was no great wonder. Anyhow, the whole country knew that Tim had it in for you, and maybe more than Tim, for that matter.'

'Villain! scoundrel!' cried Mr. Esmond starting up in a rage.

'Take it easy now, Mr. Esmond!' said Pierce coolly and with an impressive motion of his hand, 'if you want to hear the story before I'm taken off to jail. Don't be calling people such ugly names till you know whether they deserve it or not. I said every one knew that Tim had it in for you, and I was tryin' all I could to put the evil thought out of his head, but just as soon as I'd get him persuaded to lave it all in the hands of God, Mr. Esmond here was sure to do something to stir up his blood worse than ever—'

The old gentleman was again breaking in with a fierce objurgation, but the Dean laying his hand on his arm, begged him to remain quiet, or that otherwise they might as well give up hopes of hearing the sad details.

'He never got right over that hurt,' resumed Pierce, 'and so he wasn't able to work, and there was nothing for it but to go out and take to the road at onst, and when himself and the childer 'd be going their rounds he met Mr. Esmond of an odd time, and though he never asked him for anything—he'd scorn to do it—still he always gave him the height of abuse and called him a lazy dog, and all such names, and many's the time he threatened to horsewhip him—till at last he had the poor fellow most beside himself, and he said that the two of them could not live any longer, that one of them must die! Well, after that, sure myself was night and day on the watch for fear he'd have the misfortune to do it, and things wore round till that unlucky day that the poor master went to Rose Lodge—'

'Merciful Heaven!' cried young Mrs. Esmond, 'he went at my urgent request to warn his uncle of the danger to which he was exposed.'

'I know that, Mrs. Esmond. It was Cauth there that told you of it—and Cauth can tell you who told her, and put her up to tell you.'

'Well, sure enough it was your four bones, Jerry Pierce!' said Cauth with a groan, 'there's no denyin' that, anyhow?'

'And I was watching Tim all that day,' went on Jerry, 'and having others watching him, too, both him and old Mr. Esmond, ay! and the young master too, for some way or another I had a fear over me about him, though I couldn't

tell what it was for, or how it came. At last when it was wearing on near evening, I made up my mind that I wouldn't stand it any longer, but I'd go to Tim and get him to go with me, himself and the childer, to some other part of the country, where I'd work for them all, and keep poor Tim out of the way of doing the bad that was in his heart to do.'

'And that was the object of your leaving, Jerry?' said young Mrs. Esmond in a tremulous voice.

'Surely it was, ma'am; but as I said, there was something over me, and when I heard that the master, God rest him! was going to Rose Lodge, well do you know but my Bush began to creep, and I went out to Mulligan, and says I to him, 'Tom, I'm afraid there's something bad going to happen!' and Mulligan laughed at me, and says he—'I have to go in to give the bit of this bridle a rub, for it isn't as bright as I'd wish and do you be getting the roan saddled while I'm away, for you see the master's in a hurry.'

'I will,' says I, and sure enough I tried to do it, but somehow I was so through-other in myself, and my hands was tremblin' to that degree that I couldn't get on as I'd wish, and when Tom came in a great hurry to take out the roan, he was as mad as a March hare when he found I hadn't it done, and I believe it's angry enough the poor master was at havin' to wait so long. Well, he got off, anyhow, and after I went in and said some words to the mistress before I'd go, I went off as fast as my legs 'd carry me towards the Lodge. Not a sight of Tim could I see up or down, and there I kept walking backwards and forwards along the road near the Lodge, sometimes taking to the fields for fear any one 'd notice me, till at last it came on night, and then says I to myself, he'll not be going out to-night, I'm thinking, when he wasn't out before; and sure there's no danger of my master, anyhow, so with that I was making the best of my speed to Larry Mulligan's, where I had a little business of my own, when, just as I got to Mr. Elliott's gate—'

Here a singular interruption took place, the nature of which we will describe in our next chapter. At the window again appeared Mabel chanting still the tragic fate of 'The Croppy Boy.'

'Five hundred pounds then she would lay down, for to see me walkin' thro' Wexford town.'

'Farewell, father, an' mother, too. Sister Mary I love but you—'

'Och wirra! there's the peelers!' and with an unearthly scream of terror she fled like a lapwing.

(To be continued.)

THE POLISH INSURRECTION.

LECTURE OF MR. WILLIAM SMITH O'BRIEN.

On Wednesday evening an important lecture on the present gallant struggle in Poland, was delivered in the Round Room of the Rotundo, by Mr. Wm. Smith O'Brien. The spacious room was densely crowded in every part by an enthusiastic audience.

Mr. O'Brien came forward, and the applause with which he was greeted was again and again repeated. Although exhibiting in his appearance some traces of the care which he has undergone, still Mr. O'Brien looks remarkably well, and seemed well pleased with the hearty nature of the reception which he met with. Silence being restored, he said—'It is not the first time, as you are very well aware, that I have heard the cheers of a Dublin audience, and I am not sorry to find that, though a good many years have elapsed since I last addressed you, the same kindly feelings exists for me as existed in former times (loud cheers). The reception which you have given to me to night is very flattering to me. I am going to ask you to confer a favor upon me, and that is to keep as quiet as you can while I am reading the address, as there is considerable difficulty in being heard in this room (applause). Mr. O'Brien then proceeded to say:—

Before I enter upon the subject which is to engage our attention this evening, I am desirous to say a few words in reference to the object for which this meeting was convened. Many persons have asked me, whether any extraneous topics would be introduced which would be distasteful to those who do not agree with my opinions respecting the national interests and requirements of Ireland? To all such persons I have made answer that, in according to the request of those who have done me the honor to ask that I would deliver a lecture on Poland, my object has been to serve the cause of Poland, and that I, as well as all whom I can influence, would endeavor to abstain from saying anything that could offend those who may desire to co-operate with us in support of Poland, but who do not share my convictions upon other questions of public policy. There may be many persons here to night who do not agree with my opinions re-