

KNOCKNAGOW OR THE HOMES OF TIPPERARY.

BY CHARLES J. KIOCKHAM.

CHAPTER XXX. NED BROPHY'S WEDDING.

When Mr. Lowe found himself kneading fresh snow, after jumping from the glein Ned Brophy's yard, he looked about him with a slight sense of bewilderment.

Their driver for the first two miles had been pleasant enough, but when they turned off the high road into a narrow "boreen," Mr. Lowe expected every moment to be flung over the fence, against which the wheel almost rubbed as they jilted along.

"Have we much farther to go?" he asked, clutching the side of the gig, as the wheel at Hugh's side sank into the deepest slough they had met yet.

"Only a couple of fields," Hugh replied. "We'll be in view of the house after passing the next turn."

The couple of fields seemed five miles long at a moderate calculation to Mr. Lowe, and it was not till he found himself on his legs in the straw he felt satisfied they had really arrived at their journey's end.

As he gazed about him he had a confused consciousness of the twang of fiddles, mingled with the hum of many voices and the clatter of many feet, on the one hand, and a combination of odors, in which turf smoke and roast goose predominated, on the other.

The music came from the barn, and the odors from an out office at the opposite side of the yard, which was converted into a kitchen for the occasion—and there being no chimney, a plentiful supply of smoke was the natural consequence.

Hugh shouted for some one to come and take care of his horse; and a workman rushed from the barn, creating considerable confusion among a crowd of beggars at the door—for whom the fun at that side seemed to possess more attraction than the culinary preparations and savory odors at the other.

Mr. Hugh Kearney's arrival was soon made known to the people of the house; and Mr. Donovan, as "best man" and master of the ceremonies, was at the door to receive and welcome him.

"Is this the doctor you have wed you?" Mat asked. "Begor, I'm glad we have him, as I was afraid there'd be no way to talk to the ladies."

"This is Mr. Lowe," replied Hugh. "Mat was evidently disappointed; for he had the highest opinion of the doctor's powers in the matter of 'discoerria' the ladies."

On entering the kitchen, where preparations for dinner were also proceeding on a large scale, Ned Brophy's mother welcomed them with a courtesy, and her daughter took their hats and overcoats to one of the two bed rooms off the kitchen.

Mat Donovan opened the parlour door, and showed the gentlemen in with a bow and a wave of his hand that even the accomplished Richard, whose absence he so much regretted, might have envied.

Two ladies who sat by the fire—one in a blue ball dress and pearl necklace, the other in a plain black silk, with only a blue ribbon for ornament—stood up; and Mr. Lowe found himself shaking hands with the blue ball dress almost before he was aware of it.

"Don't you remember Miss Lloyd?" Hugh was obliged to say; for it was painfully evident he did not at once recognize her.

"I beg pardon," said he, "but really the likeness was so unexpected."

Miss Lloyd was in fits of ecstacy, and called to her sister to introduce her.

Mr. Lowe bowed again, and it was pretty clear from the expression of his eyes that he thought the plain black dress and the blue ribbon a pleasanter sight to look at than the blue gaud and pearl necklace.

"Sit down, sir," said Mat Donovan, placing a chair in front of the fire. "Or, maybe," he said, turning to Hugh, "you'd like to have a bout before the tables are brought into the barn?"

"Oh, no, we'll wait till after dinner," said Hugh.

"Very well, sir," replied Mat. "Father Hanngan'll be here shortly, and I'll bring him in to have a talk with you before supper is ready. I'm afraid the cook is after takin' a sup too much, an' if the ladies here don't show 'em what to do, things'll be apt to go contrary."

"Oh, you may command my services," said the younger lady, with a laugh.

"Thank 'em, miss," returned Mat. "But she's takin' a sleep, and maybe she'd be all right after it."

"Who is the cook?" Miss Lloyd asked, eagerly. "Is Mrs. Nugent?"

"No, miss," replied Mat. "She was up at the castle yesterday, preparin' the big dinner, an' she's bated up entirely."

"Oh, was she at the castle? Where is she? I'd like so much to ask her all about it."

"She's gone into the little room there, miss, to take a stretch on the bed."

Miss Lloyd was on the rock immediately. Even Mr. Lowe faded from her mind and was lost in the stream of that big dinner at the castle.

Seizing a candle from the table, Miss Lloyd rushed into the little bedroom off the parlour. Immediately a loud scream made them all start to their feet, and fly to her assistance. All was darkness in the bedroom till some one brought a candle; and there was poor Miss Lloyd, blue ball dress, pearl necklace, and all, sprawling on the floor, and staring wildly about her. The fat cook—who was a very mountain of a woman—was lying on the floor too, snoring sonorously; and it at once became apparent to the astonished spectators that Miss Lloyd had tumbled over her.

Hugh Kearney stepped over the fat cook, and reaching his hand to the frightened lady, raised her up.

"O Mr. Kearney," she exclaimed, panting for breath, "what have I fallen over?"

"Over a mountain," replied Hugh, laying his hand on the fat cook's shoulder and shaking her.

The sonorous snore that proceeded from the mountain suddenly ceased; and a second vigorous shake had the effect of causing the fat cook to open her eyes.

"O Mr. Kearney," she exclaimed piteously, looking into his face, "you know what a weak constitution I have."

This address, uttered as it was in a

familiar and affectionate manner, took Hugh somewhat by surprise; for it happened that Mrs. Nugent was a perfect stranger to him.

"Foundher an' turf, Mrs. Nugent," exclaimed Mat Donovan, "everything is roasted an' biled—an' there's open war among the women. Wan says wan thing an' another says another thing; an' between 'em all everything is three-nay-byla."

Mat put his arms round Mrs. Nugent and lifted her to her feet—a feat which no man in "the three parishes" but himself would have attempted.

Mrs. Nugent steadied herself for a moment, untying her apron and turning the other side out, with great deliberation.

"You know, Mr. Kearney," said she, "how a salt herring gets me."

Hugh felt slightly confused, and altogether at a loss to understand why Mrs. Nugent should persist in assuming that he had so intimate a knowledge of her constitution.

"Really, ma'am," said he, "I do not know, I believe this is the first time I ever had the pleasure of meeting you."

"Well, if you don't, your mother does," said Mrs. Nugent, as she stuck a pin in her cap a little over her right ear—for what purpose it would be difficult to say.

"She knows what dressing a dinner is," continued Mrs. Nugent, looking round on the company, "for she was used to nothing else in her own father's house."

Hugh felt that this compliment to the O'Carroll would have greatly gratified his mother, and that she would have gazed over his shoulder at the assertion that she was "used to nothing else" but dressing dinners at Ballynamore.

"And how are you to-night, Miss Lloyd?" said Mrs. Nugent. "I hope your family are well."

"Quite well, thank you, Mrs. Nugent," replied the lady addressed, who was nervously feeling her pearls one by one, to know if any of them had come to grief in consequence of her tumble.

"Come, Mrs. Nugent," said Mat Donovan, "an' set 'em to rights at the dishin', in the name of God!"

"Yes, Mat the Thrasher," replied Mrs. Nugent. "Let me alone for setting them to rights."

She moved with great dignity towards the door; but making a sudden and quite unexpected detour before she reached it, Mrs. Nugent came plump up against Mr. Henry Lowe, who mechanically caught her in his arms, as yielding to the momentum, he staggered backwards.

"Hands off, young man, till you're better acquainted," exclaimed the fat cook, in an offended tone. "I'm no sleight of hand, an' she's a shrewd young gentleman from her, to his utter confusion and dismay. But before he could collect his wits to protest he meant no harm whatever, Mat Donovan took the offended lady's arm, and conducted her to the kitchen, where her appearance, as she stood with arms akimbo in the middle of the floor, made Mrs. Brophy and her servant girls feel like delinquents, so awe-inspiring was the glance the mighty empress cast round her dominions.

"At the Thrasher," said Mrs. Nugent, "will you—"

"Begor, there's Father Hanngan; I must be off," exclaimed Mat, as he hurried away without waiting to know what Mrs. Nugent required.

"God save all here," said Father Hanngan, stamping his feet as he stepped over the threshold. "How are you Mrs. Brophy?"

"O'n're welcome, sir," was Mrs. Brophy's reply, as she opened the parlour door.

Father Hanngan had a hearty greeting from every one, and Mr. Lowe was particularly glad to see him.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Lloyd; but we must put Mr. Flaherty at that corner. Sit down there, Mr. Flaherty," he con-

tinued, laying his hand on the arm of a respectable looking man who until now had been concealed behind the tall figure of the priest.

The old man was dressed in a decent suit of black, and as he sat down in the chair to which the priest had conducted him, Mr. Lowe was struck by the pained smile that glowed over his round, ruddy face.

He wore a brown wig, curled all round from the temples, which he now caught hold of ever each ear, to fasten it on his head. He then commenced playing with a bunch of seals attached to his watch ribbon, which hung from the fob in his small clothes.

"Good night, Miss Lloyd," said he, without turning towards her.

"Good night, Mr. Flaherty," she replied. "Is he the man who was laughing and making straight before him, though the lady was on one side, and rather behind him. 'I think this is Miss Isabella I have beside me,' he said after playing again with the bunch of seals.

"Yes, Mr. Flaherty. It's a long time now since you paid us a visit."

He did not reply, as he was listening, with an anxious look, to the conversation passing between Father Hanngan, Mr. Lowe, and Hugh Kearney.

"This is the English gentleman?" he observed in a whisper, leaning his head towards the young lady who had just spoken to him.

"Yes; he's Sir Garrett Butler's nephew," she replied.

Mr. Lowe's curiosity to know something of Mr. Flaherty was so strong that it brought him to the side of Miss Lloyd, at the other end of the room. She tossed her fiances about, and made way for him in an ecstasy of delight.

"I am curious to know," he said, "who is that old gentleman?"

As he spoke his curiosity was further excited by seeing a little boy come into the room and place a green bag on the old man's knees.

"That's the celebrated Irish piper," she replied. "I am surprised to see him here. I did not think he attended country weddings."

"I suppose," said Mr. Lowe, "he goes round among the nobility and gentry, as we are told the harpers used to do."

"He does," she replied; "and he has a beautiful little pony the countess gave him. But I suppose he is stopping at present with the priest, and Father Hanngan has brought him with him."

"I wish he would begin to play," said Mr. Lowe. And he was rather startled when the old man immediately said:

"Yes, I'll play a tune for you."

"Oh, thank you; but I really did not think you could bear me."

"He!" he replied, laughing; "I can hear the grass growing. He pulled out his watch, and after opening the glass and fumbling with it for a moment, he said:

"Twenty minutes past nine."

Mr. Lowe, who looked at him in surprise as he smiled and chuckled while putting up his watch, caught a glimpse of the old man's eyeballs, and saw that he was blind.

"Sit down near me here," said Mr. Flaherty. "I know Sir Garrett and your mother well. I'll play one of poor Garrett's favourite tunes for you."

As he uncovered his pipes their splendor quite took Mr. Lowe by surprise. The keys were of silver, and the big covered with crimson velvet fringed with gold; while the little bellows was quite a work of art, so beautifully carved and ornamented with silver and ivory.

Having tied an oval-shaped piece of velvet with a ribbon attached to each end above his knees, he adjusted his instrument, and after moving his arm, to which the bellows was attached by a ribbon, till the crimson velvet bag was inflated, he touched the keys, and etching up the "chanter" quickly in both hands, began to play.

Mr. Lowe, who watched him narrowly, now saw the use of the piece of velvet tied round his leg, as the "chanter" was ever and anon pressed against it to assist in the production of certain notes by preventing the escape of the air through the end of the tube.

The musician soon seemed to forget all mere human concerns. He threw back his head, as if communing with invisible spirits in the air above him; or bent down over his instrument as if the spirits had suddenly flown into it, and he wanted to catch their whispering there, too.

The audience, to some extent shared in the musician's ecstasy; particularly Father Hanngan, from whose eyes tears were actually falling as the delicious melody ceased, and the old man raised his slight eyes, and listened, as it were, for an echo of his strains from the skies.

"O!" exclaimed Father Hanngan, turning away his head, and flourishing his hand in a grandiose manner, as if he were chief, as he affected to sneeze before taking the pinch of snuff he held between the fingers of the other hand—"oh, there's something wonderful in these old Irish airs! There was a ballad in last Saturday's Nation about that tune, that was nearly as moving as the tune itself. Did you read it?" he asked, turning to Hugh Kearney.

"Yes," he replied. "Your friend, Dr. Kiely, induced me to become a subscriber to the Nation."

"I don't get it myself," returned Father Hanngan. "The Father O'Neill gets it, and I suspect he has a leaning towards those young Irishmen, and dabbles in poetry himself. But I wish I had that little amid the mountains, and lakes of Connemara had not yet robbed him of all the freshness of color and brilliancy of eye of his native country. To be sure, both had faded somewhat; and to-day particularly there was an unusually dejected expression in his handsome face as he stood before the old priest.

The fact was, Owen had just been getting a lecture, which he knew was well-deserved, from Father Laurence. Owen was the best of fellows—industrious, honest, God fearing, a model son, a kind brother, a true friend. In his home in the West he was a general favorite, and the lamentation had been universal when circumstances had caused him to leave it for a while for a good job that had been offered him in London. There he had left a mother who adored him, and a bright-eyed girl who had promised to be his wife, and a character of which any man might be proud. For a while after he came to M— his good habits stuck to him, and he was the same steady, hard working fellow as at home. Then the moment of trial came—the bad companions, the evil example, the delicate and jeers of his comrades, the overpowering temptation, the sudden yielding, and then the cruel, dreadful, unavoidable consequences.

Good Father Laurence had made more than one attempt to rescue poor Owen from the horrible fate to which he was so surely and quietly drifting. He was in vain, however. The young man had of late begun to avoid him, and even to absent himself from the chapel. At last rumors reached the priest's ears which determined him to make a supreme effort before it should be too late. One evening, after a long and tiresome day's work, he made his way to the house in the little back street, where he knew that Owen lodged, and, catching him just as he was going to take a set of boon companions at the neighboring public-house, he earnestly appealed to him to save himself from ruin and misery, and there and then to take the pledge. "You'll never regret it, Owen, I promise you, you never will. It is your own chance, and if you reject it, it is all up with you, I do believe. Just think what you're coming to, my boy— you see a young fellow as never stepped, a month or two ago, and I proud I was of you, and used to point you out as an

example of what old Ireland could produce, carrying your head so high, and not afraid to look any man in the face. But now, my poor fellow, just look what you're coming to—what you're come to, rather—shaky and pale and besotted like the rest of them. Just brutes; that's what they are, and you'll become one too. And it will be the death of your poor mother, and of the lass who trusts and loves you. O, either of them saw you as you were last night, rolling along the streets, bringing shame and discredit on the old country, on the mother who bore you, and, worse than all, on the holy religion you profess! Upon my word, it is enough to make St. Patrick himself weep for very shame."

Owen's heart was touched. He was sorry for the old priest, whose dim eyes were really filled with tears, and he was ashamed and disgusted with himself.

"I tell you what it is, Father Laurence," he said at last—"I'll stay at home to-night. There! I have promised those chaps to meet them, but not a foot will I go; and if they come here, I'll be in my bed, and pretend to be sick. Now, won't that satisfy you, Father Laurence? I'll not see the public house as long as I live. Do you think I care for the drink? Not a bit of it. It's only for the sake of comradeship and doing like the rest. But I'll give it up to please you; and I'll only drink a glass now and then, just to stand a meal a treat, and because one must wet one's lips with something. Won't that do, Father Laurence?" the young man concluded, with a coaxing air, taking off his coat, as though already beginning to prepare for bed.

Father Laurence was not, however, so easily taken in. Experience had taught him how little such promises were to be trusted.

"Shame on you, Owen," he said, "to try to put me off in that shabby fashion! To please me indeed! Is that your motive? Why it's God Almighty you should be thinking of pleasing, and of saving your body and soul from ruin and destruction. Nothing will save you from that accursed temptation but the pledge, and it is the pledge I have come to give you. Pretend you're sick, indeed, and go and hide your head in the blanket? Why not tell the truth—that you're determined to save yourself while there's time, and to give up the drink altogether? O, Owen, Owen! it just shows you your mischief that's done already, and the forward you've set becoming, that you should have to go to bed to hide yourself from the danger, instead of facing it like a brave fellow, and showing the sort of stuff you're made of."

This appeal produced a considerable effect, but it was by no means conclusive. Owen made a stout resistance still. To take the pledge was a serious matter. He foresaw you'd set becoming, that you should have to go to bed to hide yourself from the danger, instead of facing it like a brave fellow, and showing the sort of stuff you're made of."

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had actually reached the door, when he recollected that till twelve o'clock that night he could not, with common honesty, consider himself free to satisfy this longing for drink which had suddenly gripped him. Patrick's Day! Yes, it would then be Patrick's Day, and he would "down the shamrock" in earnest.

He had thought of going down to the chapel after his supper, and of preparing himself in a Christian manner for the next day's feast. But now the intention was clean gone. He would just wait quietly at home, locking himself in by way of precaution, till he should hear the clock strike twelve, and then he knew a "public" not far off, where they would still be open, where he could have a good glass of liquor that would make him himself again, and rid him of this intolerable longing. But he wanted to be cheered and warmed up a bit, and to give himself some little indulgence in honor of the feast. How cold and cheerless his little room looked when he entered it! He hardly felt equal to preparing his own supper, and the food was distasteful to him. He could not eat it, he could not even look at it, and with a dazed, bewildered sensation he sank down on his bed, intending to rest quietly there for a few hours which must elapse before the longed for hour struck, when he would be free to give himself that which would supply the place of food to him.

But he could not rest. Presently he started up again, and, clapping his hat on his head, was out in the open air, tridling with hurried steps down the little lane with a half-formed notion in his brain of buying the whiskey and bringing it home with him. But once in the public house, the temptation was too strong for him; the smell of the liquor was overpowering, and in an instant he had put the glass to his lips and swallowed a draught. O, how good it was! How it ran like fire through his veins, all at once endowing him with a magic strength, and making him feel able to defy the world! The weakness and depression had all disappeared, and as one glass had done him so much good, another was tossed off to complete the cure.

At that moment a familiar figure passed the open door, and Owen, recognizing his old enemy, Bill Greenwood, felt a sudden desire to show himself off to the man whose taunts still rankled deeply in his bosom, and perhaps to find an opportunity of making him smart for them. So he followed Bill down the street, and overtook him, as he was about to enter at the nearest public. Bill, who seemed more sober than usual that evening, and who Owen observed with surprise, wore a clean shirt and a tolerably respectable coat, gave a surly kind of assent, remarking that he hadn't too much time to lose, as he had to go to the station to meet a girl whom he expected from Liverpool.

"An Irish girl, too," he said with a grin, "who is coming all the way over to marry me. I guess you'd wouldn't do as much for you! But mine is a brave lassie, and though she's kept me waiting a bit, she's coming at last. Ye see it's not them that's afraid to look a glass of good whiskey in the face that the Irish people like."

Bill, who concluded, with a contemptuous glance at his companion. "They're much too sensible for that, and know well enough that it's only snags and corks that won't take their drop and stand a feller a treat when he meets 'em."

Owen shrugged his shoulders at this speech, feeling stung in the thought that he would stand Bill's treat as would go a long way towards knocking him over altogether. Bill, however, was disposed to be prudent that evening, and though, as he said, just to oblige Owen, he tossed off a glass, it was Owen himself who drank the most on the occasion, and on whom the liquor took most effect. Bill seemed half inclined to shake him off as he set out for the station, declaring that the train was due in ten minutes. Owen, however, he hardly knew why, unless with some notion of picking a quarrel with him, stuck to him like a leech, playing him with questions concerning the girl who was coming all the way over from Ireland to marry him. The Welshman got angry at last, and with an oath told Owen to come along with him, and see for himself "as decent a girl as was to be found in all Connaught, and with a pair of blue eyes that just give a chap the squeals all over to look at." This assertion for some mysterious reason riled Owen considerably. The notion of a pretty Irish girl marrying a coarse brute like Owen was too much for him altogether. He swore that his Norah had blue eyes, and was a comelier lass than any other in all Ireland, let alone Connaught, and that Bill was a liar if he said the contrary. Whereupon Bill, growing furious, burst out, "Your Norah! My Norah is the girl that's worth a dozen of you'n! And she's a-shovin' on it too, by coming over to marry me instead of sticking at home, with her fingers in her mouth, waiting to be fetched like a barrel of goods!"

They were at the station now, and at the words "my Norah" coming from Bill's coarse lips, Owen reeled as though he had been struck, and all the blood in his body seemed to rush to his brain. Like a tiger he turned upon his companion, but at that instant a train rushed up to the platform where the two men were standing, and Bill had darted forward to a third-class carriage, from the window of which a young girl was looking anxiously out. Owen stood transfixed. It was Norah, his Norah, with sweet red lips and eager, laughing eyes; and in the flash of a second, without ever even so much as seeing her, she was out of the train, and was caught in Bill's embrace. At first Owen was paralyzed at the spectacle; but the next moment a wild frenzy took possession of him, and he had sprung upon Bill, seizing him by the collar, and then closing with him in a desperate struggle, while Norah's shrill scream of horror and fright rang through the station. It was a desperate struggle. Bill seemed at first to get the worst of it; but his great strength presently began to tell. In another instant Owen felt that he would be powerless. Suddenly he recollected his knife that was in his waistcoat pocket, which by a dexterous movement of his hand he seized. What happened next? Owen did not know by what devil's trick he managed it, so promptly and cleverly that he had plunged the knife into Bill's throat, and the Welshman had fallen back with a

gurgling groan, and was lying helpless on the platform.

O, the horror of what followed! Owen only seemed to hear Norah's screams, and to see Bill's white face, with wide opened staring eyes looking up at him. At first, he did not know what it meant; but presently he heard voices around him saying that Bill was dead; and he felt a strong grip on his arm, and he realized that they were carrying him off to the station house, and that people were looking at him with a strange shuddering, and calling him a murderer!

He, Owen Lambert, a murderer! It was impossible—quite impossible. And yet, his hands were all covered with blood, and he knew well enough that the awful expression he had seen of Bill's face meant—to be remembered with horror and loathing; to be pursued to the very end by Norah's reproachful eyes and his mother's curses. Would she curse him? This thought seemed the crowning misery of all. He could bear everything else—the shame, the ignominy, the terror of the law; but he could not bear the thought of a punishment! To die a shameful death; to be remembered with horror and loathing; to be pursued to the very end by Norah's reproachful eyes and his mother's curses. Would she curse him? This thought seemed the crowning misery of all. He could bear everything else—the shame, the ignominy, the terror of the law; but he could not bear the thought of a punishment! To die a shameful death; to be remembered with horror and loathing; to be pursued to the very end by Norah's reproachful eyes and his mother's curses. Would she curse him? This thought seemed the crowning misery of all. He could bear everything else—the shame, the ignominy, the terror of the law; but he could not bear the thought of a punishment! To die a shameful death; to be remembered with horror and loathing; to be pursued to the