

THE EMIGRANT LASSIE.

[The following lines contain the simple unadorned statement of a fact in the experience of a friend, who is fond of wandering in the Highland glens.]

As I came wandering down Glen Spear,
Where the braes are green and grassy,
With my light step I overtook
A weary-footed lassie.

She had one bundle on her back,
Another in her hand,
And she walked as one who was full loath
To travel from the land.

Quoth I, "My bonnie lass!"—for she
Had hair of flowing gold,
And dark brown eyes, and dainty limbs,
Right pleasant to behold—

"My bonnie lass, what allest thee,
On this bright summer day,
To travel sad and shoeless thus
Upon the stony way?"

"I'm fresh and strong, and stoutly shod,
And thou art burdened so;
March lightly now, and let me bear
The bundles as we go."

"No, no!" she said, "that may not be;
What's mine is mine to bear;
Of good or ill, as God may will,
I take my portioned share."

"But you have two, and I have none;
One burden give to me;
I'll take that bundle from thy back
That heavier seems to be."

"No, no!" she said, "this, if you will,
That holds no hand but mine
May bear its weight from dear Glen Spear
Cross the Atlantic brine."

"Well, well! but tell me what may be
Within that precious load,
Which thou dost bear with such true care
Along the dusty road?"

"Belike it is some present rare
From friend in parting hour;
Perhaps, as prudent maidens' wont,
Thou tak'st with thee thy dower."

She drooped her head, and with her hand
She gave a mournful wave;
"Oh, do not jest, dear sir!—it is
Turf from my mother's grave!"

I spoke no word; we sat and wept
By the road-side together;
No purer dew on that bright day
Was dropt upon the heather.

JOHN STUART BLACKIE.

MY LADY'S DIAMONDS.

IV.

When Susan returned home, just as the day was breaking she was startled by the sudden apparition of poor Micky, looking like a small ghost in his white night-gear, trembling in every limb, and with a face pale as ashes. Springing from his box-bed as the door opened, he flew to his mother, and clung round her, sobbing convulsively, as though his heart would break. The passion of terror and grief that shook his poor little frame was such as for some time to prevent her getting a coherent account of what had happened; but at last in broken words and sobs it came out. Too well the unhappy woman understood all. Her husband, her once good and industrious Jim, one of a gang of robbers.

Those who can recall the winter of 1862 may remember that gang whose maraudings in the neighbourhood of Dublin were so cleverly contrived as for months to baffle the efforts of the police to detect them.

What added to Susan's misery was the state of mind the little boy was thrown into by the knowledge that his benefactresses were to be the victims of the plot. Lady Mary and her granddaughter visited Mercer's Hospital, where he had been laid-up after his accident, and their kindness had bound him to them with strong ties of gratitude and love.

"I'll go, mother, and warn them, that I will, if I have to walk every step of the road on my crutches. I'll ax the way as I go along. Any one will tell me."

"Yis; an' what do you think the men 'll do to you for peaching on 'em? Red Joe, that's by all accounts the ferociouslest ruffian that—"

"I don't care! They may cut me into strips; they may throw me into the Liffey. I'll save them that was good to me."

"And tie a rope round yer father's neck. A' hold yer tongue, child! You don't know what you're talking about. For your life don't let me ever hear a word about telling mortal. If I thought a sinner of what you heard that night would ever pass yer lips I'd—I'd—I don't know what I'd do to you!" sobbed the wretched woman. And what she did do was to catch the child to her breast, and smothering him with kisses, rock herself and him to and fro in her great agony.

She was truly in a dire strait. Afraid to breathe a word to her husband of the discovery the boy had made, lest it should ooze out and come to the ears of the men; and well she knew the desperate character of Red Joe, and that he would stop at nothing rather than be balked of his prize. Miserable at the thought of the crime Ryan was about to commit, and the intended outrage upon the dear ladies; and not daring to lift a finger to prevent it.

Day after day, too, she was beset by the entreaties and lamentations of Micky. The child was pining away before her eyes, "fretting the flesh off his bones." He could neither eat nor sleep, and his wan pinched face, piteous to behold, went to his mother's heart.

"Ah, mother dear, if you only knew how kind they were to me in the hospital, and their goodness to every whole mother's soul besides, in the place! Miss Edith as tender and gentle as an angel; and like an angel she looked as she'd come gliding up the ward wid a step as soft as the falling snow, and the light from the windies as she passed 'em, glinting off her lovely golden hair that shone like the sunbeams. Herself was a sunbeam, sure enough, in that gloomy place. A nod an' a smile she'd have for every one, passing along the two rows of beds to the top of the ward where Mrs. Lynch the nurse sat. And then after giving the "good-morning" to Mrs. Lynch, and hearing all about the patients, back she'd come again and stop at every bed. The feeling way she'd talk to the poor crathurs, axing so pitiful what the accident was, and where they had the pain! And the presents she'd have for every one! A bunch of flowers here or a bit of knittin', an' a book or a newspaper for them that were scholars and could read, and cakes and toys and scrap-books and pictures and sweets for the children. O, but the children doated alic on Miss Edith!" exclaimed Micky, with sparkling eyes. "The pretty bright ways of her! And the plays she'd invint for them! They'd forget to cry when she was there. An' stories! She'd sit down an' tell them stories, to such as wasn't too bad to listen, till they'd be that took up with hearkening to her you'd not hear a moan out of them. Myself didn't feel I had the broken leg on me while she was talking."

"You must tell me some of those nice stories, won't you, jewel?" said Susan, glad to see the child brightening over his hospital reminiscences, and trying to draw him on to forget for a little the subject on which he was unceasingly brooding on, and that was preying so ruinously upon his health.

"To be sure, mammy!" he cried eagerly. "An' may be they won't delight you." My lady—she too, he went on, "would be going about among the beds with something for every one. A packet of tea and sugar, or a screw of stuff, for the old grannies; and eggs and oranges, or a bottle of lemonade or raspberry vinegar—they're always kilt with the thirst, God help 'em! in that accident ward. If I was talking till to-morrow I couldn't tell the half of what those darling ladies' visits does for them poor patients. They'll be all lyin' there, tired an' fretful, wore out with the pain and the tediousness, and nothing to do or think of the long weary day but their misery; restless and complaining and unreasonable, and poor Mrs. Lynch's heart nearly broke with them. One calling for a drink, and another axing to have the pillow settled or the bandages; not knowing what to be at, the crathurs, with the dint o' pain and tiredness! And the children crying and wailing, and that cross and peevish, the world wouldn't plaze them. When in would come the ladies, and in a minute all would be changed! The groans and the whining would cease, and the pain be forgotten. You wouldn't think there was a bruise or a burn or a broken limb in the place."

"A great relief and blessing, surely!" said Susan.

"Yis. And for an hour after they'd be gone and the door shut upon them, the buzz of talk in the ward wouldn't stop. Every one axing the other what she had got and showing their things, and maybe changing or dividing them. And the talk the young woman would have about Miss Edith and every single thing she'd have on! Her clothes, an' her golden hair, an' her ornaments; for she always come to the hospital dressed grand on purpose. "To please the poor souls," sez she to Mrs. Lynch. Now wasn't that double kind of her, mother, dressing herself for sick creatures as if she was going off to a party?"

"'Twas better than a cordial the sight of her," the nurse used to say. "And if there was more in the world like them two angels of mercy, what a differ 't would make to the poor!"

Which sentiment, we—recording in our true narrative the deeds of real characters, and copying from life real scenes—do most heartily endorse.

"And to think," sobbed poor Micky, breaking down suddenly at last, and bursting into a passion of grief—"to think of my darling ladies set upon by them villains!—dragged out of their carriage in the dead of night!—the jewels torn off 'em!—frightened out of their wits! O, mother it will kill them! You must do something, you must!"

"Whisht, Micky, whisht, my child; the walls have ears! Sure you know I can do nothing," moaned Susan. "Where's the use of going over and over again about what can't be helped?"

V.

The St. Patrick's ball at the Castle on the 17th of March is always the most numerous attended of all the vice-regal festivities. No special invitations are needed as at the other state balls.

All who have been before presented are privileged to attend, on sending in their names to the Chamberlain. The numbers are generally swelled by many—families from the country and others who from various causes have been unable to pay their respects at previous drawing-rooms and levees; and for these there is held a sort of small court, when his Excellency receives presentations before the ball opens and dancing begins.

Lady Mary and Edith had good-naturedly undergone the usual gathering of domestics to admire the glories of their attire before leaving home. The gardener's wife, the lodge-keeper's

daughters, the poor lame dress-maker from the village, and a few others privileged outsiders, were among the gaping servants; Mrs. Parks standing behind her ladies, dignified and apart, waiting with her pins and wraps till the curiosity of the vulgar was satisfied; and Nelly, all unconscious of the dire mischief she had so innocently worked, grinning with rapture in the background.

The Commander of the day was the popular Lord Carlisle, appointed viceroy for the second time in June 1859, on the resignation of Lord Derby's administration. An unusual number of strangers had come up to town, and the presentations were still going on when Lady Mary arrived at the Castle.

At last, however, they are ended. The procession is formed—Lady Mary and her companion taking their places in it by reason of her rank and from her late husband having belonged to the household. "God Save the Queen" rings out from the orchestra, and the glittering train, fair women and brave men, bejewelled and bedecked, marches up the centre of St. Patrick's Hall, the Lord Lieutenant at its head, bowing graciously to the brilliant throng that lines his passage; with now and then a good-natured smile of recognition to some one in the crowd. When the procession reaches the dais the strains of the National Anthem give place to a lively country dance: "Patrick's Day in the Morning" is played. His Excellency gives his arm to the Lady Mayoress and leads her off. Couple after couple follow in quick succession. Feathers are tossing in the air for court plumes are de rigueur on this occasion. The ball has begun!

Why seek to describe it? The ball in St. Patrick's Hall differs not from any other.

When youth and pleasure meet,
To chase the glowing hours with flying feet!

Young hearts beating high with excitement, joy, hope, love. Older ones taking their pleasure more gravely. Chaperons looking on at their youthful charges with pleased or anxious interest; entering with zest into the moving scene; bright and lively now, to wax sleepy perchance by and by at the small hours; what time elderly gentlemen will be seen consulting their watches in tired anticipation of the carriage, and home.

Then will the "flying feet" fly faster, making the most of the shortening time, their owners glancing regretfully up at the first faint flush of the gray dawn appearing at the windows of the hall and gradually increasing; they hoping the while that "dear mamma" won't perceive it, and stealing a look to see whether she has got some one pleasant to talk to, and a comfortable seat.

Meantime the scene is most brilliant. St. Patrick's Hall with its magnificent proportions and adornments; the entire suite of apartments thrown open; the throne-room given up on this occasion to the dancers. The blaze of light! The delicious music! Lovely women in perfect toilettes, with stir of graceful plumes and sheen of diamonds—Lady Mary V——'s resplendent *parure* conspicuous among them. Men in court dresses and gorgeous uniforms—military, naval, militia, foreign, official—a dazzling kaleidoscope ensemble of scarlet and blue, and rifle green, and gold and silver lace; orders and clasps, stars and medals, decorating many a manly breast.

Contrasting curiously with these is a gentleman in ordinary evening clothes, the only individual in the whole crowded room so dressed. As he enters, a knot of dowagers seated near the door, and evidently, from their glaring costume, not belonging to the "upper ten," wonder and stare with indignant disapproval.

"How strange!" "How did he get in without uniform or court dress?" "Such ignorance of the rules! such cheek!" "Why don't they turn him out?"

But he moves quietly on, his plain black suit and white tie, making him the more remarkable and remarked, from the contrast with all the brilliancy around. A lady bows to him, and whispers to her neighbour, "The American Consul."

And now there is a stir. At a signal from the Chamberlain's wand of office, the band once more strikes up "God save the Queen." The procession forms again and moves down the hall in the same order in which it has come up. The vice-regal party goes in to supper. Soon after this is over departure sets in, and among the first to leave is Lady Mary V—— with her granddaughter.

Counting on her punctuality, three men, well-armed, have taken up their posts at an angle of the road beyond the three-mile stone. They are crouched down behind a sheltering bank, watching breathlessly—the prize is a rich one. All is silent as the grave. Not a living soul have they met on the deserted road as they came out from town. The night is dry, a keen March wind blowing.

At last, to Red Joe's straining ears, there comes a faint sound. It is the carriage. Two points of light appear in the far distance. He clutches instinctively the gags in his pocket; one restless foot is already on the bank. In his hungry eagerness he can almost see the two cloaked forms as they lie back in their respective corners, more closely muffled than usual; for the night is cold.

Nearer and nearer sounds the click-clack of the horse's hoofs on the hard road; and larger and larger—like two fiery eyes—grow the lamps, as the doomed carriage close at hand now, comes speedily onward to its fate.

VI

We will now go back a little in our story, and change the scene from the "halls of dazzling light," to the accident ward in Mercer's Hospital. Not the one visited by the ladies and occupied by women and children, as described by Micky; but that on the men's side of the hospital.

Here, in one of the row of beds, lies—helpless and suffering—Jim Ryan. A dray has knocked him down, the wheels passing over his body, crushing his ribs, and inflicting internal injuries.

It is visiting-day. Susan and little Micky have just left the ward, where they have been spending some hours, when a stealthy step comes up the stairs, and Red Joe—his hat slouched over his ill-looking countenance—appears at the bedside.

"My poor fellow, an' is this the way with you?" he whispers to Ryan. "Of all the boys in the gang, you're the one we could least spare, an' here you are,—worse luck!"

"Yis, here I am," said Ryan, "an' serve me right. Serve me right for the devil's turn I done to them that were charitable and good to my own flesh and blood. O Joe, it's the curse of God is on me for my bad courses! 'Twill be on you too and follow you, if you don't give up."

"Tut, man alive!" exclaimed Joe, "d'ye think 'twas to listen to rot like that I come to this cursed hole! But I don't wonder at you, my poor chap. Small blame to any man to be down in the mouth, an' he lying on his back, sick an' sore. I come for to settle your mind about them ladies you're so sweet upon; and to tell you I'll see no harm that can be helped comes to them, no more than if you were to fore yourself at the job. And moreover, comrade, I'll take care that you get justice and fairness about the dividing of the swag."

"I'll never touch a penny of it!" exclaimed Ryan, "or a penny of ill-got money ever again as I'm above ground. If I live to get out of this bed, with the help of God, I'll be a changed man." "Ryan did live and kept his word," "O Joe, Joe, don't do it! If ever you hope to see the light of heaven, don't!"

"Tis very like we'll give it up now—very like, indeed," sneered Joe. "No, be dead. But you'll see how virtuous, and purty-behaved we'll be, all of us, when we're living like gentlemen over in America on my lady's diamonds, Larry Burke is to take your place in the dongs Patrick's night. Good-bye now, Jim. Never fear, but I'll see you all right and your pluck back again, when you're out of this den!"

The day after Jim Ryan's accident, Lady Mary and Edith were at breakfast when, among the letters brought by the morning's post, there appeared a shabby, queer-looking epistle addressed to the former.

"Honoured Lady" it said, "This is a warning. For your life. Don't you and Miss Edith go next or near the castle Patrick's night. There's them that's lying in wait to stop your carriage and rob you of your diamonds on the Way home. I'd have gave you Warning. Before this, only a near friend of my own was in it and he's not, by the mercy of God. This comes from a friend. Take warning and be said by it at Your perill."

"An anonymous letter," said Lady Mary, tossing it across the table to Edith, with a laugh.

"How stupid these practical jokes are! Whoever wrote it to frighten me will find him or herself disappointed; it looks like a woman's hand. The idea of our being kept at home by a document like that!"

On reading it again, however, something in the tone struck Lady Mary, and she thought it might be as well, before committing it to the flames, to show the letter to Colonel Lake, the then Chief Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police.

The Colonel looked grave as he read it. Taken in connection with the nocturnal outrages that had been so frequently reported to him, and the suspected existence of a dangerous gang of thieves, he viewed the matter in a serious light.

After some deliberation and debate with Lady Mary, the interview was closed with injunctions and advice as follows:

"Your ladyship will go to the ball as usual, making arrangements to stay in town after it, and spend the night at an hotel. Your coachman must also remain, having given your brougham and horse into the hands of my men. All which arrangements must be kept perfectly secret."

The result of which was, that when the three miscreants sprang out upon the carriage, expecting an easy victory over their defenceless prey, they fell into the strong hands of three stalwart policemen; who flinging off the wrappings that disguised them, disarmed and handcuffed Red Joe and his comrades before they had time to recover the shock of the sudden surprise.

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