

THE BIT O' WRITIN'.

BY THE O'HARA FAMILY.

Continued from our last Number.

CHAPTER IV.

A figure suddenly darkened the door-way. It was that of a female, wearing the deep blue peasant mantle of the district. She stood still and silent, with her back to the inside of the house, and of course to our friends; and the ample cloak, falling close to her shoulders, and down her sides, in two straight lines, while its gathered hood was drawn over her head, baffled observation as to who or what she was, neighbour or stranger.

"Never a welcome to whoever it is," grumbled Murty. "Amin, say I, till the writin' is over," echoed Chevaun. "Ship a-hoy—ii!" hailed the admiral, angrily through his speaking-trumpet.

The person slowly turned sideways on the spot where she stood and even in her movement there was sadness. Her left hand and arm now appeared through the folds of her cloak, and a pair of new light blue worsted stockings hung from the latter. She spoke a few words in a low tone, and they fell on the ear like the melancholy though musical trickling of drops of water in a little basin, half covered with sedge, in a lonely place. They were spoken tears.

"I don't think you know who it is that's keepin' the May sun from your dour-stone, Chevaun," she said; and still her face was quite hidden by the cloak-hood which almost closed in front of it.

"Ochown! but sure I know your own poor voice, now! cried Chevaun, in great interest, as she endeavoured to push her way to the visiter by the side of the cross-legged table, "Mary, a lanna! how are you, the mornin'?"

"In good health, I give thanks, Chevaun; an' I'm only cum wid the first o' my knittin' for Murty."

She held out the stockings on her arm. The mistress of the house had now gained her side, and greeted her kindly.

"Murther, Mary: an' is id you! an' how is every inch i you, aothone?" exclaimed Murty, his inhospitable tone also changed for the better, as, in his turn, he seized the visiter's hands, and shook them violently.

"Ship on her beam-ends!" proclaimed the admiral, somewhat reprehensively, as he sprang to set up again the table which in his amiable haste, Murty had overturned.

"Come in, a-cuishla, come in," resumed Chevaun "sure this is no place for you to be stannin'!"

"Yes, roul in the four bones o' you!" said Murty, throwing an arm round her waist; and Mary passively suffered herself to be led, or rather hurled into the house.

The two women proceeded towards the fireplace; Chevaun sat on the hob, almost facing the door, so that her face remained fully visible; the other on a "boss,"* confronting Mrs. Mechan, the hood of her cloak still unmoved, and her features, as well as her person, still a mystery to the ould admiral. Murty deposited himself on a second boss, on one side of the females, with the air and manner of a person who, without much intrusion, had a right to loiter within ear-shot of whatever they were about to say; and Terence O'Brien remained where he had been, after adjusting the table, his legs apart, his one arm hanging straight by his side, his one fist clenched, and his eyes and whole face angrily—one would think—regarding the group.

"An' the poor ould mother—how is she, a-lanna-ma-chree?" resumed Chevaun, stooping her head close to that of the person she addressed.

Mary answered in a still lower and more saddened voice than that she had used at the door, accompanying the mournful sounds with a slow rocking motion of the body; and a conversation went on between her and Chevaun, of which the admiral caught not a sentence, though it might be supposed from the expression of his visage, as well as from his set attitude, that he listened attentively—which, however, was not the case. Whatever art might or might not have done to make him a gentleman, the ould admiral was one by nature—in the heart—and he would have spurned the idea of turning eves-dropper upon the confidential discourse of any persons, gentle or simple. But he could not help observing that Mary's auditors seemed deeply affected with what she told them. Indeed, Murty's huge, good blue eyes grew moist as they fixed on hers, and the tears ran outright down his wife's vermilion cheeks; while many a sympathising "och!" and

* A low, round seat made solidly with coils of twisted straw.