

# THE LITERARY GARLAND.

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### AN IRISH TALE.

It was a dreary night. The rain fell in torrents, and the wind, sweeping over the mountains, pierced to the bone. I had been for some hours exposed to the fury of the elements, seeking in vain for shelter, when, wearied and worn out, I found myself, after a rather lengthened parley with the landlord, safely lodged within the walls of a lonely tavern that stood in a gloomy place, known from time immemorial as "the Black Wolf's Pass," in one of the western counties of Ireland.

Seated comfortably by the kitchen fire, with a tumbler of the illicit before me, I soon forgot the miseries I had endured, and cast my eyes around the rude apartment. Opposite me sat an old beldame, whose strange appearance immediately excited a strong curiosity in my mind. With scarcely enough of clothing to conceal the tanned and shrivelled skin that covered her fleshless bones, she yet maintained an imperturbable dignity—a strange air of contempt and indifference. I watched every motion. When she fixed her eye, you shrunk under the palpable influence of its eagle glare—and the reckless placidity of her attitudes seemed to proceed from that abstracted importance which the events of other worlds are calculated to produce. Mine host, however, allowed me little time for reflection upon this singular figure, and drawing a chair to a great table, hunked and worn into fantastic inequalities of surface, he desired me to be seated.

Bryan, the landlord, was a jolly, apparently good-humoured and good-hearted fellow: but you felt that he was a man you could not trifle with. His face was a legible index to gauger-hunting, illicit-distillation, and the persecution of tithing proctors. But these were not crimes of constitution, but of necessity and circumstances: you had no apprehension when he stood before you that

you beheld a murderer or a housebreaker; yet you would instinctively avoid provoking his resentment.

I sat down to supper. The cloth presented an appearance somewhat like an old map of China with the huge wall on its borders, and clumps of domes and peaked turrets filling up the centre. But I had a relish for my fare, and ate cheerfully and looked contented.

My meal was dispatched in silence, which I was not unwilling to attribute to respect and attention on the part of my entertainers: but my curiosity concerning the old woman induced me to turn towards where she sat, when I perceived Bryan making strange signs, with which she seemed conversant, and the beldame herself replying through the same medium, with caustic and dissatisfied looks. Their conference, too, seemed to relate to me, and my nerves were not exactly in a state to fit me for promptitude or decision. I hastily asked for a candle, and desired to be shown to my sleeping room, determined to leave them and my suspicions behind me.

Bryan immediately went to fetch a candle, and the hag, taking advantage of his absence, cautiously approached, and in a suppressed tone exclaimed, "I charge you by the cross, to quit the house—your life is on a thread—he means you no evil but he cannot avert it. I charge you by the holy cross, to be gone!"

The earnestness and impressiveness of her manner obtained my acquiescence in a moment.

"I do not understand you," I replied; "but I am willing to believe you mean me a service. Lead me to the road, and you shall be rewarded."

She was preparing to follow my instructions when the last word caught her ear. She turned suddenly, and scowled upon me with a look of ineffable contempt; but, not diverted from her