

my hasty retreat; but she guessed it, and challenged me in her frank, straightforward way: 'Grand'ther has been trying to make a match between us, hasn't he cousin?'

'Well—something of the sort,' said I.

'And you told him you wouldn't, didn't you?'

'You guess, correctly: yes.'

'You should have left that to me, cousin; for though I like you, I wouldn't have had you.'

'And I like you, my dear cousin; but I couldn't have had you. Good bye.' And I strode on to Faintown. In a few days I was again in Yorkshire.

CHAPTER LV.

I AM IN IRELAND, AND AM CAUGHT IN A MOUNTAIN STORM.

Not long after my return from the strangely terminated visit to my grandfather, business engagements took me to the North of Ireland. I have no intention of inflicting on my indulgent readers a lengthened history of travels in that country: it is sufficient to say that my employer's affairs called me to some of its larger towns lying at wide distances apart; and that I adopted the usual mode of travel—almost the only mode then practicable in many parts of Ireland—that of riding on horseback. To this end I had purchased a strong, servicable roadster in Dublin, intending to dispose of it again when the need for it had ceased.

I had been several days at a large town which I shall only designate by its initial letter, C—; and it was on the afternoon of a gloomy, sultry, autumn day that I finally left my comfortable quarters there, to hurry on to another town, some twenty miles distant.

'You had better wait till to-morrow morning,' said my good-natured landlord, as I was about to put foot in stirrup. 'We shall have a storm before many hours are over; and the roads are unco'bad and hilly, you know.'

Yes, I knew, for I had travelled the same roads before, but I had confidence in my horse, and some reliance on my own judgment of the weather. Allowing for the badness of the roads, I expected to arrive at my destination before dusk, and also before the approaching storm should burst. I had a reason, too, for wishing to make what speed I could; I had received intelligence that a correspondent of our house had committed an act of bankruptcy, and that my presence was needed on the spot to investigate

his affairs. I thanked my considerate landlord, therefore, for his caution, followed my own plans.

'Aweel, aweel!' said he—he was a Scotchman—'a wilfu' man maun ha' his way;' in another minute, I was trotting through the streets of C—, and in half an hour I was fairly committed to my journey. The road I had to traverse was not simply hilly, it was mountainous; bad in summer, and in winter almost impassable. It was a little frequented road, rough, rugged, and grass-grown; and besides, it was extremely complicated, for it was crossed and recrossed by other mountain tracts, or boreens, which in the absence of direction posts, rendered the choice of the right tract exceedingly hazardous. Pretty confident, however, in my general knowledge of the route, I pressed onward.

The appearance of the mountains to be crossed, though gloomy and forlorn, was not uninteresting; they were almost covered with heath, and occasionally opened to the sight wild and extensive scenery, such as poets would love to look upon, and long for power to describe. I was not a poet, however; and my great concern, on that occasion, was to perform the journey as expeditiously as possible; for signs of the storm, which I had persuaded myself was at a sufficiently safe distance in point of time, began rapidly and swiftly to accumulate. Great masses of black clouds, rising in the western horizon, and thickening as they rose, darkened the atmosphere; and strong, fitful gusts of wind swept over the mountain heights and through the mountain passes, with an icy chilliness which quickened my desire for shelter.

Shelter, however, was not easily attainable. An extent of several miles, which I had already traversed, had presented only two or three mud cabins, inhabited evidently by the lowest class of Irish peasantry; and, these passed, nothing was visible but the dark heath-covered and dreary hill-sides, for many other weary miles. It seemed almost as though I were on the verge, not only of civilization, but of habitable life, and that beyond could be nothing but desolateness.

I put spurs to my horse; but, weary of the interminable climbing, he resisted all my importunities to quicken his slow walk into a brisk trot—plunging forward, indeed, a few paces while the prick and smart of the spur remained, but instantly subsiding into the same slow pace as before. I alighted therefore, and led the way, partly because, by this plan, our progress was more hopeful, and partly also because the

change of exercise diffused a more equal warmth over my whole frame.

Meanwhile, the keen wind became keener, and swept across the mountains in stronger gusts and eddies; and the clouds overhead descended, first in a thick mist, which hid every surrounding object, and next in a torrent of rain, which, in spite of a thick horseman's cloak, soon drenched me to the skin, while it ran down the clayey road with the impetuosity of a resistless current, threatening to change it perhaps into its original and proper character—that of the bed of a mountain stream. Presently, and while I was toiling on, leading my horse by the bridle, a flash of lightning, startlingly bright and vivid, illuminated for a moment the thick, murky gloom in which the mountain was shrouded; and was followed by a terrific peal of thunder. Dazzled by the flash and frightened by the concussion, the poor animal plunged furiously, and, turning sharply round, he galloped madly down the mountain side. I followed, with as much speed as I could muster, trusting that the affrighted beast would presently relax his pace; but I only succeeded in catching a parting glimpse of him as he turned out of the road we had so painfully climbed, and pursued his headlong career into the apparently untródden recesses of the mountains.

Had the loss of my poor horse been the principal one involved in this misfortune, I might perhaps have given up my pursuit for that time, and pressed onward on foot over the hills to the town I was desirous of reaching; but unhappily, as it seemed then, a small portmanteau, strapped behind the saddle, contained not only a considerable sum of money, but papers of importance to my employer, the loss of which would throw our business transactions into almost inextricable confusion. There was nothing, therefore, for me to do—while blaming myself for my imprudent hurry, which threatened to make good the old proverb of "more haste, less speed"—but to follow up the track of the fugitive horse, trusting that he would presently abate his speed, and give me the opportunity of regaining not only himself, but the treasures he had carried off.

How many weary miles I plunged over, amidst rain, wind, mist, and thunder storm, I cannot tell. I know only that my almost hopeless chase was continued until the gloom of coming night was added to the murky darkness of the tempest, and I sunk to the ground, panting and exhausted with my vain efforts. Until then I had managed to track my fugitive horse