

THE IRISH WIDOW'S MESSAGE TO HER SON.

"Remember, Denis, all I bade you say;
Tell him we're well and happy, thank the
Lord;
But our troubles since he went away
You'll mind, avick, and never say a word;
Of cares and troubles, sure, we've all our
share,
The finest summer isn't always fair.

"Tell him the spotted heifer calved in May,
She died, poor thing; but that you needn't
mind;
Nor how the constant rain destroyed the hay.
But tell him God was ever kind,
And when the fever spread the country o'er,
His mercy kept the 'sickness' from our
door.

"Be sure you tell him how the neighbors came
And cut the corn and stored it in the barn;
'Twould be as well to mention them by name—
Pat Murphy, Ned McCabe, and James McCann,
And 'Nig Tim Daly from behind the hill;
And a y, agra—Oh, say I missed him still.

"They came with ready hands our toll to share—
'Twas then I missed him most—my own right
hand—
I felt, although kind hearts were round me there,
The kindest heart beat in a foreign land;
Strong hand! brave heart! one severed far
away from me
By many a weary league of shore and sea.

"And tell him she was with us—he'll know
who;
Mayvourneen, hasn't she the winsome eyes?
The darkest, deepest, brightest, bonniest blue
I ever saw, except in summer skies;
And such black hair! It is the blackest hair
That ever rippled over neck so fair.

"Tell him old Pincher fretted many a day,
And moped, poor dog! 'twas well he didn't die.
Crouched by the roadside, how he watched the
way,
And sniffed the travellers as they passed him
by;
Hail, rain, or sunshine, sure 'twas all the
same,
He listened for the step that never came.

"Tell him the house is lonesome-like and cold,
The fire itself seems robbed of half its light;
But maybe 'tis my eyes are growing old,
And things look dim before my falling sight;
For all that, tell him 'twas myself that spun
The shirts you bring, and stitched them
every one.

"Give him my blessing, morning, noon and
night;
Tell him my prayers are offered for his good,
That he may keep his Maker still in sight,
And firmly stand as the brave father stood,
True to his name, his country and his God,
Faithful at home, and steadfast still abroad."

—Dublin Freeman.

THE DUEL TO THE DEATH.

THE ACTOR'S STORY.

The Theatre Royal, Barnoloster, was a prosperous establishment at the time, now many years ago, when I was a member of its company, and when the tragic event occurred in which I was most unwittingly concerned. By the aid of a strong corps dramatique, backed up by London stars, the business for several seasons was maintained in a flourishing condition. In those days I was supposed to be learning the art, which I have long since abandoned, and to which I took well: it matters nothing to my story why I took to it. Many a young fellow has, in his early days, strutted and fretted his hour upon the stage, and then, fortunately for himself and others, been heard no more.

Our manager was also our stage-manager, and in these capacities was more successful than in that of an actor, in which vocation he, nevertheless, labored. He was always very civil to me—indeed, he was always very civil to every body—and we got on capitally together. It may, therefore, seem unreasonable to say that I never liked him, but such, notwithstanding, was the case. Despite his general popularity with his company, arising chiefly, I believe, from the punctuality he observed in all his payments, I fancied I saw a sinister expression in his eye, and a suppressed tone of savagery in his manner when ruffled, which betrayed a nature unwise to rouse to enmity, and capable of nourishing the direst feeling of revenge. I shake my suspicions were finally verified. I never forgive me if I wrong him! but the circumstances which eventually led to the termination of my career as an actor will forever in my mind go far to justify the prejudice with which he inspired me, for they gave birth to a conviction which I have never been able to overcome, and right or wrong, I shall see in it to the end of my days the reason why, as with the instinct of a dumb animal I disliked him from the first moment we met.

Life behind the scenes of a country theatre is not, perhaps, very refined. Much that is objectionable, of course, is to be found there, but, at

the same time, much that is honest hard-working, sincere, and kind-hearted; and I am safe in asserting that these virtues, and many more, were combined in the person of Julia Halworth, our leading young lady—a clever, graceful novice, who was struggling hard to maintain her widowed mother and three younger sisters, and, if possible, to avoid bringing the latter into a profession with the drawbacks to which she was well acquainted. Nevertheless, her task was not easy, her salary was small, and she had the greatest difficulty in eking out her resources. It is not wonderful, therefore, that she was, by degrees, induced to listen to the proposals of devotion made to her by Mr. Caugar, our manager. He was old enough to be her father, but he was in a position to place her, as his wife, in comparative comfort; for, unlike most men in his capacity, he had been very careful, and was supposed to be well off. There was a whisper that he had not been over-scrupulous in the way that he had made his money. A little privateering during the latter days of the great war, and since then some successful smuggling transactions, had, it was said, contributed largely to the wealth which he had recently embarked in ventures theatrical, for which, like many a sailor, he had a strong predilection, a certain similarity existing between the management of a ship and that of a theatre. I could see that much maternal pressure was used to induce Miss Halworth to recognize the advantages of a home such as Caugar could give her; but I could also see that if she did so, it would be at a great personal sacrifice, for not only did she seem to share my own innate repugnance to the man, increased, probably, on her part by the disparity of their years, but I strongly suspected there was a prior attachment. Of this, indeed, I was eventually convinced, and although I never knew precisely what had passed, the prologue to my tragedy had shaped itself briefly into something of this kind.

She had been induced to take up the noble art of acting by watching the successful career of a young fellow named Bernal Rutherfordstone, whom she had known from childhood, and whose efforts for his family were akin to those she was making for her own. After winning a fair reputation in the provinces, he had made a very favorable impression on the London public, and, by degrees, had gained considerable fame. His progress had been very carefully noted, step by step, by Julia Halworth, and, added to her own natural love for the art, had inspired her with a determination to devote herself to the stage with the hope of winning equal renown. I imagined—nay, I was sure—there had been on her side some deeper feelings involved; but probably with him it had been only a boy-and-girl flirtation, which had died away, leaving no mark, for they had not met for several years, and I knew they did not correspond. Nevertheless, he was the hero of her life; his doings, his successes, formed the one theme on which she was never tired of expatiating.

When, therefore, it was announced that Mr. Rutherfordstone was coming to play an engagement at our theatre, bringing with him a new play in which he had met with tremendous success in London, Miss Halworth did not hesitate to express her joy at the prospect of meeting her old friend, and of being able at last not only to see him act, but to act with him. This juncture of affairs happened just at the time she was weighing in her mind the answer she was to give to our manager's proposals, and it was then that the doubt and perplexity with which she viewed them came under my notice. On the one hand, she saw herself bound to a man to whom she had an antipathy, but who would immediately relieve her from the anxiety which the care of her mother and sisters entailed upon her (for Caugar had not failed to avail himself of the strong argument which her affection for her family placed in his hands); and on the other, freedom not only to pursue her art with the hope of achieving a great London reputation, but to indulge in the dream that it might not always be upon the stage alone that she would have to play the heroine of a domestic drama, with Bernal Rutherfordstone for its hero.

The manager's smooth words and promises had quite won over to his side Mrs. Halworth, a selfish, indolent woman, who, congratulating herself on the comfort that would accrue to her from her daughter's marriage, quite lost sight of the fact that Caugar was not altogether disinterested, and had no intention of Julia's leaving the stage, for he was fully aware of her capacity, and knew he should be making no bad investment by diverting her future earnings into his own pockets.

"I think you would do well, Mrs. Halworth, somewhat to check your daughter's outspoken admiration for Mr. Rutherfordstone. I was not aware until his engagement with me was announced this morning that she had ever been acquainted with him. It is scarcely becoming for any young lady to express her predilections in such glowing terms, but you can understand that it is peculiarly unpleasant for me to hear her, when the delicate nature of our present relations is considered. She said but now that it was the cherished dream of her life some day to play the heroine to his heroes, and that directly he had heard she was to do so here he had written to her, reclaiming his old acquaintance, and reminding her of their early hopes of some day forming an alliance which, at any rate behind the foot-lights, should astonish the world. Now, you know, loving her as I do, this was not agreeable to my feelings, and if I seem to be a little jealous at such words you can hardly blame me,

especially when she promised that I should have my answer to-day; but since the bills have been put out about Mr. Rutherfordstone she again puts me off, and declares she can not decide in so much haste. She has tortured me already long enough, and this coincidence is, to my mind, very significant."

"Oh, dear me! pray don't think any thing of that kind, Mr. Caugar; I am sure you have no cause to be anxious. She must make up her mind; she promised me she would yield to your wishes, and this enthusiasm about her old friend is only part of that which she shows on all matters concerning her profession. It is true that in better days, during my poor husband's lifetime, as children, Julia and Mr. Rutherfordstone knew each other, and were constantly playing at acting; but they have not met for years, and this letter, I am quite sure, is the first my daughter has ever had from him. It is chiefly about some stage directions, dresses, and hints he wants her to attend to; you shall see it."

"Well, well! it may be so, but I shall keep my eyes open when they meet, and I must warn you that I will not be trifled with. If I see any thing to justify the suspicion which her conduct has suddenly aroused, I wash my hands of the whole affair, I withdraw my proposals, and I leave you to your present life of penury. Meanwhile, caution her, and exercise your authority by compelling her to make her choice."

Thus much of a conversation I involuntarily overheard one evening while standing at the wing waiting for my cue, the speakers being more separated from me by the canvas of the scene; but it was sufficient to make me also keep my eyes open when Bernal Rutherfordstone arrived. This he did in a few days, and rehearsals of a new play in five acts, called "The Duel to the Death," were immediately entered on. It is unnecessary for my purpose to refer to any thing but the one great scene—the sensation, as it would now be called—of the piece. It is the story that grows out of the story of the drama that I am concerned with, the real tragedy evolved by the mimicron.

The plot was long and gloomy, culminating in the situation from which the play took its name, in which the hero is shot at the very moment his mistress, too late to avert the fatal bullet, rushes forward and falls across her lover's lifeless form. Upon this climax to the fourth act the act-drop descends. In London the great success of the drama had arisen from the reality and care with which this scene had been rendered, and an immensity of time and pains was therefore spent at our theatre in order to do it equal justice. The whole extent of the stage was occupied by an elaborate "set," representing a secluded glen.

Principals and seconds arrive, certain pacific overtures are made by the blameless combatant, one Mark Mayburn, and rejected by the villain Houndsfoot, who is the cause of the contest. Not only does he refuse to listen to them, but insists that it shall be indeed "a duel to the death!" So it is settled that lots are to be drawn for the first shot, which is to be at twelve paces; this falls to Houndsfoot. It is the event of his missing, he who is fired at (Mayburn) then steps forward one pace and delivers his fire. If this, in its turn, be unsuccessful, the duellist who had fired first then steps in another pace and delivers his second shot. Thus gradually reducing the distance, and alternately firing, the chances are supposed to be equalized, and the two enemies brought closer and closer together.

Cool and blood-thirsty deliberation marks the conduct of both. Three shots have been delivered on either side, but only two have taken effect. One has slightly wounded Houndsfoot; and the other, fired by himself, has knocked the pistol from his antagonist's hand. A great point was to be made of this incident, and of the renewed efforts of the seconds to bring about a peaceful arrangement. The blood of both principals, however, is too much aroused, and Mark Mayburn now equally insisting on its being a "duel to the death," pistols are reloaded, ground is again taken up, and in horrible proximity to each other the duellists prepare for their last encounter. The word is given: in another minute all is over, and Mayburn, with a bullet through his heart, falls to the ground just as the luckless heroine enters, as I have described.

It was my fate to be cast for the part of Houndsfoot, while, of course, Rutherfordstone played that of Mark. We had never met before, but soon understood each other, and I willingly fell into his few little caprices about the "business" of our scenes together. We went through the duel over and over again, according to the stage directions of the London theatre, carefully arranging our relative positions, and so disposing everything as to bring out the points of the incidents and the dialogue with the utmost dramatic effect. I need not go into these in detail, the final one, to which everything is gradually worked up, is sufficient. We started from the opposite corners of the stage, so as to give the greatest appearance of space, thus the fatal shot was fired in the most conspicuous part of the boards.

At the first rehearsal we, of course, only snatched our pistols at each other, and our seconds merely went through the motions and time of reloading the pair with which we were both supplied; but as it was necessary at last to carry out actually what was to be done at night, we went through the firing, and much powder was burned and noise created ere Rutherfordstone expressed himself contented with the way in which the business went and the scene was acted. At first, in firing at him, especially when we came to close quarters, I used to point the pistol well over his head, according to the usual practice in such cases, for the sake of

safety; but so determined was he to carry out the reality of the effect that he insisted on my aiming straight at him. "Depress your muzzle a little, so as to clear my face," said he, "and no wadding or flame can hurt me. The effect is absurd to see the pistol fired clean over me."

This, therefore, I did, though somewhat reluctantly, for it is a nasty feeling, that of deliberately taking aim at a man, even though you may know that the charge is harmless. However, over and over again we repeated the scene; three shots each, the intermediate business, then my fourth—the fatal one—Mark's fall, the girl's entrance, and the tableau. Now in this same fall Rutherfordstone used to make, in my humble judgment, a fatal mistake, and I ventured to tell him so. I said that a man shot in that way would assuredly fall forward, and not backward, as he did, and that all those with whom I had ever conversed who had seen a man killed by a bullet told me that the dead on a battle-field were nearly always found face downward, which fact had given rise to the expression "biting the dust." He disputed the statement, and adhered to the only little bit of conventionality in his performance.

So he persisted in his "own business," as we technically called it. The moment I had fired he took one step toward me, raised his arms, and fell flat on his back with a heavy thud. It is true that by the disposition of the characters on the stage this gave a capital opportunity for the heroine to throw herself across his body, and the arrangement was picturesque enough, but to my mind it spoiled his otherwise truthful interpretation of the part. He was not a conventional actor, but this bit of acting was so in the extreme.

For over a week the piece was in rehearsal, during which time I could not fail to notice the close intimacy which sprang up, or, more properly speaking, was renewed, between Julia Halworth and Rutherfordstone. In a thousand little ways incidental to the actor's art I saw that something besides the merely inevitable familiarity consequent upon playing together had arisen between them, and I likewise saw that this had started into life all the latent fury with which I had credited Caugar, in spite of his bland manner, smooth smiles, and soft voice. There was a desperate struggle going on within him; at times it cost him his utmost strength to control himself. Jealousy, deep revengeful jealousy, had taken possession of him—a jealousy which could have sprung only from a sincerer love for the girl than I had supposed him capable of; but it was only in this item of his disposition that I had wronged him; in all else he bore out, to my keen eyes, my original idea of his nature. In his capacity of stage manager he was, of course, present at the rehearsals, and, in addition to this, he played the part of one of my seconds in the duel, thus being continually brought into contact with every one concerned in the scene.

It was on these occasions that I noted especially what was uppermost in his mind. Once I chanced upon him talking, with Miss Halworth as I passed down to the wing to go on. She had evidently just given him her ultimatum.

"This, then, is your answer?" I heard him mutter between his teeth, and almost losing, in his ill-suppressed rage, the soft, urbane tone of his usual voice. "For this I have been kept in miserable suspense for weeks. I little thought when I came to terms with Rutherfordstone that I was wrecking my chance of domestic happiness for the sake of professional renown. Confound him!" he continued, in a still lower voice, as he turned away; "he shall not wear her, though he has won her—she shall never be his wife; I'll put an end to his engagement first, by some means."

Julia half followed him to the wing, and said hesitatingly, "I must be candid; I told you I did not think I could ever like you, and now Bernal is here, I know it; our old feeling has—"

"Spare me that reference," interposed Caugar; "this is no time for such a discussion. You shall repent your conduct, be sure. You are called, Miss Halworth;" and she had to go to the entrance, and await her cue.

"Did he threaten her?" I thought. "What would his savage nature lead him to do? Any thing?" I said to myself, as I observed the diabolical expression which had overspread his face.

Our last rehearsal had been gone through to the satisfaction of every body. I had made a final appeal to Rutherfordstone respecting his fall; but with the greatest good temper, he told me to mind my own business, and be sure not to fire the pistol over his head, as I had still always a tendency and inclination to do.

The evening came; the house was crowded. The first three acts had gone splendidly; every body was delighted, and the act-drop rose on the beautifully managed scene in which the duel was to take place. There could be no doubt that if this could be carried out in the realistic manner with which every thing else had been done, success was certain. Carried out in a realistic manner? God help me! Who could have foretold the reality of what was to follow? Who? Well, there was one person, I shall ever believe, who could have done so; but I must not anticipate.

At length the action had reached the fatal moment. As we crept closer and closer together the three unsuccessful shots on either side had been delivered amidst breathless expectation on the part of the audience; the pistol had been knocked from Mayburn's hand, the pacific efforts of the seconds rejected, and the hush of anxiety, the suppressed terror and emotion palpable in a large assembly, when the inter-