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A TALE OF CASHEL.

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CHAPTER XII.—A WAKE AND WHAT BEFEL THEREAFTER.

The weeks and months rolled by, the snows of February and the winds of March and the soft dewy showers of April had all passed away, and still Jerry Pierce was a wanderer on the earth, with the brand of Cain on his brow, eluding the vigilance of the police, in what way no one could tell, notwithstanding that a tempting reward had been offered for his apprehension, and to all appearance the popular feeling was as strong against him as it ever had been. It was the last day of April, the charmed May- eve, and the little boys and girls were abroad in the dewy meadows gathering the golden May-flowers to strew before the house-doors for the welcoming of the summer.

In the gray light of the closing evening sat Cauth by the door with her stocking on her arm, listening to the pleasant sounds from the fields and meadows, and ever as she plied her needles, muttering drearily to herself as was her custom when alone—

Wisha, but it's merry ye all are now; she said half aloud, 'as merry as crickets—that's right; go on with your galivaning—make the best of it while ye can—I'll go bail ye'll not be so merry this night twelvemonth—some o' ye, anyhow. Ah, the poor foolish creatures, isn't badly off they are to know what's before them—most o' them 'll know it time enough.'

That's the truest word you ever spoke, said a man who just then stood on the threshold before her; 'it's little pleasure they'd expect in this world if they knew it as well as you and me, Cauth.'

Well, I declare you have the odds o' me, honest man; said Cauth, startled a little by his sudden appearance.

That may be, said the man gruffly, 'but it's askin' your help I am, for God's sake, and it matters little whether you know me or not. I know you, at any rate.'

Wisha, God help your wit, poor man, said Cauth in a softened tone, 'it's little I have to give any one. It's a sign that you don't know me, though you say you do, when you ask me for charity.'

Much or little, you can give something, and you must, too, for I have a sick child at home—at home, he repeated with something like a chuckling laugh—a motherless child, too, without a bit or a sup to give her, and she cry'd for something to eat—they tell me, he added with hysterical wildness, 'they tell me it's the hunger o' death that's on the darlin'—woman, woman! give me something for her, if it's only a mouthful!!'

Oh, vo, vo! said Cauth rising quickly, 'sure I'd keep it out o' my own mouth and give it, if that's the way it is with you.' And going to the little alcove she took out a piece of oatmeal cake, then poured some buttermilk into a porringer (i.e. tin cup) and gave it to the man who had stepped inside the door, and stood shivering in his tattered garments waiting to receive the precious aliment, miserable though they were.

'There's the best I have for you,' continued Cauth, as the man put the bread in the wallet that hung empty over his shoulder; 'if it was a little while ago, I could give you something better, but, ochone, since the black sorrow came on the poor mistress at the Hall above, there's many a thing we miss that we used to have. It's the good lady she was, all out, till that curse o' God villain murdered the darlin' young master, but, sure, sure we couldn't have the face to go next or nigh her now. Go your ways, honest man! and as I gave you that charity in the honor o' God, I lay it on you to say a Pater and Ave for Mr. Esmond's soul.'

'Don't be layin' anything on me,' said the man fiercely, 'I'll say no Pater an' Aves for the bit that's to save my child's life. That's the taste I may have.' And he was rushing out of the hut when Cauth caught him by the arm.

'You're a bad man,' said she, 'or you wouldn't say the likes o' that.'

Wisha, thank you kindly, said the man in a tone of bitter mockery, 'and sure it's a good woman yourself is, —' he named a name in a low guttural whisper and then darted off, leaving Cauth like one spell-bound. Long she stood looking vacantly down on the floor, her features fixed and rigid, and her long skinny arms hanging, as it were, powerless by either side. At last she staggered to her seat near the door, and leaning a deep-drawn sigh, leaned her head against the wall.

In Ireland the Summer commences with the merry month of May—the Spring with February and Oandlemas Day, as the Feast of the Purification is there called from the blessed candles then distributed amongst the people.

'Och, then,' she murmured sadly, 'them that 'd tell me o' a May- eve long ago that it 'd ever come to this with me. Sure nobody knows what's before them; but I thought—I thought I could hide myself here, and I see I can't. I believe there's no rest for me above ground.'

She was roused from her dreary cogitations by the sound of Mabel's wild sweet voice singing outside

Och! beware of meeting Rinardine! All on the mountain high!

Wisha, what's come of all the snail's? and the ne'er a bit o' yarra can I find, at all, and they tell me it's May- eve, and what'll I do for the yarra?

'Lord save us!' muttered Cauth, 'there's that poor cracked Mabel. I hope it isn't in here she'd be comin'. The lonesome creature! it's lookin' for the yarra she is, and the snail. Oye! oye! see how she gropes along on the ground—she's for all the world like a ghost—an' worse than a ghost she is to me.' And she shuddered as she watched the spectral looking figure gliding in a stooping posture through the deepening shades in her search for the charmed plant.

The sight of her makes me shiver all over, said Cauth, and when she gets a talkin' about things it makes me most as mad as herself to hear her. She'll not get in here the night, that's for sartin. And it's a hard thing, too, to shut her out bekase she's afflicted. But sure, I can't help it—I wouldn't do it if I could.'

And so saying she softly closed the door whilst Mabel went on with her fruitless search along the white

'He says, my party fair maid, I like your offer well, but I'm engaged already, the truth to you to tell, Unto another daisiel who is to be my bride, A wealthy grazier's daughter down by the Shannon side.'

The next moment, as usual with her, the strain was changed to that most doleful ditty

Och, it's on the banks o' Oia- dy I'm told he does remain.

perhaps more in accordance with her own wild and gloomy fancies. Later in the evening, when the full moon was shining down in silvery splendor on the old Rock and the ivied ruins and the richly varied plain stretching far and away beneath, Mad Mabel stole with a creeping pace to the door of Larry Mulquin's cottage, and raising the latch, glided in. Celia was alone spinning by the fire, her father and brothers being gone respectively 'on their cattle.' There was a troubled look on Celia's face, and the rich bloom had faded from her cheek; ever as her foot turned the wheel, and the delicate flaxen thread passed lightly thro' her fingers, a deeper shade fell on her sunken features, and the tremulous motion of her lips denoted the workings of her heart within. So rapt was she in her own sad thoughts that she heeded not the raising of the latch, and the first intimation she had of Mabel's presence was her squatting on the floor beside her, looking silently up in her face through the dishevelled tresses of her long hair. A low scream escaped Celia at the sudden appearance of the ghostly face and figure, but instantly recognizing Mabel she drew a long breath and forced a smile that was ghastly on her face as sunlight on a new-made-grave.

'Och, it's a joy delight of a shining night in the season of the year.'

Celia shook like an aspen leaf at the mention of Pierce's name, and she cast a shrieking look around.

'Take care now, Mabel, what you say,' she whispered, but, remembering now useless it was worn the poor creature of anything, she adopted the wiser course of turning her attention from the dangerous subject. 'What did you come here for, Mabel?' said she very gently; 'did you want to speak to me?'

'Look here,' said Mabel, 'see what I brought you.'

And opening a dock-leaf she held in her hand she showed its contents to Celia, looking eagerly up in her face the while as if to note her satisfaction.

'It's May- eve, you know.'

'Ah, poor Mabel!' sighed Celia, and she sadly shook her head, 'I want no snails now, nor yarra neither. No, nor the May- dew.' All that's past and gone.'

Another beautiful and highly poetical custom of the Irish peasant girls is that of gathering the first May- dew to bathe their faces. For that purpose they go out before sunrise on 'May- morning' (as the first morning of the fair month is distinctively styled) and gather the dew from the leaves and flowers.

But don't you want to see Jerry's name on the plate? just for onst before they hang him.'

Celia with a groan and a shudder covered her face with her hands, murmuring, 'Mabel! Mabel! for God's sake hold your tongue!'

'I will, avourneen—I will!' said Mabel rising, 'so you'll not take the yarra, afther me goin' out a-purpose to pull it for you?'

'Yes, yis, I'll take it,' cried Celia snatching it from her, in hopes of getting rid of her the sooner.

'And you'll put it under your head, afther? and you'll see the beautiful line frame you'll have about the hangin'—they wouldn't let me see Patrick hangin' you know, she added confidently, 'but maybe they'd let you go and see Jerry when it comes his turn—if they do, be sure and bring me with you, for I think it's the greatest thing in the whole world to see any one a- hangin'—och, och!' she added with a piteous moan, 'I wish they'd hang me at onst, and be done with it, for I'm tired walkin'—walkin' ever, and never gettin' to my journey's end.'

'Where are you going now, Mabel?' Celia asked, moving with her towards the door.

'I'm goin' to the graveyard to see if Jerry be there, and if he is, I'll tell him you want him.'

'To the graveyard, Mabel?—Lord save us, what 'd bring him there?' Celia asked aghast, without waiting to think of the folly of heeding Mabel's wild ravings.

Well, I wasn't speakin' to him that night I seen him at the vault lookin' at the letters on the front of it. You mind that night, Celia; it was a purty bright night for all the world—such another as this. The spirits were all out that night, in the purty moonlight, an' Patrick an' myself walked round an' round the old walls, and the graves, on the Rock above, and then we went down to Hore Abbey, and we sat discoursin' there awhile about one thing and another, and watchin' the fairies dartin' themselves, and chasin' one another in an' out through the old windows and arches and things, and then, mavourne, off we went to Holy Cross, but just as we got there the cock crew, and poor Patrick had to go—but, listen hither, Celia! he said Jerry Pierce was goin' to be hung some o' these days, and then you and me, and Jerry and him, and all the rest of the spirits 'd have the finest times you ever seen—och, well, I must be goin'—it's tired I am—tired—tired—and the heart atin me is as heavy as lead—it's a load to carry, so it is—I wish Jerry Pierce hadn't shot the purty young gentleman and made that ugly hole in his white forehead—och, what made him do it, at all?'

So saying, poor Mabel glided away noiselessly as she came, leaving Celia well pleased to get rid of her (to her) torturing prattle, which had somehow renewed all her troubles in her mind, and left her a prey to the most excruciating misery.

Still the silent moon shone down on the slumbering earth as calmly as though no stormy passion, no gnawing grief, was at work amongst the children of men. But the world never sleeps, and the peaceful sheen of the cold pale moonbeams as they rested on the earth and on the dwellings of men, was but a mockery after all. Beneath the glittering guise which nature wore that night, the tide of human life was rushing on, and hearts were throbbing in the wildness of grief and burning with the fever of mighty passion.

Leaving the old borough behind with all its quaint and picturesque irregularity of outline, and its striking contrasts, and the shadows lurking amongst its silent avenues, we will take our way up the side of Gallows Hill to the mud cabin beneath the alder-bush where the fairy- woman dwelt in charmed solitude, her lonely but fenced round, as it were, by popular superstition. On ordinary occasions neither bolt nor bar secured the door, a latch with a string being more than sufficient for the exclusion of all without, and the protection of all within. Indeed there was little in the place to tempt cupidity.—The hut was divided midway, by a partition of wattles covered with clay, which partition being only the height of the side wall left all the space to the roof open, and gave access to the little room beyond simply by cutting itself some three feet short, leaving the breadth of a doorway at one end. The outer apartment was the kitchen, if kitchen it could be called. It had neither jamb-well nor hob, the only provision for making fire being a few large flat stones loosely laid on the clay floor, an opening in the roof above giving egress to the smoke, or at least as much of it as chanced to take an upward direction. A small pile of dry brambles lay in one corner, but the fire on the hearth at this time was composed of a species of fuel probably only known amongst the peasantry of Ireland. A quantity of 'seeds,' that is to say, the outer husks of the oats, was heaped on the stones against the blackened wall; the front of the heap was burning, emitting a much more cheerful blaze than might be supposed from the nature of the fuel, and close by sat the hag who owned the cabin, stirring in the

fresh seeds' from time to time with a primitive sort of tongs formed of a piece of iron hoop bent in two and brought almost close together at the ends. Beyond her, next the wall, were two little children, a boy and a girl, covering over the poor substitute for a fire, their half-covered bodies and their pinched faces conveying a picture of the dreariest and most abject destitution. A ghastly light was thrown on the group from the inner chamber, where a still more pitiable sight was visible through the doorless aperture in the partition. On a straw pallet which usually served for the fairy- woman's couch lay the dead form of a young child, the face only visible over the wretched covering of the poor bed. And a face of touching beauty it was, in its sweet repose, though sadly pinched and stamped with that premature oldness so often seen in the children of the very poor. But the pale golden hair that shaded the small fair forehead, and the delicate outlines of the marble like features, made a picture far though sad to look upon. Death had there nothing repulsive, nothing stern; it was the image of rest, tranquil, happy rest; no more.

Not such was the face of the solitary watcher by that bed of death—a man of spare proportions, haggard features, wild and restless eyes, and shaggy brows knitted into an ominous frown. The garments of the man had been patched in many places, but other rents here and there showed either the want of a friendly hand to mend the tattered garments, perhaps the increasing neglect that follows and accompanies increasing misery—perhaps both. The man was the same who had asked and received charity from Cauth, but the charity had come too late. His child was dead when he returned all panting and eager with his poor prize. One heavy groan was all that escaped him when his eye fell on the dead face; but hauling the bread and milk to his remaining little girl to divide between herself and her brother, who was still younger, he drew a steel to the bedside, and muttering 'Thank God she's gone at last!' he had never stirred from the same pasture all the long hours that had come and gone since then. A resin-dip was burning beside the bed in one of those stoves improvised for the purpose, rising some three feet from a wooden block that rested on the floor.—Bare and unsightly were the clay walls of the little room, uncheerful by even one article of furniture, save and except the straw pallet and the round three-legged stool on which sat the desolate father. All was poverty, sheer, unmitigated poverty in its most cheerless aspect, yet there was one redeeming quality in the squalid misery of the place, and that was its remarkable cleanliness, truly remarkable under the circumstances.

All at once the door opened, and another man made his appearance, stooped as if beneath the weight of years, yet of stout proportions withal, judging from the faint light in the cabin. The stoop soon vanished when once the door was closed, and the children uttered an exclamation of pleasure that drew a sharp rebuke from the ancient crone. She turned her head, however, and nodded to the new-comer with a curt salutation in Irish.

'Is Tim within?'

'Athen, why wouldn't he—Nelly's dead.'

'Dead!' cried the man with a sudden start, 'little Nelly dead! you're not in earnest, van-thee?'

'Maybe I'm not—go in there and see!' pointing to the inner room.

The children began to cry but were speedily silenced by a threatening gesture from the hag. The man passed on into the room.

'I'll slip out now, childer,' whispered the old woman to her young companions, 'I didn't care to go and leave him by himself with the corpse, but I'll go now and I'll see if I can't get something to lay her out in. Mind you don't let the fire out till I come back; and wrapping her old red cloak about her she left the cottage.

A tall and sinewy form was that of the man who now stood beside the wretched pallet, looking down on the little wax-like image so ineffably calm and serene. The father had only noticed his entrance by a listless nod, and then sank again into his gloomy reverie.

'Poor Nelly,' said the tall man, as he wiped away the fast falling tears with the sleeve of his old frieze coat, 'poor girl, is that the way with you? After a moment's silence he spoke again: 'Well, Tim, maybe it's best as it is. God is good to us, after all.'

'Good to us?' cried the other fiercely, 'where's the goodness, I'd wish to know. It's aisy for you to talk that doesn't know what a father's heart is.'

'Maybe I do as well as you. If I hadn't a father's heart myself for these poor childer, I wouldn't be the man I am the night, an' I think you ought to know that.'

The other started to his feet, his face, late so pale, flushed crimson red. 'There it is again, now?' he said in thick guttural tones, 'will you

never be done talking that way?'

'I wouldn't talk that way, Tim, only you take it out of me. You're a mighty quare man, now, that's what you are. But there's no use talking an' wrangling—when did Nelly die?'

'There a little while after dusk when I was down about the town tryin' to get mouthful for her to ate. She died of hunger, at last! His look grew darker and fiercer. 'That's another nail in his coffin! There's Nora yet, and Patsy—I'll go bail they'll both go like their mother and Nelly—and when they do we'll clunch all the nails, ho, ho, ho, ho, and the man laughed with horrible glee.

'Tim! Tim!' said the other, 'what's coming over you, at all?'

'O the sorra things coming over me—I'm in my parit senses, and sure you can't say I'm talkin' rasily when I tell you I'll wait till the childer's all dead wid hunger and want—before I sett e with them that killed mother and childer both. Sure if I waited till I'd be dead my-self, there would be nobody then to do the business.'

'Tim Murtha?' said his companion fixing his eyes on him with a wild and troubled look, 'Tim Murtha, the hand of God is heavy on us! blood is blood, and the stain of it can never be washed away, and the voice of it cries from the grave for vengeance on the murderer.'

A change came over the haggard face of Tim Murtha. Slowly he turned on the speaker, and the two stood looking into each other's eyes with a strange and ghastly meaning. At last, Tim Murtha spoke, and his voice was strangely hollow—

'Blood is blood, I know, but revenge is sweet!'

'God forgive you, Tim; you have a heart as hard as a stone! Now, I'd give all the money I ever seen, and twice as much more, if that deed wasn't done yet, and you're only thinking of it.'

'Nobody doubts you,' said Tim with scornful emphasis; 'it's your own neck that's troubleing you, and not the deed! Why don't you get out of the way altogether, like a moth round a candle, till they catch you at last, and then your life can't burn a pin. But I know what you're up to.'

'You've?'

'I do—as well as if I was standin' with in your hand!'

'Out with it, then?'

'No, I won't—but mind I tell you, Jerry Pierce, I'd be even with you if you think to play any of your tricks on me!'

It was Jerry Pierce himself who stood there looking on with a thunder-cloud on his brow, and a cold lightning in his eye. A storm of passion was raging in his heart, and his very brain tarred and burned like molten lead; his huge frame shook like an aspen leaf; he darted one fierce look at Tim, and the man shrank back aghast. His momentary terror brought Pierce back to recollection, and he smiled a grim and bitter smile.

'No wonder you'd be afraid,' said he, 'of Jerry Pierce the murderer! but don't fear; he added in a softer tone, 'I wouldn't touch a hair of your head for all the gold in the Queen's mine—and all on 'count of the weenie creatures that she left behind her. Poor Nelly! and stooping down he kissed the little dead face, while his tears fell over it like rain, 'poor little darling, you that I loved best among them is gone now, but I wouldn't hurt your father Nelly, or the man that owned your poor mother!'

'Give us the hand, Jerry!' said Tim in a choking voice, 'I know the truth's in you, after all, but why, why don't you get out of the way? Sure you can't expect to escape for ever, and you keepin' under their very nose?'

'Never you mind that,' Pierce replied, 'I'll live till my time comes, in spite of them all.—But why isn't the poor darlin' laid out?'

'For the best o' reasons,' said Tim with his ghastly smile, 'because there was nothing to lay her out in.'

'It's not so now,' made answer the vanithee from behind; she had entered unperceived by either of the men. 'Get out of the way, now, till I do what's fit to be done.'

'What are you going to do?'

'What's that to you, Tim Murtha? Do what I bid you, an' that's all.'

Just as the men went into the kitchen a low tap was heard at the door, and Tim Murtha, much excited, would have pushed Jerry back into the room, but the old woman told him shortly to let him be—do you think any one is comin' here afther him? she added with the proud consciousness of power, 'go and open the door—it's Ned Murtha that's in it.'

Sure enough it was Ned Murtha, and Tim and Jerry exchanged looks at what they supposed the supernatural knowledge of the vanithee. It never occurred to either that she had