

So absorbed were they both in the fate of the Castle, they did not notice the form of a man gliding cautiously up the road under shelter of the hedges, until he reached a shady recess within a yard or two of where Gerald O'Dwyer was rooted, and cast searching, half-timid glances at the young man's face, revealed as it was in the weird light of the conflagration.

"How could this have happened?" at last, exclaimed the priest. "It may have been an accident."

"An accident!" repeated Gerald O'Dwyer, mechanically. He stopped and started violently. He felt his coat pulled lightly from behind.

He turned in amazement. A man stood half-crouching behind him, who whispered in a frightened tone:

"Masther Gerald!"

A glance at the shrinking stranger, now in full light of the flames, made Gerald start again.

"Tade Ryan!"

"Hush, Masther Gerald, hush, for the love o' heaven!" the newcomer whispered.

There was something in his broken voice and frightened face that immediately told Gerald there was something wrong.

"Tade, why are you here? Why do you look that way?"

"The ould Castle, sir—the burnin'—the burnin'!"

"Well, well, Tade, we must bear it," said the young man, his heart deeply moved at the man's strong emotion. "See! I am bearing it cheerfully myself."

"Tisn't that, sir—'tisn't that," Ryan murmured tremulously, "but—but—Holy Virgin! I'm afeared to say it."

"Tade you used not to be a coward."

"No more I iver was afeared o' man till now. 'Tis of *you*, Masther Gerald, I'm afeared."

"What *do* you mean?"

"The ould place, sir—you thought 'twas be accident the fire cam."

"Ha!"

"It was *not* an accident."

"Not an accident!"

There was absolute cringing terror in the man's voice as he went on:

"I know you'll niver forgive me, sir, but I heerd that Kilsheelan was goin' over to the stranger—that they were robbin' you an' robbin' us all o' the ould place, an' me blood biled to think nothin' could save it. 'Betther have it burned to a cinder, sez I, than a mane upstart should iver glory in it—"

"Heavens! 'Then it was you—"

"Masther Gerald, it was!" he cried vehemently. "There 'tis out now, an' whatever you say I'm able to bear it."

In his first impulse of indignation the young man cried angrily:

"This is a frightful crime. How can you dare ask my pardon for it?"

"I don't axe it any more sir," said the man, drawing himself up sternly, all his terror changed to rock-like firmness. "If you're displeased wid me, I'll suffer like a man for what I done. You may take me to the sojers this minnit an' I won't rise a finger to get free. Only I thought, perhaps, you mightn't think it any grate crime after all to keep the black stranger out o' Kilsheelan."

Two opposite feelings were struggling in Gerald O'Dwyer's breast—clear, decided repugnance, as to the crime: deep personal and ancestral emotion, as to the motives of the criminal. The spectacle of criminal loyalty is rarely without commiseration.

A moment's reflection, and he wrung warmly the rough hand that had given Kilsheelan to the flames.

"Forgive me, Tade," he cried, impulsively. "I know it was a mistaken love for me and my house that prompted you to this. As far as I am concerned, your confession is a confidence, and I will not betray it. With your own conscience you must settle the rest, for I have no power to pardon you."

"*Mo lair!* 'tis Father John has the power to do *that*," cried Ryan, his old humour returning with the favour of his young lord, "an' sorra a piance from this to the hour o' my death I'll gridge, so owld Arshlade is on the cowl'd side of the Castle."

Gerald turned to the priest, who was an as-founded witness of the latter part of the disclosure:

"It may be all for the best. Who knows? Many a bad tradition is buried in those fiery ruins: better ones may replace them."

CHAPTER XIV.

THREE YEARS AFTER.

Three years! They are bubbles in an ocean—spots in eternity. Yet the joys and woes, the pregnant histories of those atomy days, and hours, and minutes.

Three years since we last saw the Tipperary mountain-side, when the breath of the destroying angel passed over the Castle and left it a charred and blackened phantom. A pen-