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NELLIE NETTERVILLE;
OR,
ONE OF THE TRANSPLANTED.

By the author of 'Wild Times,' 'Blind Agnes,' etc.

CHAPTER IV.—(Continued.)

Each of these houses had a private entrance of its own, and opening the door of one of them, Mrs. Netterville looked in quietly and entered. The interior was a room, poorly but yet decently furnished, and on a low settle-bed at the further end lay a young man, who, with his sunken eyes and hollow cheeks, had all the look of a person just rescued from the jaws of death. A knapsack on the floor, a pike and musket in one corner of the room, and a steel cap and buff coat in the other, seemed to announce him as one of the band of successful soldiers who were even then in possession of the castle.

Poor fellow! he lay, with closed eyes, wan and weary on his bed, looking, at that moment, like anything rather than like a successful soldier. But he lifted his head as he caught the noise of the door creaking on its hinges, and his face brightened into an expression of joy and gratitude pleasant to behold when he discovered Mrs. Netterville standing on the threshold.

"Can you forgive me?" she said, going up to him at once. "I cannot easily forgive myself for having left you so long alone. In the grief and anguish in which I have been plunged all day, I had well nigh forgotten your existence, and you must be faint, I fear me, for want of nourishment."

"Nay, madam," he answered, zently indeed, but yet with a good deal of that comfortable self assurance in spiritual matters which seems to have been an especial inheritance of 'Cromwell's saints.' "If you have forgotten, the Lord, at least, hath been mindful of his servant, and hath cast so deep a slumber on my senses, that I have been altogether unconscious of the lapse of time, or of the absence of those carnal comforts which, however the spirit may rebel against them, are nevertheless not altogether to be despised, as being the means by which we receive strength to do the bidding of our Master."

Mrs. Netterville could not help thinking that the posset cup and soothing draught, which she had administered the night before, might have had as much as any especial interposition of Providence to say to his seasonable slumbers; but the times were too much out of joint to permit of her making, however reverently, such an observation, so she merely touched his brow and hand, said:

"I am right glad, at all events, that you seem in nowise to have suffered from my neglect.—Eat now and drink, I pray you; for I perceive by this refreshing moisture on your skin that all danger has passed away, and that you need at present no worse physic than good food and wine to restore you to your former strength."

"Nay, madam," said the soldier, with great and hardly repressed feeling in his voice and manner. "Eat or drink I cannot, or in any way refresh myself, until I have poured forth my song of gratitude, first to the Lord of hosts, who hath delivered me from this great danger, and then to you, who have tended me (even as the widow of Sarepta might have waited on Elias) through the perils of a sickness from which my very comrades and fellow-laborers in the vineyard fled, trembling and afraid."

"You must pardon them, good Jackson," said Mrs. Netterville, "and all the more readily, because this disease, from which you have so marvellously recovered, is, men say, in its rapid progress and almost sure mortality, akin, if not indeed wholly similar, to that terrible malady, the plague, which is the scourge of the eastern nations, and leaves crowded cities, once it has entered in, as silent and deserted as the sepulchres of the dead. You cannot therefore wonder, and you need not feel aggrieved, if men who would have risked their lives for you on the battle-field, yet shrink from its unseen, and therefore, to poor human nature, its more awful dangers."

"Nay, madam, I blame them not; perhaps even in their place I should have done the same. Nevertheless—and though I have no ill-feeling towards them—I cannot forget that you, a Popish woman and an enemy, have done that for me which the very children of my own household have shrunk from doing, and I would fain show my gratitude if I could."

"You can show it, and that right easily, if you will," she answered kindly, "by eating and drinking heartily of the provisions I have brought, and so regaining strength to wait all the sooner on yourself. For I shall soon, as you doubtless know already, have work in hand which will compel me to make my visits fewer; and yet, I shall not like to risk other lives by sending any of the household to wait on you in my stead."

"Alas, madam, I fear I have been but a troublesome and unprofitable, though not altogether,

I do assure you, a thankless guest," the man answered in a somewhat sad a deprecatory manner.

"Nay; but now you mistake me altogether," she answered earnestly. "You have been a most patient sufferer, and that trouble—which is altogether unavoidable in any sickness—has been, you may believe me, a pleasure rather than an uneasiness to me. I only meant to say that though I shall still continue to visit you morning and evening, I shall not be able to come so often in the day time as I have been used to do; for all matters in this sad affair of the transplantation having fallen into my hands, you may well imagine it is as much or more than one poor woman can well accomplish by her own unaided efforts."

"Would that I could aid you," he answered fervently—"would that I could comfort you.—But alas! in this matter of the transplantation, I can do naught, seeing that it is the Lord himself who hath girded on our swords, bidding us to smite and spare not. Nevertheless, lady, I am not ungrateful, and in the long, sleepless nights of my weary malady I have wrestled for you in prayer, striving exceedingly and being much exercised on your account; nor gave I over, until I had received the comfortable assurance that as the Lord sent angels to Lot to deliver him out of Sodom, so he would some day make of me a shield and a defence, whereby you may be snatched from the woes that he is about to rain down on this land, because 'the cry of its idolatry is waxen great before his face,' and he hath sworn to destroy it."

"Well, well," she answered a little impatiently, "I thank you for your good-will at all events, but for the present we will discourse no further on this matter. God will one day judge between us, and by his fiat I am content to stand or fall, in all those matters of religion on which, unhappily, we differ. See—I have trimmed the lamp so that it will burn brightly until morning, and there is food and wine on this little table. I will put it close to the bed, so that when you need nourishment, you will have but to put forth your hand to take it. And now I must say good-night—to-morrow I will be with you by the early dawn."

Having thus done all that either charity or hospitality could ask at her hands, Mrs. Netterville retired from the room, sooner probably than she would have done, if the soldier's last words had not grated on her ear, and roused more angry passions than she wished to yield to in her breast.

"He has a good heart, poor wretch," she thought, as she took her way back to the castle; "but strange and fearful is it to see how pride, in him, as in all his comrades, usurps the place and true humility and religion."

The sudden sound of a pistol going off disturbed her in the midst of her cogitations; and with a pang of indescribable fear and presentiment of evil at her heart, she stood still. It seemed to come from the grove of yew-trees round the church, and was not repeated. Having ascertained this fact she walked rapidly forward in the direction of the sound, her mind in a perfect whirl of fear, and only able to shape itself into the one thought, pregnant of future evil, that, either by some of her own people, or by one of the English soldiers, a murder had been committed. Just as she entered the grove of yew-trees, she perceived something like the loose garb of a woman fluttering down the path before her, and then suddenly disappearing behind the tower of the little church. She did not dare to call out; but feeling certain that this person must either have fired the shot herself, or have seen it fired by some one else, she quickened her pace in order to overtake her. Twilight was already deepening among the yew trees; the path, moreover, was overgrown with weeds and brambles, and as she ran with her eyes fixed on the spot where the figure had disappeared, she felt herself suddenly tripped by some object lying right before her, and fell heavily against it. At the first touch of that unseen something, a sense of terror, such as animals are said to be conscious of in the presence of their own dead, seized upon her senses, and all the blood was curdling in her veins as slowly and with difficulty she removed herself from its contact. Gradually, as she recovered from the stunning effects of her fall, and her eyes grew accustomed to the gloom around her, the 'thing' on the ground slaped itself into the form of a human being—but of a human being so still and motionless, that it seemed probable that it was a corpse already. Very reluctantly she put forth her hand to try if life were really extinct, but suddenly discovering that she was dabbling it in a pool of wet warm blood, she withdrew it with a shudder.

"My God! my God!" she moaned, "what enemy hath done this? Surely it is one of the soldiers from the castle, and they will accuse our people of the murder! Grant Heaven, indeed, that they are innocent! Would that Hamish were here to help me. Yet no! they would

certainly in that case try to fix the guilt on him. I will go hence and let them discover it as they can. Yet what if I should meet them! I am all dabbled in his gore!"

With a new and sharp terror in her heart, as this thought took possession of it, she began hastily to rub her hands in the moss and dry leaves around her, in order to free them from the blood which clung to them; and she was still engaged in this rather equivocal occupation when a sudden stream of light was cast on her from behind, and, rising suddenly, she found herself face to face with the officer who had been left in command of the garrison of the castle.

Half-a-dozen of his men were at his back, and by the light of the lantern, which he carried, she read in their faces their conviction of her guilt. At a sign from their chief they surrounded her in awful silence, and he himself laid his hand heavily on her shoulder—

"Murderer!" he said, "thou art taken in thy sin!"

"I did it not," cried Mrs. Netterville, so utterly confounded by this terrible accusation that she hardly knew what she said. "So help me Heaven! I am innocent of this deed!"

"Innocent! sayest thou?" the officer answered firmly. "Innocent! Thou with his blood red upon thy hands! Yea, and thy very garments clogged in his gore! If then thou art innocent, as thou wouldst have us to believe, say what thou wert doing in this lonely spot at an hour when none but the murderer or the wanton would care to be abroad?"

"I was returning from a visit to the soldier Jackson, a visit which, as thou knowest, Master Rippel, I pay him every evening at the hour of dusk; and I had well nigh reached the castle, when, hearing a shot in this direction, and fearing mischief either for my own people or for mine, I came hither, if possible, to prevent it."

"A likely story, truly," replied the officer, who, unlooked for by her, was one of the fiercest if not the saintliest of the band of warriors then domiciled at the castle. "Nay, woman, and for thine own sake hold thy peace, or out of thine own mouth thou shalt stand presently condemned. For tell me, my masters," he added, addressing the other men, "where will you find a woman who, hearing a shot and dreading mischief, would not have fled from the danger, instead of incontinently rushing, as she would have us to believe she did, into its very jaws?"

"Yet have I rushed into the jaws of danger more than once already within this fortnight, and that not for the sake of my own people but of thine; as none ought to know better than thou, Master Rippel, and thy comrades," Mrs. Netterville, now fairly put upon her mettle, retorted bravely.

"Nay, and that is naught but the very truth, though the father of lies (which is Beelzebub) himself had said it," one of the men here ventured to remark. "For surely, Captain Rippel, you cannot have forgotten that we should have had a soldier the less in the camp of Israel, if she had not nursed the good youth Jackson through this black business of the plague, when we, even we, men anointed and girded to the fight, did hesitate to go near him."

"Ha! Dost thou also venture to defend her?" cried the officer angrily. "Nay, then, let that woman which is called Deborah be brought forward and confronted with the prisoner. Her testimony must decide between us."

One or two of the soldiers who had been lingering behind at a little distance in the dusky twilight now advanced, half pushing before them, half leading, the very woman who had addressed Nellie so impudently in the morning. She came forward with a strange mixture of eagerness and reluctance in her manner, willing enough, it might be, to bear false testimony against her neighbor, but very unwilling to be confronted with its object.

They placed her face to face with Mrs. Netterville, and the captain turned his lantern so that the light fell full on the features of the latter. They were cold and calm, and almost disdainful in their expression, now that she knew who was her accuser; and Deborah, spite of all her efforts to brazen out the interview, cowered beneath her glance of scorn.

"Nay, but look well upon her, Deborah," said the captain, seeing that her eyes fell beneath those of the woman she had accused. "Look well upon her, and say if this be not that Moabitish woman whom thou sawest, as thou wert lingering (for no good purpose, I do fear me greatly) in the shadow of the trees—whom thou sawest, say I, steal thither between light and darkness, and treacherously, do to death our brother Tomkins, who, being—as methinks you revealed to me just now—wearied overmuch with prayer and holding forth, (he was, as I myself can testify, a man of most precious doctrine, and greatly favored in the gift of preaching), had come hither to repose himself."

"Nay," said the woman, speaking in very tolerable English, an accomplishment she had

picked up when in service in Dublin; 'of that great weariness caused by too much prayer and preaching, Master Rippel, I said naught—my own impression being,' she added, unable even before such an audience to repress the gibe, 'that the slumberous inclinations of worthy Master Tomkins had been caused by a somewhat too ardent devotion lately tendered to the wine-cask.'

"Peace, scoffer! peace," cried the captain. "And if thou wouldst have thy blasphemy against the Lord and against his saints forgiven in this world or in the next, look once more on the face of the prisoner, and be not shamed or afraid, but say out boldly whether you can swear to her in a court of justice as being the person whom you espied just now in the act—yea, the very act of murder."

"I can," said the woman shortly, and avoiding the eye of Mrs. Netterville as she spoke.

"Thou canst?" the latter asked in a tone of indignant astonishment. "And pray, if thou were watching me so narrowly, why didst thou not endeavor to prevent me?—why not strike up my weapon?—why not cry out, at least, so as to rouse up the sleeping soldier?"

"I did what I could," the woman sullenly responded. "I sought out his comrades. It was their look-out—not mine—and to them accordingly I left it."

"She speaks the truth, as we who so lately heard her tale can testify," the captain answered quickly. "You see, my men," he added, addressing the other soldiers, "Beelzebub is divided against himself, and the very children of his kingdom bear witness against each other. Surely the woman Netterville is guilty. Take her, therefore, some of you, a prisoner to the castle, while the rest prepare a decent burial for our murdered brother. I myself must speak apart with the witness Deborah, in order to put her testimony into a fitting shape to be laid before the court of my lords, the High Commissioners of Justice."

CHAPTER V.

The sun had climbed well-nigh midway in the heavens, lighting up Clew Bay and its hundred isles until they glinted like emeralds in the blue setting of the sea, as an old white-haired man and a young girl carrying a small bundle in one hand, while with the other she supported the failing strength of her companion made their way slowly and painfully along the valley through which runs the bright 'Errill' river on its way to the ocean. Following the up course of the stream, they had past almost without knowing it through some of the finest of the mountain scenery of the west, up hill and down hill, by pretty cascades, in which the river seemed to be playing with the obstacles which opposed it; round huge bare shoulders of rifted and out-jutting rock; through dark, deep purple gorges, which looked as if the mountains had been wrenched violently asunder in order to produce them; and now, at last, they found themselves in a quiet, dreary looking glen, where cushions of soft moss and yielding heather seemed to woo them to repose. Nevertheless, foot sore and worn out as they evidently were, they continued to press bravely forward until they had nearly arrived at the farther end of the valley; but by that time the old man's head had begun to droop wearily on his breast, and his steps had become so languid and uncertain that it was evident it would be perilous to proceed farther without giving him the rest he so absolutely required.—Choosing therefore a little nook, where the turf grew soft and dry, and where clusters of tall fern and heather, rising nearly six feet from the root, seemed to promise at least partial shelter from the midday sun, the girl quietly disposed of her bundle as a pillow for his head, and invited him with a smile to a siesta. He obeyed as readily as if he had been a child, and she then sat down beside him, crooning an old nursery lullaby to lull him into slumber. But she sought no such salutary oblivion for herself, and no sooner had his eyes begun to close in sleep than she rose, and, as if anxiety had rendered her incapable of remaining quiet, wandered restlessly on till she reached the top of a hill which shut in the valley from the land beyond. There she paused, fear and foreboding, weariness and sorrow, all forgotten or swallowed up in the breathless admiration which took instant possession of her soul. Around her, crumpled and tumbled in all directions, were hills, bare indeed of trees, but green to the very summit, and strangely picturesque in the fantastic variety of their forms. There were quiet glens and solemn rock-strewn passes, with streamlets swelled into cataracts by the rains of spring, yet looking in the distance like mere threads of liquid silver springing from their rugged sides. There were long brown tracts of peat land, brightened and relieved by patches of golden flowering gorse, or of thin herbage which, in its perfectly emerald green, is only to be seen in such like boggy places; and over and above all this, there were the shadowy outlines of more than one far-off

range of mountains melting into the delicate blue background of the sky, and changing color, as rapidly as the young cheek of beauty, beneath the ever-shifting lights and shadows of that 'cloud scenery' which is nowhere more beautiful or varied than in Ireland. To the left, and looking, in the clear atmosphere, so close that she almost felt she could have touched it with her outstretched hand, rose 'Croagh Patrick,' sacred to the memory of Ireland's great apostle; and Clew Bay lay, or seemed to lie, bright and shining at her feet,—Clew Bay, with its gracefully-winding shore, and its archipelago of islets; some bold, beetling rocks, ready and able to do battle with the storm, others mere baskets of verdure floating on the tide; while the largest and most picturesque of them all, the sea-girt kingdom of Graua Uaile, Clare Island, stood bravely up, cliff over cliff, at the very mouth of the harbor, guarding it against the winter encroachments of the Atlantic, which, green as liquid jasper, and calm in that summer weather as a giant sleeping in the sunshine, unrolled itself beyond. Long and wisely Nellie fixed her gaze upon that fair prospect; and it was with a strange reluctance, and foreboding of future sorrow, that she at last withdrew it in order to examine attentively that portion of the country which lay more immediately around her, and with which she believed herself about to be more intimately connected. As she did so, a building, perched half way up a hill, rather more inland than that upon which she herself was standing, attracted her eye, and she gazed, with a sudden mingling of hope and fear, like a person choking, for she felt a sudden conviction that in the wild, uncultivated lands beneath her she beheld the portion assigned to her grandfather by the commissioners at Loughrea, and in that edifice, which seemed to have been built for the express purpose of commanding and overruling the entire district, the house in which they had told her she was to establish her new home. "House indeed it could scarcely be called in anything like the modern acceptance of the term, though it was probably perfectly well suited to the wants and wishes of the wild chieftains by whom it had been erected. The original building had consisted of a single tower, of which the rough, rude walls, formed of huge stones put unhammered and uncemented together, betrayed its origin in times so far remote as to have no history even in the oldest annals of the land. Added on to this gray relic of the past, however, a new building was now evidently in process of erection. It was far from finished yet, as Nellie knew by the poles and scaffolding around it; but even in its embryonic state it bore a suspicious resemblance to that square simple fortalice type of building which seems to have been the one architectural idea of Cromwell's Irish drafted soldiers, and which still remains in many places the silent but uncontrovertible witness—the seal which they themselves have set upon their forcible and unjust possession of the land. The very look of that half-finished building seemed an answer to Nellie's late foreboding, and with a sinking heart she turned her back upon it and retraced her steps to the place where she had left Lord Netterville. The old man had already shaken off his fitful slumbers, and was toiling feebly up the hill.

Nellie ran back to fetch her bundle, which he had been unable to bring with him, but overtaking him to the spot from whence she had just been taking her bird's eye view of the country and, pointing to the fortalice in process of erection, watched anxiously to discover what sort of impression it would make on his mind. But either he did not observe it, or did not take in the peculiar significance of its presence in those wilds; and finding that he remained silent and apparently unmoved, she collected all her remaining energy to say cheerfully—

"Look at that old gray tower to the right. If the man whom we met this morning among the hills spoke truth, we have reached the end of our weary journey, and yonder is our future home. It is not like our own dear Netterville, indeed, and yet it seems a goodly enough mansion. So goodly," she added, stealing a glance beneath her long lashes to see how he took the insinuation, "that I almost wonder they should have dealt thus kindly by us; for I know that many of the first of the 'transplanted' have had their lots assigned them in places where there was not even the but of a peasant to shelter them from the weather."

"Tush, child! talk not to me of houses," the old man answered querulously, too much occupied with the actual disadvantages of his position to catch the hidden drift of Nellie's observation. "What boots a goodly mansion, if starvation be at its portals? And what, I pray you, but starvation are they condemned to who have been sent to make themselves a home among these barren mountains?"

Nellie suffered her eyes to roam once more over the bright waters of the bay, and then, with a quick sense of beauty kindling up in her soul,