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NELLIE NETTerville;

OR,
ONE OF THE TRANSPLANTED.

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

CHAPTER XIII.—(Continued.)

Roger listened to all this in silence, privately resolving to risk his own defection if discovered, as an outlaw, and to visit the stable of Netterville next morning, in hopes of procuring a fresh mount. As nothing, however, could be done till then, he entreated Nellie to lie down and rest, after which he left the hut, there not being a second chamber in it, and throwing himself on a bank of heather on the outside, was soon fast asleep. It was long before Nellie could follow his example; but at last she fell into that state of dreamless stupor which often, in cases of extreme exhaustion, takes the place of healthy slumber. Such as it was, at all events it was rest—rest of body and rest of mind—a truce to the aching of weary limbs, and to the yet more intolerable weariness of a mind wincing and shivering beneath a coming woe. The first gleam of daylight roused her from it. There was never any pleasant twilight now, between sleeping and waking, in Nellie's mind! With the first gleam of consciousness came ever the pale image of her mother, and there was neither rest nor sleep for her after this. In the present instance, anxiety as to the chance of being able to prosecute her journey at all, was added to her other troubles; and, unable to endure suspense upon such a vital point even for a moment, she opened the door quietly, so as not to disturb old Grannie, and looked out for Roger. He was nowhere to be seen, and she guessed at once that he had gone up to the castle. Then a longing seized her to look once more upon the old place where she had been so happy formerly; and without giving herself time to waver, she walked hurriedly up the valley. She did not, however, venture to the front of the house, but resolved instead to take a path which, skirting round it, would lead her to the offices behind. It was by one of those strange accidents which we call chance, but for which the angels perhaps have quite another name, the very path which her mother had always taken when visiting the sick soldier. The door of the room which he had occupied was slightly ajar as Nellie passed it, and moved by an impulse for which she could never afterwards thoroughly account, she pushed it open without noise, and entered. The room was not uninhabited as she had at first supposed. A woman, evidently in the last stage of some mortal malady, lay stretched upon the bed, and a soldier of the Cromwellian type was seated with an open Bible beside her. He had probably been employed either in reading or exhorting; but at the moment when Nellie entered, it was the woman who was speaking.

"I tell you, soldier," Nellie heard her querulously murmur, "I tell you, soldier, it is mere waste of breath, your preaching. So long as that woman's death lies heavy on my soul, so long I can look for nothing better in the next world than hell."

At that very moment Nellie noiselessly advanced, and stood in silence at the foot of the bed.

The woman recognized her at once, and with a wild shriek flung herself out of the bed at her feet. The girl recoiled in horror and dismay.—She had learned the whole story of her mother's condemnation from Hamish ere she left Clare Island.

"Murderess of my mother!" she cried, in a voice hoarse with anguish. "Dare not to lay hands upon her daughter!"

"Mercy! mercy!" cried the woman, givelling on the ground, and seeking with her white, shrunken fingers to lay hold of the hem of Nellie's garment. "Mercy! mercy!"

"Where shall I find mercy for my mother?" Nellie asked, as white as ashes, and shivering from head to foot in the agony of her struggle between conscience and resentment—the one urging her to forgive her foe, the other to leave her to her fate. "Where shall I find mercy for my mother?"

"You see, soldier—you see," moaned the poor wretch upon the floor, "the daughter cannot pardon me; why then should God?"

"What would you have?" cried Nellie, almost maddened by the mental conflict. "What would you have? I cannot cure you. What can I do?"

"You can forgive," the woman answered feebly; "then perhaps God will pardon also."

"O my God! my God! give me strength and grace sufficient!" cried Nellie; and then, by an effort of almost superhuman charity, she stooped, put her arms round the dying creature's neck, and kissed her.

The woman uttered a cry of joy, and fell back

heavily out of Nellie's arms. A long silence followed.

Nellie looked at the dead, white face lying quietly on the floor beside her, and felt as if she were dying also so utterly did her senses seem to fail her, and so dead and numb were all her faculties in the heavy strain that had been put upon them. A hand was laid at last upon her shoulder. Nellie started violently. She had totally forgotten even the existence of the soldier.

"Nay, fear not, maiden, nor yet grieve inordinately," he said, in a voice of mingled pity and admiration. "Thou hast acted in all this business (I am bound to bear testimony to the truth) in a way worthy of thy mother's daughter."

"Thank God, at least, that I forgave her," Nellie murmured beneath her breath, scarce conscious of what he was saying.

"Nay, and in very deed," he answered, "thy presence here has been a crowning and a saving mercy for the poor wretch whom we have seen expire. Ever since I found her last night, dying alone and in despair, I have been striving for her with the Lord, and praying and exhorting, but, as it seemed to me, all in vain, until thy kiss of peace fell like balm more precious even than that of Gilead on her soul, and restored it, I cannot doubt, (for I saw a light as of exceeding gladness settle upon her dying features,) restored it to long banished peace."

"Thank God that he gave me grace to do it!" Nellie once more whispered. It seemed as if she were powerless to think of aught besides.

"They who do mercy shall in due time find it!" rejoined the soldier, putting a small scrap of written paper into her hand. "In this very room thy mother tended me, when my own comrades had deserted me, fearing the infection; in this very room yonder woman, having been expelled the other portions of the mansion, since order has been taken for the separation of God's elect from the sinful daughters of the land, took up her abode some three days since; and in this very room I last night found her, dying of the malady of which, but for thy mother's care, I must have also perished, and so moved by the prospect of eternal retribution which lay before her, that she of her own accord did dictate, and did suffer me to write down on the spot, a full confession of her own guilt in the matter of the murdered Tomkins. She told me then—and many times afterwards in the course of the long night she did continue to aver it—that she herself it was that did the deed for which Mrs. Netterville stands condemned to die; she having, in a drunken squabble, seized the man's pistol and shot him dead upon the spot. And she furthermore avowed, with unspeakable groanings and many tears, that, terrified at the consequences of her own act, and moved besides by a fiendish desire of vengeance against thy mother, who had, in some way unwittingly, in times past, offended her, she not only accused her of the murder, but maintained that accusation afterward upon oath when examined before the high Court of Commissioners in Dublin. Now, then, maiden, rise up and speed. Thy mother's life is in thy hands; for with that paper, writ and witnessed by one who, however humble, is not altogether unknown as a zealous soldier in the camp of Israel—with that paper, I say, to attest her innocence, they must of a certainty acknowledge it, and let her go."

"How shall I thank Thee, O my God!" cried Nellie, scarcely able to believe her ears that she had heard the soldier rightly.

"It is good to praise God always," he replied sentimentally, "but at this moment briefly. Thy present care must be to get to Dublin with what speed thou mayest."

"Alas!" said Nellie, "how shall I get there? I have ridden day and night ever since I heard this unhappy news; and only yesterday evening our horses were so used up that I and my companion had to find our way hither as best we could on foot."

"There are but two horses in the stables, and neither of them are mine to offer," said the soldier, evidently distressed and anxious at the dilemma in which his protegee was placed. "Nevertheless, and the Lord aiding me in my endeavors, I will do what I can. Come with me to the courtyard—I doubt not but thou knowest the way well enough already."

Yes, indeed, poor Nellie knew it well enough, and at any other time she might have wept at revisiting on so sad an errand a spot hitherto pleasantly associated in her mind with many a childish frolic, and many a petted animal, the favorites of the days gone by. Just now, however, she had no inclination to dwell upon the memories of the past. Joy at the proved innocence of her mother, and a wild fear lest she herself should arrive too late in Dublin to allow of her profiting by the disclosure, filled her whole soul, and left no room there for sentimental sorrows. She found Roger already in the yard,

engaged in hot discussion with an officer of the English army, a coal-black charger which the latter was holding carelessly by the bridle, being the apparent object of the dispute.

"Ay," muttered her conductor, as he glanced toward the group; "it is, I see, even as I suspected, and I shall have to pay dearly for Black Cromwell." Then leaving Nellie a little in the background, he went up to the English officer and said:

"Here is an unhappy maiden, Captain Rippel, bound upon an errand of life and death, and sorely in need of a good steed to bear her. The fate of a grave, God-fearing woman, even of Mistress Netterville herself, the late owner of this mansion, is dependent on her speed; and I had I twenty horses in the stable, as I have not one, I declare unto thee as God liveth and seeth, that she should have her choice among them all."

"Yea, and undoubtedly," the other answered with a sneer. "Nevertheless, since it is even as thou sayest, and that thou hast them not, I fear me, good master sergeant, that this young daughter of Moab, who has been lucky enough to find favor in your eyes, will be none the better for your good intentions."

"Sir, if you be a man—a gentleman—you cannot, you will not refuse!" cried the indignant Roger. "Consider, this young lady is here a suppliant where once she dwelt the honored mistress of the mansion, and you cannot of a surety say nay! Remember it is no gift we crave; for this purse contains double the value of your steed, strong and of admirable breeding as undoubtedly he is."

He held up a purse as he spoke, the parting gift of Henrietta, from whom, however, he had accepted it merely as a loan, to be afterward repaid in some of the most valuable of the articles yet left him in the tower. "It was well filled and heavy; but with a little smile of scorn the officer waved it quietly on one side."

"And how am I to be certified, I pray you, that this young maiden—who seems to have cast withcraft on you both—is in reality Mistress Netterville, or any other indeed than a base impostor?" he asked with a most offensive leer. "Scarce five days have as yet elapsed since I came hither, sent by the Lord High Deputy himself, to put order in this garrison, and to separate the elect of God from the sinful daughters of the land, and—"

"Sir, do you dare?" cried Roger, suddenly cutting short his speech; and raising his hand, he would have struck him to the ground, if the soldier had not placed himself hastily between them, saying in a menacing tone to Roger:

"If thou wouldst not destroy the young maiden's hopes altogether, sir, leave this affair to me. Another look or word of thine, and it will utterly miscarry."

Roger felt the man was right. It was not by violence or angry words that he could best serve Nellie. He checked himself at once, therefore, and left back, while the soldier said quietly to his superior officer:

"Thou hast not, peradventure, captain, forgotten the offer which thou didst make to me some three days since, when first the way in which the Lord had disposed of our lots was made known to us at Netterville?"

"Forgotten—no, in sooth—not I!" the other answered roughly. "Nor have I forgotten either with what manifest folly and ingratitude thou didst reject it; better though it was by a hundred pieces of good gold, than that which one of thy comrades didst thankfully accept from Major Pepper."

"Throw Black Cromwell and the white mare Daylight into the bargain, and I accept," the soldier answered quietly.

"What! part with Black Cromwell?—Black Cromwell, who hath carried me unburt through more battles than David himself ever fought against the Philistines?" the officer demanded with well-affected astonishment. "Verily and indeed, master sergeant, thou art, as I do perceive, notwithstanding thy good odor for most punctilious sanctity—thou art, I say, but an extortioner, after all. Had it been the mare alone, now, though she also is a very marvel for strength and speed—I had never said thee nay; but to talk to me of parting with Black Cromwell is to prick me, so to speak, upon the very apple of the eye."

"Nevertheless I have a fancy for him, and, if I cannot get him, I will still hold fast to Netterville, the inheritance which the Lord himself hath of late assigned me in this new land of promise; the other steadily replied."

"There is the good horse Battle of Worcester, he is stronger than Black Cromwell, and would altogether suit the maiden better," his superior rejoined in a coaxing tone.

"Yea, but he hath an ugly trick of going lame ere the first mile is over," Sergeant Jackson responded with a knowing smile, and then he added in a tone which was evidently intended to bring the discussion to an end, "It will be

all in vain to dispute this matter any further, Captain Rippel. If you have in truth, as you seem to say, made up your mind to keep Black Cromwell for your own riding, I, on the other hand, am equally resolved not to part with this horse of Netterville, which will serve me well enough, I doubt not, as a residence, once I have brought my old mother hither to help me in its keeping."

"Nay, then, usurer, take the horse and thy money with it!" cried the officer, in a tone far less expressive of vexation than of triumph at the result of the discussion. "Take thy money, and hand me over that debenture which, with the loss of such a charger as Black Cromwell, is, I fear me, but too dearly purchased."

Without deigning to utter a single syllable in return, Sergeant Jackson took the purse which the other in his affected indignation almost flung at his head, with one hand, while with the other he drew forth from the breast pocket of his coat a paper, being the identical debenture in question, and presented it to his officer. Captain Rippel snatched it hastily from him, ran his eye over it to make sure that it was the right one, and then, turning on his heel, sauntered out of the courtyard, without even condescending to glance toward the spot where Nellie stood anxiously awaiting the result.

Sergeant Jackson instantly dived into one of the stables, and seizing a side-saddle, (Nellie's own saddle of the olden times,) he led forth a strong, handsome mare, as white as milk, and began to saddle it in hot haste; while Roger, taking the hint, did the same for Cromwell.

"I am afraid I have cost you very dear!" Nellie said in a low grateful tone, as she stood beside the sergeant. "Believe me, for nothing less than a mother's life would I have suffered you to make such a sacrifice."

"Nay, maiden, call it not a sacrifice," he answered without looking round, and giving a pull to the reins to make sure that they were tight. "Or if thou needs must think it one, remember that, had not thy good mother saved my life, I should not have been here to make it."

Nellie's heart was too full to speak, and she suffered him to lift her in silence to her saddle. He settled her in it as carefully and tenderly as if, instead of a simple soldier, he had been one of the old courtly race of cavaliers, from which she was herself descended, and then, with one last whispered word of gratitude for himself, and one last loving message for old Grannie, which he promised to deliver to her in person, Nellie rode forth from Netterville, and, without even giving it a farewell glance, turned her horse's head toward Dublin.

CHAPTER XIV.

The city of Dublin, as it stood within its walls in the days of the Protectorate, barely covered ground to the extent of an Irish mile, and was built entirely on the south side of the Liffey. That side, therefore, only of the river was embanked by quays, and not even that in its entirety; the space now occupied by the new custom-house and other buildings, to the extent of several thousand feet, being then mere ooze and swamp, kept thus by the continued overflowing of the tides.

To the north of the Liffey, however, there was a suburb, built, as time went on and the exigencies of an ever-increasing population required, outside the walls of the fortified city. It was called 'Oxmantown,' now 'Oxmantown,' and occupied a very insignificant space between Mary's Abbey and Church street; Stone Battery, Grange Gorman, and Glassmanogue, being merely villages scattered here and there in the open country to a considerable distance northward. A bridge of very ancient date, the bridge of 'Duhghall,' also at a later period styled the 'Old Bridge,' formed the sole means of communication (except by boat) between the city and its northern suburb. Built upon four arches, and closed in on the Dublin side by a strong gate-house with turrets and portcullis, the Old Bridge, like all others of similar antiquity, was broad enough and strong enough to form a sort of street within itself; shops being erected upon either side, and traffic as busy and as eager there, as in the more legitimate thoroughfares of the city.

From Old Bridge men passed at once into Bridge street, (Viculus Pontis formerly,) a long narrow thoroughfare, hemmed in on one side by the city walls, and on the other side by a tolerably handsome row of houses. These houses were almost all built in the cage-work fashion of the days of Queen Elizabeth, and roofed in with tiles and shingles. Many of them also possessed inscriptions which cut deep into the wood above the doorway, stated the name and calling of the owner, with the addition frequently of some pious sentiment or appropriate phrase from Scripture. This custom seems to have been a favorite one in Dublin; and in the more antique portions of the city there existed houses, even to a very recent period of its history, upon

which might still be read the names and occupations of the men who more than two hundred years before had resided within their walls.

On the day on which we are about to introduce Dublin to our readers, there had been a considerable amount of stir and bustle going on among its inhabitants, and more especially among those of Bridge street. Rumors had in fact been rife since early dawn of an expected rising of the rebels (as the king's partisans were then styled by their opponents) in the north; and men speculated in hope and fear, as their secret wishes moved them, on the probability of the report. It received something like confirmation in the afternoon; one or two regiments of recently arrived English soldiers, armed from head to heel, and evidently ready to go into action at a moment's notice, having been marched out of the city and sent northward. Later on in the day, moreover, it became known that the Lord-Deputy himself, Henry Cromwell, the best of Ireland's recent rulers, accompanied by a strong escort, was proceeding in the same direction, and might be looked for at any moment at the 'Ormond Gate,' which shut out Bridge street on the city side, just as the 'Gate-house' closed it on that of the Old Bridge.

But if people stood at their doors and windows to do honor to the coming of their king deputy, there yet seemed to be another and still stronger attraction for them at the end of the street opposite that by which he was expected to appear. Eyes were cast quite as often, though more furtively, in the direction of the Old Bridge as in that of the Ormond Gate; for in the midst of other rumors, there had come a whisper, no one knew how or by whom it had been first set a-going, that a person suspected of belonging to the rebel party had just been arrested on the river, having attempted, by means of a boat, to elude the passage of the Old Bridge, and so penetrate unchallenged into the heart of the city.

There followed, as a matter of course, much secret and some anxious speculation as to the rank and real object of the arrested person; but no one ventured to make open inquiry into the matter. Cromwell's brief reign of blood had stricken men dumb with fear. To have shown the smallest interest in persons suspected of belonging to the rebel party, would have been but to have drawn down suspicion on themselves; and suspicion, in those hard times, was too nearly akin to condemnation to be heedlessly incurred. Instead, therefore, of going at once to the Gate-house and ascertaining the real facts of the case from its guardians, people were content, while awaiting the appearance of the military cavalcade from the castle, to question and conjecture among themselves as to the rank and real business of the arrested man. A flourish of trumpets before Ormond Gate put a stop at last to their gossipings. Heads and eyes, if not hearts and good wishes, were instantly turned in that direction; the gate was flung open, and Henry Cromwell, surrounded by a goodly company of officers and private gentlemen, rode at a brisk pace through it. A moment afterward, and he had swept past all the gazers, and pulled up opposite the Old Bridge. The guard at the Gate-house instantly turned out to receive him, the portcullis was drawn up, and he was actually spurring his horse forward to the bridge when a girl, in the habit of a western peasant darted through the soldiers and flung herself, on her knees before him. The movement was so rapid and unexpected that, if the Lord Deputy had not reined up his steed until he nearly threw it on its haunches, he must inevitably have ridden over her. A moment of silent astonishment ensued. The girl herself uttered no cry, and said not a syllable as to the nature of her petition; but as she lifted up her head toward the Lord Henry, her hood, falling back upon her shoulders, revealed a face of ashy whiteness, and there was a pleading, agonized expression in the dark eyes she raised to his, which told more than many words, of the inarticulate anguish of the soul within.

Henry Cromwell was not of a nature to be harsh to any one, much less to a woman; there had been information enough sent in to that morning to make him suspect a snare and turned sternly for explanation to the chief officer of the guard.

"What means this unseemly interruption, corporal?" he asked, as the latter was vainly endeavoring to induce Nellie to rise from her knees. "Is this maiden a prisoner? or if not a prisoner, is she distraught, that she thus ventures, bareheaded and dressed in such ungodly play-acting fashion, to rush into my very presence?"

"A prisoner of only half an hour's standing is she, may it please your excellency," the soldier answered promptly, "she and her companion! They were seen attempting to cross the river in a boat borrowed from some of the natives on the other side; and as it seemed to me that their purpose must needs be seditious, to demand such secrecy, I caused both to be ap-