

completed the air of venerable nobility that attended his presence.

"Where on earth have you been, Gerald?" asked O'Dwyer Gary, as the truant entered the hall, his cheeks still red with the excitement of the dance. "Our friends have been toasting your health, and the response was *in nubibus*."

"Let them take it as spoken, sir, and I'm sure they'll like it all the better," laughed Gerald. "I've been down at the village—they have glorious fun there. As tired as I was, I got through a jig in great style."

"Astonishing the energy of the young generation," remarked Squire Thornton. "Tisn't enough for them to risk their necks all day across a country, but they must risk their hearts in the evening with the girls. I hope you got over the jig as safe as you got over the stonewall to-day, Gerald? 'Twas a capital jump!—capital!"

"So somebody thought who rode round to the gap," laughed another. "Of course it it wasn't you, Thornton—some fellow that stole your fair face for the occasion."

"Faith, then, you'd better take care nobody saddles the theft upon you," retorted the squire. "You were the only one seen in my company."

"'Twill take an ocean of punch to keep your wits from turning into pistol shots, gentlemen," said the host, good humouredly. "Your tumbler is more ornamental than useful, Thornton. Mr. Crashington, the Irish whiskey isn't as bad as the Irish rebels, I hope?"

"O! de—li—cious!" lisped the Hon. Mr. Crashington, one of the young London exotics above-mentioned, "Only a trifle—a—heady, don't you think?"

"Tisn't over courteous to strangers, I must admit," said O'Dwyer Gary, with a laugh. "But it improves on acquaintance."

"'Pon my soul then, another shake-hands with it would put me under the table," said an English colonel, of dragoons.

"There it is, you see" put in Squire Bingham, a huge, red-faced man, who was duellist and drunkard almost by profession. "You never can understand us Irish."

"I confess I can't understand five tumblers of your whiskey-punch," laughed the Colonel, good humouredly.

"And ye talk of a Union!" cried the Squire, in great disgust. "Most likely the first law ye'd make for us would be one to declare whiskey-punch 'heady,' and make its manufacture High Treason."

"Oh! pon my honaw, I didn't mean anything—aw—personal," said the Hon. Mr. Crashington, who was getting alarmed at the storm his words were raising.

"Faith if you did, sir," rejoined the Squire, "the whiskey will be able to avenge itself."

"By the bye, talking of the Union," said a country gentleman, anxious to change the topic, "they say Castlereagh hasn't given up the notion."

"Given it up!" said one of the Dublin politicians, a lawyer of some eminence. "They say in town the Union's as good as carried."

"Ahem!" said Mr. Sackwell, who, amongst his equals, was more butt than idol, and whose part in their conversation was usually confined to smiles and interjections.

"Nonsense! there's not an independent man in Ireland that doesn't execerate it."

"A great many of them don't execerate money, though," said the lawyer, quietly. "When it comes to be a choice between the two, the Union may seem to be the lesser evil."

"But the people, my dear sir! We'd have a rebellion as sure as sunrise."

"All the pleasanter for the unionists; they'd even be glad to supply ropes for the people to hang themselves."

"But there's not a word of it in Parliament."

"My dear sir, it's not in the light of day the Union will be carried."

"They'll hardly try their infernal gold with our public men, at any rate."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Mr. Sackwell, finishing his tumbler of claret with the air of a Cincinnati."

"Don't be too sure of that, either," said O'Dwyer Gary, with just a shadow of pain on his countenance. "'Tisn't an hour ago since I myself had the honour of a visit from one of Lord Castlereagh's friends."

"You're joking, surely."

"Not a bit, I assure you. He offered me the cheering alternative of £20,000 and a baronetcy with the Union, or beggar without it."

"By George!" cried the English colonel, vehemently. "If I were an Irishman, I think I'd have got hanged long ago."

O'Dwyer Gary lost none of his composure as he proceeded.

"But you wouldn't guess who the ambassador was? I'll hold no secrets in so base a business."

For all his smiles, Mr. Sackwell so trembled that he upset his tumbler, and brought the eyes of the whole company upon him.