

"This arrangement, though not quite up to the height of that ideal happiness, driving the ponies "all by himself," was yet very delightful to Dooley, who wisely made the best of the circumstances.

"You can understand, Mrs. Saxelby, that mamma has been a good deal occupied, when I tell you that, beside Mrs. Dawson, we have had his mother and cousin staying at the manor for the last fortnight."

"Indeed?"

"Yes; and we have had to go about with them a good deal. The cousin, Miss O'Brien, is a great horse woman—like most Irish women, I believe—and Clem has been her cavalier, and shown her the neighbourhood."

"Indeed?"

Mrs. Saxelby's voice was the least bit constrained, and she drew her shawl round her shoulders with a suppressed sigh.

"You're not cold, Mrs. Saxelby?"

"No, not cold. But I believe there is a touch of east in the wind: and a cloud passed across the sun; and—and—it is not quite as pleasant as it was."

"We will turn and take the Rigsworth Park road home, if you like. Steady, Jill, steady, pet; that's it, go along, beauties."

"Do long, booties!" echoed Dooley.

"What was I saying? Oh, yes. About Miss O'Brien. She is charmed with the rides and drives about here; and she told me, with her piquant little taste of a brogue, that she was quite astonished to find anything fresh and green within twenty miles of Hammerham; for that she had imagined it to be darkened with a perpetual cloud of smoke, and surrounded by a sort of wizard's circle of cinder for miles and miles."

"Is she—I suppose—she is handsome?"

"She is an exceedingly fine girl, and better than handsome. I think she has the brightest and most expressive face I ever saw, and she is as clever as she can be. I wish her cousin Malachi had half her brains! Clem is delighted to find that she will listen to his holding forth on his pet hobby—Gandry and Charlewood, and all their wonderful enterprises in the four quarters of the globe—for any length of time. And what's more, she remembers what he tells her. She astonished papa at dinner yesterday, by correcting him about the number of miles already laid down, of the new South American Railway."

"She must be very clever," said Mrs. Saxelby, faintly.

"She is. She really is. But, *entre nous*, I'm not sure that her memory would have been quite so accurate, if the information had been imparted by papa instead of Clem. However, that's no business of ours, is it?"

"Oh no," rejoined Mrs. Saxelby, in a queer little voice that didn't seem to belong to her; and then she relapsed into a silence that was unbroken by either until they came within sight of the widow's cottage at Hazlehurst.

"Here's Mr. Tarlewood!" shouted Dooley.

"Mr. Tarlewood, I've been diving!"

"You'll dive again, head-foremost out of the carriage, if you don't keep still, Dooley," said Penelope. "Now, see here. For just this last little bit, I'll give you the reins into your own hands, all by yourself. Hold them very steady. Now, bring us up to the gate in style."

Clement Charlewood was waiting at the little garden gate, and came forward to help his sister and Mrs. Saxelby out of the carriage.

"I hope you have had a pleasant drive, Mrs. Saxelby said Clement."

He had lifted out Dooley in his arms, and was stroking the little fellow's curls from his forehead as he held him. Something came up into Mrs. Saxelby's throat and gave her a choking sensation that made her eyes fill with tears.

"Thank you; a charming drive. I—I hear—dear me, I don't know what this can be in my throat—I hear that I have to congratulate Augusta."

"Thank you. Yes, we are to lose her very soon; but my mother will have her comparatively near at hand, after all. It is scarcely like a separation."

"Mrs. Charlewood is fortunate. I have to be

parted from my Mabel, and without the comfort of confiding her to a husband's protecting love."

Mrs. Saxelby let her tears brim over and run down her cheeks, without saying anything more of the choking sensation in her throat.

Dooley struggled down out of Clement's arms, and, running to his mother, took her hand.

"Tibby will tum back, mamma," said he, manfully. "I *soor* s'e will tum back. 'Cos Tibby said so."

"Good-bye, Mrs. Saxelby," said Penelope. "I won't get out, thank you; we must be driving homewards. If you'll let me, I will come again before long, and give Dooley another lesson in driving."

Penelope did not appear to see Mrs. Saxelby's tears. She never required any softness of sympathy from others, and never expressed any to others. But perhaps her feigned unconsciousness was real kindness.

The widow stood inside the garden gate and watched the vehicle as it rolled swiftly away along the level road. Then she went into her little sitting-room—which somehow looked very poor and threadbare to her eyes under the bright sunlight—and, taking Dooley on her knee, held the child's soft cheek to her breast, and cried until his yellow curls were all wet and matted with her tears. The loving docile little fellow sat very still with his arms round his mother's neck, only offering from time to time his great comfort and panacea for all ills:

"Tibby will tum back, mamma; I *soor* Tibby will tum back."

CHAPTER VI. MACBETH AT KILCLARE.

MONDAY night came; and the first night of the season at Kilclare. The establishment of Mrs. Bridget Bonny was in a flutter of expectation and excitement. On the first night of the season Teddy Molloy, Biddy's step-son, always gave his two apprentices leave to go to the play, and he and his wife usually went into the pit themselves in fact, the whole household turned out, with the exception of old Joe Bonny and the foreman: who was a Methodist, and held theatres to be sinful. The performance commenced at seven, so Mrs. Walton and Mabel set off for the theatre at a little before six, preceded by Pat Doyle, the washwoman's son, who was engaged to carry a basket containing their stage dresses to and from the theatre every evening for the weekly stipend of one shilling.

Mabel had no more onerous task to perform on this first evening than to appear as a witch and join in the choruses. She was therefore free from responsibility, and could observe everything around her with tolerable calmness. Nevertheless, she felt a thrill of excitement and nervousness when, from the dressing-room which she and her aunt shared with old Mrs. Darling, she heard the sudden rush of footsteps and the Babel of voices that followed the opening of the gallery door. The stairs leading up to the gallery passed close to the wall of Mabel's dressing-room, and she felt them shake beneath the clatter of hurrying feet, and heard the noisy greetings and shouts of that portion of the audience known in theatrical parlance as the "gods."

"I think there will be a good house," said Mrs. Darling in her measured accents.

Mrs. Darling was to play one of the three weird sisters, and was busily engaged in covering her fat placid countenance with a perfect network of black lines; which may have looked haggard and awful at a distance, but which, viewed near, gave her face the appearance of a railway map.

"I'm sure I hope so," said Mrs. Walton. "I think the business is likely to be good on the whole. This was always one of the best theatrical towns of Ireland for its size."

"Half hour, ladies!" cried a high shrill voice outside the door.

"What is it? What does he say, aunt?" asked Mabel, combing out her long thick hair, which she was to wear loose and dishevelled about her shoulders; that being the indispensable coiffure for a witch in the days of King Duncan.

"That's the call-boy, Mabel. He is calling the half-hour; that is to say, you have still thirty minutes before the overture begins."

"Miss Bell is completely new to things theatrical, I see," said Mrs. Darling affixing two long matted elf-locks of grey hair to the nondescript turban which she was about to put on her head, having first carefully combed back her own smooth light hair, and fastened it up out of sight.

"Well, yes; in a measure she is new to them. She lived for some years in my family. But that was when she was a child, and I never let the children be very much in the theatre."

"Your son," said Mrs. Darling, grandly, "is, I am pleased to hear, considered one of the most rising scene-painters of the day. He has won golden opinions from all sorts of people, Mrs. Walton."

"I am very glad to hear you say so. Jack is ambitious, for all his careless light-hearted manner."

"He may justly be so. Many of our first artists have sprung from the theatrical painting-room. David Cox, Roberts—"

"Ten minutes, ladies!"

"Dear me, I must hasten. I did not think it was so late."

Mrs. Darling continued her toilet somewhat more quickly than before, but with a sort of methodical majesty that never deserted her.

As soon as Mabel was dressed—and perhaps some of my readers may like to know that the costume of a Scottish witch in that remote period was supposed to be accurately represented by a clean white petticoat, a pair of neat black leather shoes, a brown bedgown, green and blue tartan cloak, and flowing hair—she accompanied her aunt into the green-room. It was lighted by a couple of gas-burners fixed on each side of the chimney-piece. Beside the spears and banners there was now a pile of round pasteboard shields covered with silver paper, and there were three wooden props—of the kind used in suburban gardens to sustain clothes-lines—leaning up in a corner, and intended for the use of the three principal witches. The only person in the room when Mabel and her aunt entered it, was Mr. Shaw. He was transformed, by means of a flowing white wig and beard, into a very venerable-looking King Duncan, and was walking up and down repeating his part in short jerky sentences. Presently came in, various other members of the company. Mr. Moffatt dressed as Macduff, and looking very fierce about the head, and very mild about the legs. Mr. Copestake as Banquo, with false black beard, like the curly wig of a wax doll, and very pink cotton stockings. Miss Lydia St. Aubert, dignified and imposing in the long purple robes of Lady Macbeth, and with a square of white cashmere bound on her head by a golden circlet.

It was all poor enough, and had a large element of the absurd in it, which Mabel was fully alive to, but yet there was a certain glamour of romance over the shabby place and the third-rate players. There was a certain poetry, and an escape from the hard actualities, in the very fact of having to utter such words as those of Shakespeare's tragedy of Macbeth, and in the attempt to body forth, however inadequately, those wondrous creatures of the poet's imagination. And let it be remembered that, inferior as were most of the performers to the height of the task assigned to them, there were probably few, if any, persons even among the better portion of the audience, capable of reading and expounding three consecutive lines of the play as intelligently as the great majority of those provincial players. The very quaintness of the phraseology which would have rendered many passages obscure to the general readers, was, by habit and tradition, clear and familiar to the actors, and acquired force and meaning to many ears for the first time, being interpreted by their lips.

"Overtures, ladies! Overtures, gentlemen!" bawled the call-boy—who was a son of Nix, the versatile property-man, and was himself attired in a kilt and tartan scarf, ready to personate Fieance. Presently, with a crashing preliminary chord, the orchestra struck up a medley of national airs. Not Scotch tunes, but Irish melodies. And the selection terminated with an air of local celebrity, called Jerry the Buck, to