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THE DOOM OF WARNHAM.

CHAPTER II.—(Continued.)

'I have him!' he swore; 'he is no such fool as I thought. He has jumped into this stream here and run along it, and, by Heaven, if he has put the dogs of the scent, I shall hunt him through eternity.'

'A horrid laugh was heard as the echo of the words came back—"through eternity!" Each of the men looked at the other in startled surprise.

'Which of you laughed?' roared Ralph.

'None of us,' was the answer.

'Dismount,' said he, 'and leave your horses with one. Let the rest come after me.'

'I will not said one. I don't mind killing a man by knocking him on the head in fair fight, or taking him unawares if he is an enemy. But hunting an idiot is not to my taste. I shall hunt him no more, Baron de Warnham, for fear of worse company in the chase.'

'Nor we!' shouted all the men in a breath.

'Curses on ye! white-livered dogs that ye are!' said wicked Raph. 'I shall follow the game myself.'

'The men went homeward; but the chase went on. From the woods after the night fell there rose voices in halloo, faint and distant, but clear, and there were more voices in the cheer than Baron de Warnham's. Tones broke on the stillness of the night that startled the sentries at their posts in old Warnham Castle, and made men who never quailed before shiver and pray. Awful shrieks of laughter, too, rose on the air, and the yelp of ravishing hounds mingled in the chorus. At last, in the dead midnight, it all ceased. There was a human shriek of concentrated agony heard by all in the castle—there was a dog's yelp, and a chorus of dead laughter once more rose. Nothing was ever more still than the dead night after that, and all knew that the horrid hunt was ended.

Ralph de Warnham did not come home that night, nor did he come home with the morning dawn. A party was detailed to go into the woods to search for him, and they saw a fearful sight at last. Lying across the baron they saw his favorite bloodhound strangled; and near lay the idiot boy with a gaping wound in his throat, that the dog tore out. In the boy's hands were tufts of hair tightly clenched, which by its texture and hue was seen to be the dogs hair, which he had plucked from him with dying grasp.

'The baron was breathing, but insensible.— They bore him home, and he awoke to the skill of the leech, to fall back again and rave of an awful sight he saw and an awful doom to be his in eternity, when he was to be hunted by his own dogs as a punishment for his cruelty and his murder. They recovered him: but he was an altered man; fearful of shadows he lived; and though he waxed in wealth and secured his lands and lordships, fearful of shadows he died; for they say he talked of sights around his deathbed that horrified even the holy men who sought to bring him comfort and faith, and sought to do so in vain. He died with curses on his lips and wild halloos, as on the evening he set his blood-hounds on the scent of the hunted boy. There were strange sights at Warnham until he was buried; there were strange sounds heard at night too; for the ghost-hunt went on. But when he was laid in his clay they were heard no more, except at low intervals. Whenever there is sorrow or death over the heir of Warnham, again through its woods that hunt its founder followed is let loose, and—'

The story had been going on towards its completion whilst the storm had been rising; and the terrible thunder-peal that Jenny the huntsman heard in the lonely avenue, now bursting over Warnham Arms, gave it a startling conclusion. The listeners ventured a few remarks about the fearful nature of the night; but they seemed to have got enough of the supernatural, and listened to the thunder as it crashed loudly through the air.

A short while passed on in this manner, when a carriage was heard drawing up at the Arms. 'Bless me,' said the host, 'another visitor!'

The postilion who had been at the door be-

fore, now entered, all dripping with rain that flowed down like a waterfall from his clothing. 'I'll stop here,' he said, 'the night wid my horses! I lost my way in the darkness, and would lose my courage and never get it back, only I kep' blown' my horn.'

No doubt he was accommodated with all he required at the Warnham Arms: but it is necessary we should leave him and its guests, to follow the thread of our 'ower true tale.'

CHAPTER III.

It was a gray autumn morning some dozen years before the opening of our story that a woman walked with slow and tottering steps towards a house situate near a river in a country district not far from Dublin. The river was the Rye Water, and the district is to the west of Leixlip, beautiful and fertile to-day as it was then. Monthly roses that had not yet ceased to bloom grew all across the front of the cottage, and where they they did not cover the white washed wall, the woodbine thrust its tendrils, green and dewy, to the morning air. The wanderer passed across a little rustic bridge that spanned the stream which flowed clear and swiftly beneath its frail arch; and having crossed to its further side she turned into a neatly-gravelled path, bordered by young but tall fir-trees, and leading towards a door-way in a wall that was continued from the cottage to the river-side. As the woman passed on, the skirting of trees upon each side of the path grew thicker to the wall which she approached. She stopped and gazed round her from time to time, and seemed more cautious in her progress as she came nearer the house. Stepping aside from the pathway towards an old elm that lifted its head toweringly amid the younger growths of the grove, she leaned against its broad trunk and sank down on the eminence formed by its roots. Here she sat for some time with her head buried in her hands, and her frame shook and shivered, whilst the deep sobs broke up from her breast. At length she grew more calm, and raised her head from the position which she assumed on giving way to this burst of grief. Throwing back the hood that covered her face, she revealed a countenance which might be called wonderfully lovely but for the deadly pallor that overspread it, and the grief that marked her features with many a line of mournful meaning.— Masses of the yellowest hair that ever festooned with its graces the brows of the blonde beauties that are born to Ireland from the mixture of the Northern with her native Eastern blood, rolled in golden falls adown upon her cheeks and neck until they were hidden in the folds of the hood gathered upon her shoulders. Her eyes were large and clear, but there was a glassy gleaming in them that told equally of sorrow and sickness. Her figure was so enveloped in the cloak which she wore that its outline could not be discerned. As she lifted her head, she put forth her hand to lower a branch which impeded her view of the graceful residence upon whose grounds she stood. It was her left hand, and it bore the signet-ring of matrimony, whilst to guard it there was another circlet in whose round was set a diamond of great value. Whilst she gazed a puff of smoke rose from the chimneys of the cottage, and the slow clatter of a mill-wheel, lifting its note in unison with the water sweeping beneath its spokes, gave the first signs of life about the quiet place.

'My home,' she said, swaying herself to and fro; 'my home! oh, why, oh, why did I ever leave it!'

Even as she spoke the door opened and an old man came forth in the morning light. He stood on the door-sill, and the sun, which had for the past hour struggled with the clouds, now began to chase away the mists with his strong beams of glory. The red dawn light fell upon the time-worn features of the old man. He lifted his hat reverently, and as the winds dallied with his gray hairs, he muttered out his blessing to the Giver of another day. His thankful ejaculation over, he walked down the path leading along under the windows of the cottage to the doorway we have mentioned. As he passed onward, the wanderer let the branch she had pulled aside

resume its place, and she cowered behind the elm. So calm was the morning that the slightest sound from the pathway reached her ears.— She heard the slow and unsteady footsteps as they paced along the walk, and the murmurs that from the lips of the walker were plain to her faculties.

'Glory be to God!' he said; 'glory be to God! A heavenly morning for the time o' year. The strame is a little light—a little light to grind the corn; but rain comes for the miller as well as for the seed. Just so; one helps the other. God gives, and He grinds; that's well said, surely.'

Here the old man indulged in a low laugh at his wit, and walked down to the river side.— Looking into the bed of the stream, he again resumed his soliloquy:

'I know, I know it,' he said; 'the strame is light; but it'll be cured o' that. There's but one thing, God help us! that has no cure—a sick heart. Hut tut! what am I saying? Sure, it has a cure, too! an' it is Gods own hand—glory to His name—that gives it. Yes, yes; His blessed gift of death—death wid faith cures that, too.'

A clamor from the ducks in the farmyard interrupted the old man's thoughts and soliloquy.

'Ha, ha!' said he, laughing his quiet laugh again; 'there's their promise of rain. Them blessed birds, them blessed birds! I never knew them yet to tell a lie, when they get out their voices for the wet.'

He hobbled over to the door we have noticed before, and opening it, shouted out as loud as his voice could ring, to some one beyond it, 'Phil, Phil! Phildy, my bouchal!'

'Yes,' was answered from within.

'Musha Phildy, give them blessed birds a feed of oats; we're going to have rau. And Phildy—'

'Yes,' was duly answered by the invisible.

'Is the kiln fire lit?'

'Yes, sir.'

'God bless your work, Phildy! It's all right,' said the old miller, and he shut the door, turning down to the pathway from which the wanderer had stepped aside amongst the trees, humming, in a cracked voice, as he went, a dog-grel song known in his day as the 'Miller of Arva.'

'Oh, I am the Miller of Arva, they say; I grind all the corn that comes in my way; And my son John is a long-legged man; There's none like me but Nancy and Sam.'

His quavering voice faltered yet more as the miller had got over each line of his rude minstrelsy; and it was easy to see it touched a chord as tremulous and woeful as ever strung the harp of life. He stopped in his walk as he stopped in his song.

'O Nancy, Nancy!' he sobbed rather than said: 'O Nancy, Nancy! my child, my first born and my last, where is the yellow-head that I blessed in the mornin' getting up, an' that lay nestling on my arm in the night, when the early stars bade the little birds to bed, as you used to say. O my darlin', O my darlin' little mother less girl, you living memory of my life—my life, the jewel of my heart whin the world was young an' me, like the bright day, full of hope and pleasure and light! O Nancy! Nancy!'

A wild hysterical cry burst forth from the cowering woman as she listened to this appeal of feeling from the old man, and springing to her feet she bounded forward, falling rather than kneeling at his knees.

'What's this! what's this!' said the old miller, raising his stick as if to strike the kneeling woman.

'Your child!' said the wanderer.
'My child!' said the old man; 'my child! O no, woman! Not my child! Something that the evil powers an' evil hearts put into my house for my child; something that was brought for my little saint—the little saint that God gave me from the bosom of my dying wife to bless my lone house and lone life with her innocent prattle and loving ways; something that was brought to break my heart and bruise my fondness till they bled out—bled out all their kindness, an' left me miserable, if I was to live with no hope in God

an' hereafter;—something that was doomed me to be an' eternal grief, an' that I would a'most curse it—'

'O father!' shrieked the suppliant, 'do not curse me—do not curse your child!'

'Curse my child!—oh no!—but cursing you, you changelin', is not cursing my child. Why look at the sun there, without a cloud upon it—the sun in heaven—the sun in glory, with the blessin' o' God on its rising up an' the going down; never had God's brightness, nor His blessing, nor His hand so marked upon it as my Anne. An' you—foul an' soiled an' sinful—you, whose breath was as blasting with ruin and dishonor as the lightning is of destruction an' death,—you want to put yourself before her father as my pure and beautiful girl—'

'O father!' said the woman, and she rose to her feet, 'sinful I may be, ungrateful I may be, unkind and thankless—yet not all ungrateful, not all unkind, not all thankless; but I am not—am not—God and the world be my witness—I am not dishonored! I am a wedded wife.'

'Out o' my way,' shouted the old man, 'out o' my way.'

The weeping suppliant bent down again and clasped her father's knees.

'Out o' my way,' he shouted. 'It never was my child that stole from her father's house in the night, that left him alone in his old days, that flew with a stranger, and broke the bond o' nineteen years' care and tenderness, and had no mercy upon gray hairs nor grate sorrows. Oh, if my curse can darken your days in life, or deepen your doom beyond the grave, may it now henceforth an' hereafter—'

What he would have said was interrupted by a cry so wild, so awful, from the woman, that the words were unuttered on his lips, and he gazed at her as, bounding to her feet, she lifted her hands in supplication. Her face was contorted, her form angular and rigid, as with the excess of a general convulsion; she moved her lips, but no words came from them; she bent forward, and a gush of blood rushing from her mouth covered the old man all over, as she clutched him in her embrace. There was a gurgling sound, and both fell to the earth together.

Their fall was not unseen. The wild cry had sent its horror to more ears than those of the old miller. From the doorway there rushed down the path a fine tall young man.

'Masther! masther!' he said, 'what's this?'

The old man slowly rose to his feet and looked on the form that so soon ceased to breathe, as he answered: 'Phildy! Phildy! that's my daughter—my daughter Anne Verdon that was. Mind—mind you—Phildy, she's my daughter still, though she has the right—thank God!—to another name,—another name; an' there is a grate sorrow under that name to be buried with that heart. Stop the mill to-day, Phildy!' said the old man with a terrible calmness in his talk; 'for my dead child is no disgrace to her dying father; an' may the Lord have mercy on her soul!'

CHAPTER IV.

The hours of the day had gone over since the occurrence of the event we detailed in our foregoing chapter, and night had fallen dark and stormy on the world. Light gleamed from the windows of the miller's cottage in unusual profusion, as there came rumbling up the avenue that led towards the house the creaking wheels of a cart. It was driven by the man whom the miller called 'Phildy' in the conversation of the morning; but whose name was Philip Lee.— With slow pace he drove his horse and cart, and turned from time to time in order to watch if its burden were safe. That burden was a coffin—a coffin for Anne Verdon, who had died in her father's embrace in the sudden excitement we have recorded, and with his pardon given her, though her ears were deaf to its muttered mercy. Stolidly he pursued his way until he reached the door of the miller's cottage.

'Here's Phildy,' said a loiterer at the threshold.

'Yis,' answered the man; 'an' on such an

errand Phildy had to go and is come too soon.'

'Musha, thru for ye, Phildy,' replied the party addressed. 'There wasn't the like of purty Nancy Verdon in the three counties.'

'That's not her name,' said Phildy quietly, taking down the coffin from the cart; 'that's not her name, though she was happy when it was, an' fair as the mornin' when the strame has no shabda' on it.'

'An' what was her name, Phildy agrab?' questioned the speaker; 'shure you're so wise, you know all about it.'

'There's for us now,' said the man,—'there's for us now. Foolish Phildy is what they call me, but I'm not so foolish as to tell you that. You have knowledge enough, an' not to want any from me. Come out of my way,' he said roughly, as he carried the coffin through the doorway into the cottage.

The rooms in the little house were more numerous and more neat than could be considered from its rustic appearance outside. A long hall extended its length right and left from the entrance, crossed at the ends only by apartments. That at the upper end on the left was the room that Anne Verdon used to have as her chamber when the cottage was her home. The house was crowded with people come to the 'wake,' and as Phildy came in there was a lull in the conversation that was carried on up to his appearance. He went along amongst those who, for want of accommodation in the rooms branching off the hall, stood in the passage, and after some trouble succeeded in gaining the little chamber which the dead girl had often entered hearty with life, and hope, and happiness, but in which now her remains were lying dressed for the grave. The death-bed was not without its little decorations of simple taste. Its snowy drapery, tied with the dark emblems of the tomb, accorded well with the fair face of the newly-departed. In the few hours that had elapsed since her life broke loose in the purple tide of her heart's blood, every rigidity that pain had brought upon her face and form had softened down in the relaxation of muscle and tissue that adds so much to the appearance of the recently dead. The lines that pinched her features with the traces of pain, as her father saw them during her last interview with him, had been smoothed into the winning softness that youth had shed upon her countenance in happier times, and upon her lips that strange seeming of a smile that ever robs its gloom from the death-look. There were but a few people in the room where she lay, and of those her father was one. The old man sat at the head of the bed beside his dead daughter. His stick he held in his hands, and leaned on it heavily. He seemed to be absorbed in thought, for he said not a word to those around them; and not even the entrance of Phil bearing the coffin roused him from his meditation. Phil carried it forward and laid it on the bed beside the dead girl. The movement startled the old man.

'Eb, eh! what's this?' he said; 'what's this?'

'The coffin that I went for,' answered Phil, turning round and walking out.

'Ay, ay, Phildy,' muttered the old man; 'an' there's more pace under its coverin' than is to be found under many a face gown. Phildy is a quare boy,' said he addressing the persons in the room, 'an' a fine boy, if the head was right; but the crathur is't clear there, though lovin', an' kind, an' thru. Poor Anne—God rest her!—thrust Phildy when she wouldn't—O Maryone!—wouldn't thrust her poor father. An' Phildy knew all about her when I didn't; while the only consolation he'd ever gi' me was that she was safe an' well.'

The old man again fell into silence, and sat as absorbed as before for some time. Phildy came into the room at length, and sat down beside him on a chair. He was a magnificent specimen of an Irish peasant, muscular, tall, lithe, and handsome. He was evidently a man of powerful strength, but his countenance, open and regular in every feature, was marred by the restlessness of his dark eye, which gleamed with a fire that showed all was not well within. He