

THE CROSS OF PRIDE.

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[Some of the incidents in this tale really occurred, and a few of the characters are drawn from life.]

CHAPTER I.

It was a time of unusual excitement in the quiet streets of B——, a remote inland town in Ireland. The election for the county of—— was being warmly contested. One of the candidates was Colonel de Burg, the possessor of a large estate in the neighborhood. His opponent was a *parvenu*, the son of a former agent of the de Burg estate, who had acquired considerable wealth by ways and means not always such as would bear inspection. It was Saturday evening; the election could not be decided until the following week; the polls were reluctantly closed by the contending parties, and Colonel de Burg, with one of his friends, leaving the hustings, sauntered about the streets enjoying the refreshing coolness of the hour and admiring the picturesque environs of the ancient town of B——. It was divided into two parts by a broad, deep river, spanned by a massive bridge of several arches. Standing now upon this noble structure, Colonel de Burg and his companion loitered many minutes to survey the striking beauty of the scene stretched before them. On the right bank of the river, covering a considerable space, appeared the stately ruins of a Franciscan monastery, its noble arches and high gothic windows moulded with black marble, its grey walls half covered with the dark green leaves of the luxuriant ivy, all distinctly seen in the crimson light which a gorgeous sunset was flinging over every object. While on the opposite bank of the river were seen small but richly-cultivated gardens with shady arbors trellised with creeping plants and fragrant flowers—a verdant lawn fronting the aristocratic residence of the de Burg's, with broad, low parapet overlooking the calm water laving its base; and farther down, a high grassy hill rising abruptly from the river's brink, its level height crowned with the elegant, modern mansion of Richard Dalton, Esq. Colonel de Burg's political opponent.

'What a beautiful scene! I did not expect to see any thing so picturesque in this remote place,' was the observation of Sir Reginald Vivyan, the Colonel's young friend, after his eye had taken in the various objects before him.

'The situation of B—— is certainly romantic. What a fine back-ground to the picture does that lofty mountain present, standing out so clearly defined against the western sky, its bold peak veiled by an orange and crimson drapery of clouds. I did not expect to find B—— so large a town, but as I have not been here for many years my recollections of it are very indistinct.'

The father of Colonel de Burg was one of those absentee landlords, the bane of Ireland in former years, who spent in foreign countries the wealth drained from a miserable peasantry, on their neglected and badly-managed estates.

'That is a fine monastic ruin: I should like to have a nearer view of it,' observed Sir Reginald, 'I have seldom seen an architectural pile so little dilapidated,' he continued, as both gentlemen directed their steps towards the Abbey; 'the walls are but little touched by the mouldering hand of time.'

'It was partly rebuilt in the fifteenth century, remarked Colonel de Burg. I have heard my grandfather mention that in his youth it was in good preservation; part of it was then roofed, and the cloisters were almost entire. I myself remember a spiral staircase in one turret leading to a small chamber above, which in boyhood was my peculiar sanctum.'

The gentlemen had now reached the Abbey. It was built like many such edifices, in the form of a cross, and its architectural beauty was more conspicu-

ous upon a nearer inspection. But soon the attention of the strangers was attracted towards another object of engrossing interest. From the narrow window of an ivy-mantled turret looking down upon them as they stood in the cloisters below—where they had been for some minutes admiring the exquisite sculpture of its arches—appeared a girlish face of rare beauty.

'That must be the turret you spoke of de Burg; but who is the fair creature peeping out from it?' gaily observed Sir Reginald. 'I must see whether she is in reality a being earthly like ourselves; she looks too beautiful to be made of perishable elements. The entrance to that turret must be somewhere in that ivy-covered wall. Oh! here it is!' he continued, as his eye caught a low-arched door partly hidden by the clustering foliage of trailing plants. The next moment, stooping beneath the low portal he was ascending the stone-steps of the winding stairs, followed by his companion. At the top, another gothic entrance led into a small circular chamber the oaken floor of which though deeply stained from age was yet entire. The apartment was roofless but sheltered by the thick foliage of a majestic tree evidently co-eval with the building. Beside the narrow casement was placed a rude seat from which the young lady rose hastily as the gentlemen entered. They drew back suddenly, as their eyes met the calm proud look of that young and very beautiful girl. It seemed to demand the reason of their intrusion.—Colonel de Burg recovering his self-possession made a hurried apology in which the words, 'strangers wishing to see the Abbey' were heard. The young lady bowed haughtily, then taking up a small work-basket which lay on the seat beside her she passed from the turret with a stately gracefulness. A minute afterwards she was seen making her way through the many tombstones and wooden crosses in the ruined nave of the Abbey; then entering the cloisters she disappeared through their sculptured arcade.

'What a splendid specimen of Irish beauty!' exclaimed Sir Reginald. 'Who is this queenly creature, de Burg?'

'I really do not know:—remember I am quite a stranger here.' 'We must inquire, and there is a person who will, I suppose, be able to satisfy our curiosity.'

The gentlemen now descended the spiral stairs and accosted an old woman whom they saw kneeling beside a newly-made grave—the ruins being used as a cemetery by the people in the neighborhood.

'Is it the purty young lady who was sitting up at the turret windy ye're askin about,' asked the crone, stopping in the midst of telling her beads and eyeing the strangers askant, with mingled curiosity and dislike.

'Yes, she just now passed you as she left the ruins.'

'Shure I know she did, and small blame to her to lav the place when the likes of ye is maraudhering about; What business had ye to molest her primises at all? Isn't that the lonesome little place where she often sits reading or sewing from mornin, till night.—Shure it's the height of impidence ye have or ye wouldn't have done it.'

'We really did not mean to offend the young lady; we wished to examine the turret inside.'

'And ye didn't want to have a nearer look at the *colleen dhas* herself; go *devin*, ye must take me for a born nathral to think of inveiglin me in that way!' and the crone began to tell her beads with angry energy.

The gentlemen were amused and provoked at the same time; but anxious to find out the name of the beautiful stranger Colonel de Burg hazarded another inquiry.

'And who are ye, yourself that's so mighty curious, if a body may ax,' she

said answering one query by asking another, a custom almost habitual to the Irish peasant, in whose cranium the bump of inquisitiveness is as fully developed as in the Yankees.

'My name is de Burg, Colonel de Burg.'

The old woman rose to her feet with sudden alacrity.

'Blessed Mary! is it yourself that's in it? or does my ould ears deceave me,' she exclaimed, seizing the Colonel's hand and pressing it between her own shrivelled palms with respect and affection. 'Shure my two eyes never hoped to look upon one of the family agin for *muvrone* it's long since they crossed the threshel of the ould place, spindin' their days in furrin parts like most of the quality.'

'You are one of my father's former servants I suppose,' observed Colonel de Burg a little affected by the old creature's demonstrations of affection.

'I was that same yere honor, and when ye were a woeny cratur many a time I carried ye in these ould arms; but ye don't remember Nance *dhu* as as they used to call me, bekase these white locks was then as black as a sloe. But shure its a greater wondher that the ould heart within me didn't know yourself *avic dheelish machree*.'

'It would be impossible for you to recognize me, Nance, years have made too great a change.'

'Thruc for ye, *avic*, its the fine looking gentleman ye are now, misther Con. And are ye come home to remain with yere own people the rest of yere life! and that it may be long and happy I pray the saints this blessed day!'

'I shall never be so long absent from the old home again, Nance; and I shall take care to see you provided for the remainder of your days. But now do tell this gentleman and me the name of the young lady who seems such a favorite with you.'

'Shure she deserves to be that same, for hasn't she often kept me, ould Nance Connor, from want; may the light of glory shine about her dying bed!'

'If she has the beauty of an angel, it seems she has the goodness of one too; but you have not yet told us her name, good Nance,' said Sir Reginald, a little impatiently.

The English accent fell unpleasantly upon the ear of the crone. Like most of the peasantry, she felt a natural dislike to the conquerors of her race. She turned her grey eyes with no pleasant expression upon the interrogator, and it was some moments before she deigned a reply.

'Her name is Harcourt; it's English like your own, and none the bother for that, aither,' she muttered.

'Harcourt! an aristocratic name! She is of good family, I presume.'

'She belongs to the rale ginthry on one side only,' continued Nance, addressing Colonel de Burg. 'Her father was a Kurnel in the army. On the mother's side, though come of dacent people, she has nothin' to boast. Her grandfather, ould Joe Morgan, made his money by smugglin' tobaccy and making snuff.'

'Strange! that a Colonel in the British army should form such a *mesalliance*! Is it not Vivyan?'

'Not if the mother resembled the beautiful daughter,' was Sir Reginald's reply.

'It was quare, and it was not quare, when one understands the ins and outs of it. The Kurnel was bamboozled into the match.'

'Was ould Joe's daughter as handsome as Miss Harcourt, Nance?' asked Colonel de Burg.

'She wasn't, then—an uglier girl than Charlotte Morgan you wouldn't meet in a day's walk, if you travelled from Banthry to Skibbereen.'

'Rather singular that such a Gorgan should have a Venus for a daughter; is it not, Vivyan?'

'Very; such freaks of nature are unaccountable.'

'The Kurnel himself was a mighty handsome man; Miss Ellinor takes after him, intirely. She has his very look and his step so proud. She's a rale lady: sorra a one would think the blood of the Morgans ran in her veins.'

'Where does Mrs. Harcourt live, Nance?'

'Just behind the Abbey, yere honor, and that's the rason why Miss Ellinor, being quite convanient to the ould ruins, spins so much time in the weeny room up yander.'

'Is Colonel Harcourt absent on foreign service; or, does he live with his fance?'

'Musha, that's what he never done. Not long ather the weddin' he went off with himself and never showed his face in B—— ever since.'

'Went off and left his bride!' exclaimed both gentlemen, in surprise.

A grim smile flitted over the old woman's face. 'She was no bride of his choosin'. It's a quare story, Misther Con; I'll tell you how it happened. You must know, first and foremost, that ould Joe Morgan used to live in great style, and keep a good table; for the ships that brought him the tobaccy from furrin parts used also to smuggle the best of wine and brandy, and silks into the bargain. Well Kurnel Harcourt was, like most gentlemen in that day, mighty fond of his bottle; and he used often sit down to dinner with ould Joe and dhrink his wine and pay compliments to Miss Charlotte, as in duty bound. And it happened one night that her father took it into his head to make the Kurnel his son-in-law. The parson and his clerk was sent for and Miss Charlotte, dhressed like a queen, and the Kurnel being stupid with dhrink, let them do as they plased, and shure enough he was married to Miss Charlotte as fast as the church could make him. The next day when he found out the thrick that was played him he nearly lost his senses, and swore he wasn't married at all at all. But ould Joe showed him the entry of the marriage in the vestry book, and the parson said it was all right, and so there was no help for it. Soon ather the Kurnel was ordered off to Injy to fight agin Bony and the Queen of Moroc; and that's the last was heard of him. He's dead long since, they say.

'What a singular story,' I am surprised that any Christian minister could be found capable of such an act as performing the marriage ceremony for a man who was intoxicated!

'Och it was ould Parson Atkinson that done it; he was the greatest nager in the country, and for goold he would sell his sow to the divil; ould Joe paid him well.'

Does the world recognize Mrs. Harcourt as the Colonel's wife? Are she and Miss Ellinor admitted into society?'

'Of course, and why not; aren't they as good as any one else,' shure there's none of the rale quality in B——, but you Misther Con.'

'You forget Dick Dalton, Esquire, Nance,' said Colonel de Burg, archly.

'Dick Dalton indeed!' and there was a contemptuous curl on the thin lip, and a look of scorn in the grey eye.

'Well the world is come to a purty pass when the likes of him sets up for a member of Parliament. You remember his grandfather, Misther Con; he was cowerd on the de Burg estate one't upon a time. I wondher what the ould man would say to young Dick's doings! But the world is turning upside down; and as the wheel of fortune goes round, them that's on the lowest spoke gets a lift. But it will be too bad intirely if Dick Dalton gets the betther of your honor at the election.'

'I hope not Nance.'

'Faix I'm not so shure of that, Misther Con. He's a Roman, like all his people, and all the boys will vote for him, and no blame to them, seeing as how they're thrated by the Orangemen. Dick