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THE HERMIT OF THE ROCK.

A TALE OF CASHEL.

BY MRS. J. SADLER.

CHAPTER XIV.—MISS MARKHAM'S STORY.

A week or two after that evening at Esmond Hall, Harriet Markham sat by the bow-window of a summer-parlor in Keshingham Castle...

The scene was more beautiful far to the eye than if day in its pride had array'd it.

As she watched the blue mist curling upward from the lake in delicate forms of beauty, her graceful fancy fashioned them into visions and rays, the guardian spirits of the silvery waters...

'Take care, my lord,' said Mrs. Pakenham, who, being a cousin-german of Lord Effingham, had kindly taken charge of his splendid marriage since the death of the Countess some two years before...

'Excuse me, my lord,' said Harriet with a start and a blush. 'I did not hear what you said.'

'The Earl repeated his question, and then launched the first part of the air. It was 'Shule Aroon.'

'It were strange, indeed, my lord,' said Harriet smiling, 'if I did not remember that. It was one of the airs that oftentimes soothed my infant slumbers.'

'I know not why it is,' said Lord Effingham, 'but ever since it seems to haunt me like a voice from the world of spirits. It is, indeed, a fine old air. Do you know the words, Miss Markham?'

'I know one set of words, my lord; but perhaps not the best, for there are several versions of 'Shule Aroon' and 'Shule Aroon,'—as it is indiscriminately called—sung here in Munster;—most of them are in Irish, and can hardly be rendered into good English so as to preserve the exceeding beauty and simplicity of the original. The words I have are a sort of free translation, the refrain being still sung in the old musical language of the Gael.'

'You would oblige me much by singing the song for us,' said the Earl, whereupon the Hon. Mrs. Pakenham drew up her portly form in lofty state, and looked the contempt for Irish music which she cared not at that moment to express in words.

Miss Markham bowed her acquiescence; Mr. Goodchild rubbed his fat white hands, and smiled and nodded, and asked if he should not have the honor of fetching the guitar.

'No, No, Mr. Goodchild; many thanks for your politeness,' said Harriet laughing at the odd association of ideas; 'the guitar and my old song would make strange discordant melody together—to borrow a bull for the occasion.—Here is the song, my lord.' And she sang with all the sweetness and simplicity of the true ballad style:

'Oh! have you seen my Norah Fay? She's left me all the sad long day, Alone to sing a weary lay; Go dhi mo vourneen slaua; Shule, shule, shule aroon; Shule go sochir agus shule go cune Shule go their dorris agus ellig lume, As' go dhi mo vourneen slaua.

'You'll know her by her raven hair, Her deep blue eye, her forehead fair, Her step and laugh that banish care; As' go dhi mo vourneen slaua.

'In form you may her semblance find, But none like her, of womankind, If you can see her heart and mind; As' go dhi mo vourneen slaua.

'Oh! bring to me my Norah Fay, For hours are days when she's away; The sun looks dark, and sweet birds say, Go dhi mo vourneen slaua, &c.

'Mercy on me, what a barbarous tongue!' said Mrs. Pakenham; 'how in the world can you articulate such harsh, guttural sounds?'

'Just as easily as I do the improved Saxon which now forms our vernacular. You think the Gaelic a 'barbarous tongue,' my dear Mrs. Pakenham, and yet that 'barbarous tongue' which ought to be still the vernacular of the Irish people was once the language of a highly-civilised nation, spoken alike by king and chief, and warrior-knight, and noble lady. The bards of Erin in the long-past ages moulded it into forms of rarest beauty, and men who were great lights in their generation, made it the vehicle of their thoughts, and their lofty inspirations.'

'Dear me! I should not have thought so,' said Mrs. Pakenham with an extra assumption of dignity; 'but I suppose you know best, Miss Markham! How stands the game, my lord?'

'Oh! the battle is fought and won—for once, Mr. Goodchild has carried the day. Miss Markham, you were kind enough to promise to tell us the story of Mad Mabel. Suppose you told it now to while away the hours?'

'With much pleasure, my lord,' Harriet replied, 'and the more so, as Lady Ann and Lady Emma are not present, for, although they have frequently reminded me of it, I have purposely refrained from gratifying their curiosity as the story is not exactly one that would benefit them to hear. The tragical scenes I am about to describe as briefly as I can, are, alas! but too common in this unhappy country, and are to some extent, perhaps, Irish, owing not so much to the natural ferocity of the people as the unsatisfactory relations between landlord and tenant.'

'Why, Miss Markham,' said Mrs. Pakenham, opening her eyes to their fullest extent, 'you don't mean to say you are going to entertain us with a tale of Irish life, do you?'

'I would not, on any account, think of doing so, Mrs. Pakenham,' said Harriet, 'were it not Lord Effingham's wish to hear it. So with your permission and Mr. Goodchild's, I will proceed at once, promising, at the same time, for your consolation, to make the story as short as possible.'

'Miss Markham is very good,' said bland Mr. Goodchild, and he folded his plump hands athwart his goodly paunch with an air of meek resignation that was altogether impressive. The Hon. Mrs. Pakenham took up a Chinese fan that lay on a spider-table near, and commenced fanning herself with great force and admirable dexterity.

'Your lordship has doubtless heard,' said Harriet, 'of the murder of Mr. Chadwick. I believe almost every one has heard of it, either at the time it occurred, or since?'

Lord Effingham replied that he had not only heard of the murder, but had known Mr. Chadwick, who had been for a short time a sort of under-agent on his Irish estates, before he got promotion to that situation which subsequently cost him his life.

'Then your lordship probably knows what manner of man he was, and how little calculated to win either love or respect from the people over whom he was placed in brief authority?'

'It was precisely on account of his excessive harshness, amounting at times almost to brutality, that I was finally obliged to supersede him in his office,' replied the Earl. 'I had heard so many complaints of his tyrannical treatment of the tenantry that I could not possibly allow him to continue it longer.'

'Well, my lord, there is reason to fear that his more recent employer cared little how he treated the tenants provided only he squeezed the money out of them. He appears, indeed, to have had a carte blanche, as most Irish agents have, in regard to the means to be employed for that end. And yet it is said in the neighborhood, by way, I suppose, of giving the devil his due, that Mr. Chadwick was not so excessively severe in exacting the payment of rent as many others who are permitted to live on in their heartless oppression of the poor; but somehow his manner of dealing with the tenants and the peasantry in general was most insulting; he neither understood, nor cared to understand the peculiar sympathies or antipathies of the people amongst whom he bred, and was, therefore, continually treading on their corns, as the vulgar phrase goes, taking no pains at any time to conceal his contempt for them, and though fully conscious that he was an object of hatred to them, taking every opportunity of openly breathing defiance. He was a man of large, unwieldy proportions, as your lordship doubtless remembers, and I have been told that on some occasions when he had a large number of the peasantry around him, he would say in a scoffing tone, as he rubbed down his huge frontal, puffing the while like a juvenile whale, 'You see I'm growing fatter and fatter every day. I'm thriving on your curses, I believe.' Then the rustic dissemblers around would glance furtively at each other, and force a laugh, and say, 'Your honor is mighty pleasant, so you are, and fond of crackin' your jokes, more power to you, sir, for that same.' But

deep in their hearts were rankling the imprecations that fell on them from his foul tongue, and the bitter mockery and contempt wherewith he treated them on all occasions.'

'Upon my honor, I do not wonder at his treating them so,' said Mrs. Pakenham, all at once renewing the fanning process which she had perhaps unconsciously suspended. 'I really think they deserve no better.'

The Earl cast one of his black looks on his stately kinswoman, and she was silent. Harriet resumed with a heightened color:

'There is no knowing how long this might have gone on, had not Mr. Chadwick commenced building a police-barracks at Rath Cannon, adjacent to Holy Cross Abbey, and only a short distance from Thurles. He was in the habit of boasting in all companies, and even to the people themselves, that he was the man to keep the Bloody Tips in order, and that he was going to have a police station at Rath Cannon for the very purpose of watching them. Now this in the peculiar state of the country, and for reasons known to themselves, was just what the peasantry least wished for, and, recognizing in this new move, yet another and more convincing proof of Mr. Chadwick's hatred of them, and, moreover, an open defiance of them, they accepted the challenge, and swore to each in their secret meetings, that Chadwick must die.'

'What a horrible set of wretches!' cried Mrs. Pakenham, now fully absorbed in the narrative. 'What treads incarnate they must be, and what a cowardly set, moreover, to conspire for the murder of one man?'

'My very dear Mrs. Pakenham,' said the chaplain, 'if you knew this unhappy country better, you would wonder at no act of baseness or cruelty on the part of the people—especially here in Tipperary.'

'You are scarcely just to this unhappy country,' Mr. Goodchild said Harriet looking at him in a way that made him feel rather small, as the phrase goes; 'even as regards Tipperary your assertion is by far too general and sweeping.'

Thereupon the good man began to justify himself.—'I protest, Miss Markham!' said he with intense earnestness, 'I did not mean to censure the people—the Romanists, namely, of this most miserable country—'

At this the Earl smiled, and Harriet laughed—'why, my dear good sir,' said she, 'you are making matters worse instead of better. Just allow me, pray, to continue my story, and I will take your explanation for granted.'

'Permit me to ask one preliminary question, Miss Markham,' said Lord Effingham, 'how can you account for the wide-spread conspiracy entered into by the peasantry for the execution of their diabolical purpose?'

'Very easily, my lord, by the simple fact that the conspiracy already existed in the form of a secret organisation, having revenge for one of its principal objects. They called it, and probably believed it justice, acting on the assumption, not always unfounded, that there was no justice for them in the law courts of the land, that the oppressors excuse me the harsh word, my lord, I do but borrow it from their phraseology;—that the oppressors had the law in their own hands, and that they had to look for justice to themselves alone. There was a time when this was true to the very letter, but the misfortune of the people is that they do not see how times have changed in the country, that a more enlightened spirit is abroad amongst the gentry, and that justice is now to be found on the bench. That, in fact, the partizan magistrate of a former age is now almost the exception to the general rule, and is thrown down by the majority of his brethren on the bench. However, old prejudices, long and fondly cherished, are not easily eradicated from the minds of the illiterate, and, moreover, there are always some designing knaves interested in their perpetration, so it is that many of our poor people are led blindfold into these dangerous societies formed amongst them for what they consider self-defence. Many, too, who are naturally peaceable and well-disposed are actually forced, by the most dreadful threats, to join these associations, against their own honest convictions and against the positive and most solemn prohibition of their Church.'

'It is truly a lamentable state of things,' said the Earl, 'and the worst of it is that legislation has no power to reach the evil.'

'None whatever, my lord! Human legislation will have little effect amongst Irishmen who set divine legislation at defiance. Where the efforts of religion fail to make them wiser or better men, no human power can do it. However, as I had the honor of telling your lordship, it was in the mid-night assemblies of these misguided men that the death of Mr. Chadwick was resolved upon. The only difficulty then was to find executioners for their horrid resolve.—For some days this was a difficulty, for Mr. Chadwick was known to have his house well provided with arms, and, moreover, to carry arms

on his person wherever he went. It was the old story of the cat and the bell. Things did not long remain in that state, however, for before the grand meeting of the secret conspirators one night, in a wild gorge of the Keeper mountain, appeared a stalwart young fellow, Patrick Grace by name, who enjoyed the reputation of being an avenger of wrong, and the sworn foe of the tyrannical landlords. Without any sort of hesitation he declared his willingness to undertake the execution of the dread sentence pronounced on Mr. Chadwick, provided he were left to do it in his own way and at his own time. Of course his proposal was eagerly accepted, for, though young in years, Patrick Grace was strong in courage and in resolution. He had so many times proved his prowess in one way or another against the landlords, that he was looked upon as a champion of the people's rights. A rustic Don Quixote he was, ready to do and dare all things for the cause. A deplorable instance he was, too, of that perverted sense of justice which I have endeavored to describe. What made him still more popular amongst the people was his remarkable personal beauty, accompanied by great sprightliness of manner, and that whole-souled generosity which, above all other qualities, finds its way to the Irish heart. Such was Patrick Grace when he presented himself to execute the popular vengeance on Mr. Chadwick; the admiration of the women and the envy of the men, in his own class, and the pride and boast of all. But though the rustic Adonis danced with all the pretty girls, and applied 'the blarney' with skill and effect, he had already made his choice from amongst them, and as the old ballad says:

'Placed his affections on a comely young dame, And like that same comely young dame, sung by her enamored swain under the poetical title of the 'Rose of Ardee,' and therein familiar to every rustic singer in many parts of fair Ireland, the object of Patrick Grace's love was

'Straight, tall, and handsome, in every degree; in fact, just the one to catch and fix the affections of a 'Roving Bachelor' of their ever were to be caught or fixed. She was an orphan, and lived as a servant in the house of a comfortable farmer, where she was treated, as is usual, amongst that class here in Ireland, as one of the family. Grace was a son of the family, and during the pleasant evenings that followed the day of toil, the youth and the maiden, thrown together, in the heart-opening sunshine of rustic merriment, found themselves, they scarcely knew how or why, bound together by the tenderest bonds of loyal and true affection. And if ever the course of true love did bid far to run smooth, it was for Patrick Grace and this rustic beauty, who was soon his betrothed bride, their marriage being only deferred till a mud-wall cabin was put up to shelter their household gods.'

'Dear me, Miss Markham,' said Mrs. Pakenham yawning wearily, 'what a very tiresome story.'

'I cannot agree with you, *ma belle cousine*,' said Lord Effingham, 'I find it extremely interesting—pray proceed, Miss Markham!'

'It has a peculiar interest for me,' said the grave chaplain, 'from the insight it gives into the atrocious immorality of the Romish system.'

'I am not aware that it does give any such insight,' observed Miss Markham; 'I have shown on the contrary, that the Romish system, as you say, so far from encouraging men in these combinations and lawless courses, is at all times engaged combatting their evil passions, and endeavoring, with all its might, to suppress those occult associations which are ruinous to the faith and morals of any people—but doubly so to a Catholic people, because they withdraw them from the saving Sacraments of the Church of which they are not allowed to participate. Do I make the matter intelligible to your lordship? I see Mr. Goodchild is in the condition of those who, being convinced against their will, are of the same opinion.'

The Earl bowed affirmatively and smiled at the keen sarcasm which Mr. Goodchild luckily for himself did not seem to understand, probably in blissful ignorance of the gist of the old adage quoted by Harriet.

'Pray go on with your story,' said the somewhat petulant Mrs. Pakenham, 'supper will soon be on the table.'

'Well, Patrick Grace was, of course loudly applauded, and his proposal eagerly accepted by the secret conclave, few of whose members would have cared to risk their precious lives as he did for the common good.'

'And did he do it, Miss Markham?' exclaimed Mrs. Pakenham in a state of breathless anxiety. 'Did he do that wicked act?'

'He did,' said Harriet, her voice sinking beneath the weight of horror and of shame, 'he did—he promised to kill the obnoxious agent, and he kept his word.'

There was silence for a moment, and then Harriet resumed, as by an effort:

'The young betrothed of Patrick Grace knew nothing of what was going on; fearing, perhaps, her importunate entreaties not to imbue his hands in blood, or run the risk of losing his own life to do the will of others, he would not venture to see her till after the deed was done, and then, he expected, that so far from blaming what he considered his heroic and patriotic act, she would be the first to applaud his self-devotion.'

'But where—when—how did he accomplish the awful deed?' cried Mrs. Pakenham.

'He probably waylaid the unfortunate gentleman in some lonely spot under cover of the night,' suggested Mr. Goodchild.

'He did no such thing, reverend sir; if you will have the goodness to listen, you shall hear what he did. One day when the great broad sun was shining overhead, Mr. Chadwick was superintending the erection of the constabulary-barracks before-mentioned, talking in his loud, domineering way to the men employed on the work, and little dreaming that his last hour had come, when the daring youth who had undertaken the execution of the fearful sentence secretly pronounced upon him, walked deliberately up, with a pistol in his hand, and shot him with so sure an aim that he fell dead to the ground.'

A groan or horror escaped from the lips of Mrs. Pakenham—she could not speak; the chaplain was little less agitated. Lord Effingham alone preserved his composure.

'What?' he asked, 'in the presence of the workmen?'

'Even so, my lord, and of the passers-by, relying, doubtless, on the hatred wherewith Mr. Chadwick was regarded by the surrounding peasantry, and fully as much, perhaps, on the secret organisation which underlay the whole strata of society. He very naturally thought that no one would venture to give evidence against him for fear of their terrible revenge. And, indeed, it seemed at first as though he reckoned not without his host, for he walked away after doing the deed, unmolested by any one. One man only, a mason who was standing by Mr. Chadwick's side at the fatal moment, exclaimed, perhaps involuntarily—'God forgive you, Patrick Grace.' But Grace little heeded the words, his conscience being perfectly at rest with regard to the nature of the deed he had just perpetrated, and no thought of personal danger from the recognition ever entering his mind.'

'What a frightful perversion of mind!' said the Earl.

'And especially of the Irish mind! If your lordship only knew as I know the intensity of horror wherewith the Irish, perhaps more than any other people, regard the commission of murder, you could then understand, in some degree, how great must be the provocation, how fierce the excitement that closes their hearts to pity.'

'Well, well,' said Mrs. Pakenham with an impatient gesture, 'we can dispense with all that but what came of it?—did the horrid wretch escape? Did no one give evidence against him?'

'That is just what I am going to relate,' said Harriet with a quiet smile, and she resumed as follows:—'As may be supposed, Grace, having no fear of being brought to trial, took no pains either to conceal himself or to deny the commission of a crime which he considered as an act of retributive justice. The news of the tragic event spread like wildfire through the country, and when the veil of darkness covered the earth, the conspirators came together in their secret haunts to meet their emissary and congratulate him and themselves on his successful attempt to rid them of their detested enemy. When asked if he thought any one had seen him doing the deed, he answered carelessly, 'Why, then, to be sure, didn't all the men that were working on the building see! But what of that—sure, I knew before I went every one that was in it, an' they are all the right sort. Philip Mara was standing right alongside the cold chap when I paid my respects to him, and more by token he said, 'God forgive you, Patrick Grace!' when he seen Chadwick falling.' So far all was considered safe, and Patrick Grace was the idol of the hour, and enjoyed for the time, in his own limited sphere, all the glory of a conqueror.—Short indeed was his unhalloved triumph.—Early next day he was arrested on the deposition of Philip Mara, and whilst he and his fellow-conspirators cursed the traitor, as they chose to call him, and breathed the most terrible threats against him and his, they little knew what an agonized struggle the worthy mason had undergone before he decided on giving information in the case. Mara was an upright, honest, right thinking man, with intelligence somewhat in advance of his class, and, above all, a deep sense of his obligations as a Christian; which would not permit him to keep such an atrocious crime secret. And so it was that, trampling under-foot all the suggestions of fear