

A VISIT TO IRELAND.

BY MARY LOCKE.

We are all alone, my darling; and life's outlook is dark and gloomy...

We have roamed beside the river where your feet were wont to tread...

We have lingered 'mid the lovely scenes where another used to stray...

Oh! home of all my early dreams, when hope was soaring high...

To kneel before the shrine where first I breathed fresh life...

But, there's no living in the land, where industry is scant...

Oh, hapless land, how hard thy lot!—how cruelly the years have stamped their sorrow's seal...

Let up your face, my bonny boy, so beautiful and bright...

Oh, land of hospitality!—of those my youth hood knew...

Farwell, my land!—a long farewell! I've looked my last on thee...

"A SORROW'S CROWN OF SORROWS."

CHAPTER V.

Meantime, while the excellent Dr. Marsden congratulated himself on the evident impression his adopted daughter had made on Aubrey...

From the moment when suddenly awakened from sleep by his presence, she had crossed her blue eyes upon Bruce Laidlaw's face...

To this end, as she was about to go to bed, she set forth to give the dog a run, and to make various trifling purchases in the neighbourhood of the King's Arms Hotel.

Bruce Laidlaw espied her, as she went out to the window of the coffee-room, where he was reading the local newspaper...

"A wonderful taking girl," he reflected. "She seems to diffuse sunshine around her, she is so young, so pretty, so genial, and so enthusiastic."

"How did such a girl come to have such a brother?" he pondered, and then while the expression of his face grew gradually hard and forbidding...

Bruce Laidlaw was, as a rule, indifferent as to what the world thought of him, yet it chafed him considerably to know that a garbled version of his private affairs might be in Lola's possession at this moment.

He had no intention of enlightening her, or anyone else, as to the true state of the case. It was not Bruce Laidlaw's way to explain and excuse his conduct to a set of people whom he heartily despised.

Much as he might fret and fume over the consequences of his own act, yet he knew were the circumstances to happen again, his own behaviour would be probably identical with what it was five years ago, when one dreary winter's night, he, a poor provincial actor, walked home through a desolate country town after the performance, had taken a letour by a bridge over the river, and arrived there just in time to save a miserable, heart-broken woman from destroying the life which had grown too hard for her to bear.

He knew the woman well; she was a member of the company he himself was traveling with, and known to them as Ella Granville, wife of the actor engaged for "heavy villains." This Milford

Granville, as he styled himself, preserved the traditions of his peculiar line of business only too faithfully in his capacity of husband and father, by drinking hard, and bullying and beating his wife and child.

To this helpless, distracted creature, shivering in the wind and in the fear of death, Bruce Laidlaw came as an angel from heaven. Shocked, impressed, and full of pity for the friendless woman who betrayed her love for him in every wild word she uttered, he had led her to her own door as a brother would lead a sister, after solemnly promising to befriend her and her child as long as they all should live.

The world thought the worst of their friendship; Bruce Laidlaw knew the best, and desired no other position towards Ella Granville than that of brother and adviser. Yet, being but mortal, and of a dictatorial turn of mind, he had been much annoyed of late at hearing Mrs. Granville's name associated with those of a fast, supper-party giving class of semi-educational people of whom a young Russian prince and his tutor, Andrew Marsden, were two prominent members.

So Andrew affected a sudden interest after dinner, and bent his cunning young head assiduously over it, whilst from the corner of his eyes he watched the pair at the piano, Bruce playing the accompaniment, whilst Lola sang Irish ballads in that full mellow voice of hers, with the light from the pinkish lamp and the candles on the piano falling softly on the glorious colouring of her skin and hair, and on the perfect outline of Bruce Laidlaw's profile.

To Lola it was a perfect evening, never to be recalled afterwards without a sense of sweet restful delight. She was at her best and most beautiful, with every unconsciously graceful gesture full of a soft, alluring charm.

And so it came about that Lola looked back in vain in the direction of the town, and returned from her expedition by another road two hours later, walking slowly, with flushed cheeks, angry with herself for thinking he would have come when he saw her, hurt, disappointed, and with just the beginning of a strange dull ache at her heart that in later years she was to know too well, but which then, in the morning of her joyous youth, was something new and incomprehensible to her.

That same afternoon, when Bruce, who had a mania for collecting guide-books of every place he visited, proceeded to Oxford railway bookstall, in search of further local literature, he found Miss Marsden there before him, and heard her, unconscious of his presence, close behind her, enquire for a certain summer novel to which he had contributed.

"It isn't worth getting, I assure you," he said.

When Miss Marsden turned and, with the sweetest smile in her cheeks and light of glad surprise in her eyes, simply observed:

"I wanted to read your story. My brother is going to send me all your books from town, but I wanted this to begin with."

"I do wish you wouldn't be so exacting! Except some few of the very best, I cannot imagine why people read novels at all."

"Nonsense!" she retorted, when I am going to read all yours."

"It is a pity about the novel, but so long as you don't show me any about them afterwards, the consequence will be all upon your own head. I can only warn you that they are not worth reading, and as I wrote them, I ought to know."

She laughed, and her laugh was such a revelation of curved red lips parting over regular white teeth, that Bruce felt moved to be nothing but humorous, if only to watch her laugh again.

"But I want you to talk seriously," she said. "I promised to write you about your writing, and more than that, to help you, but you must not be so ignorant of your own work, and then I will get Andrew to send me that one first."

"I have only written six, but I succeeded, and I believe that made a fair success by my own favorite. To tell the truth, long before a book is finished, I know thoroughly good of it, and over the public eye, and by the time it is published for me, or want to hear the result of it mentioned again."

Lola was deeply interested. This state of mind was so very that of a great artist with his soul in his work, and a glance at Bruce's beautiful, intellectual face restored her confidence in the long and arduous of his genius, and she went on whispering her ideal undisturbed.

So he wandered on with Lola by the river and past the red-tiled cottages into the fields, listening while she told him local legends, and presently drawn from his reverie by her warm sympathy, he sketched to her briefly the outline of his own career for twenty years since the time when, a boy of ten, he had been sent away to school on his father's second marriage.

Between the lines of his narration Lola caught glimpses of the nature of the man, who never forgave his father for his harshness to him as a child, and as steadily avoided his relations in prosperity as he had done in poverty, and who carried his intolerance of patronage to the point of seriously hurting the feelings of those who loved and admired him most.

Yet, the longer she conversed with him, the greater the influence he had at once acquired over her became. Bruce Laidlaw had, when he chose to exercise it, a singular charm of manner, frank, humorous, and kindly. He was at his best with Lola, because her enthusiastic sympathy thawed his self-absorbed indifference, and she even charmed him into a tardy consent to return for afternoon tea at the Doctor's house, a compliance which, however, he instantly regretted, as he disliked strangers and cordially detested the only other member of her family with whom he was acquainted.

himself against the notion of the young author as a possible husband for Lola; whilst Andrew, who was already finding Oxford society pall upon him, welcomed the advent of the London author with relief, and exerted himself to his utmost to be entertaining and agreeable.

So Bruce Laidlaw let himself be persuaded into staying for dinner, which meal, with Lola's high spirits at their wildest, with Andrew's smart flippancy, and Bruce's trenchant humour, proved the brightest that had ever yet been enjoyed at Dr. Marsden's table.

The Doctor for his part watched his guest very keenly, but, detecting in Bruce's coldly-brilliant eyes when they rested on Lola no trace of the tenderness he had seen in Aubrey's that morning, he relaxed his vigilance, and gave himself up to thorough enjoyment of an unusually amusing evening.

Andrew Marsden on the other hand, being better versed than his guardian in the unspoken language of a woman's heart, fully recognized the fact that, did things but progress on the lines in which they had started, Aubrey de Vaux had had the remotest chance in Lola's affections if Bruce Laidlaw chose to bid for them. The question to be solved, therefore, was—would Bruce Laidlaw do so?

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He must never marry; the race of De Vaux must be left to die out with him. Of the old generation, Adele de Vaux had taken the veil, Jules was dead in Brazil, Henry dead in Normandy; while Gaston, Madame de Vaux's husband, had not been seen or heard of for more than twenty years. The world believed him dead, and his son shared that opinion. Only in the minds of Victor Merimee and Madame de Vaux was the name associated with a figure horrible as a vision of Dante's—a gibbering, chattering thing by turns ridiculous and violent, gnawing its nails and glaring at intruders from the darkest corner of a darkened room.

To her daughter, Lady Mordaunt, and to the rest of the world, Madame de Vaux was the widow of a wealthy French gentleman of honoured name and cherished memory, and mother of a man young, sweet-tempered, and attractive in manner and appearance, an ideal husband for even an exacting girl. To herself and to Victor Merimee alone she was a woman weighted by a terrible secret, haunted by a terrible fear—wife to a madman, and mother of a son in whose veins ran the tainted blood of whole generations of mullers and suicides.

When a weaker woman would have broken down and died under the strain, Madame de Vaux lived bravely on. Twice only, so far, had she detected in Aubrey's conduct any symptoms to excite her watchful fears. Three years ago, while still at college, he had fallen violently in love, and had believed in some conspicuously foolish fashion whilst under the influence of this infatuation, that his mother had been forced against her will into consenting to Dr. Merimee's proposal, and that the young man should travel round the world in his care and companionship during these early and dangerous years of his life.

The Doctor's judgement had been verified by the result. Aubrey returned to England stronger and healthier in mind and body; but in less than twenty-four hours after his arrival at Montague Lodge, it became clear to his mother that the good he had gained during his travels was likely to be imperilled by his return, and that the love inspired in him by Lola Marsden at twenty-five would be of a more enduring and more dangerous character than that he had displayed for a provincial lass three years ago.

Naturally truthful, for her son's sake, Madame de Vaux grew intriguing and insidious. It was her aim to bring Bruce and Lola together. To this end she visited the girl and took her out driving to talk to her of Bruce; she invited Mr. Laidlaw to her house to talk to him of Lola; she teased Aubrey to go to London on trifling commissions to his step-sister, that he might be out of the way when, by elaborate arrangements, she contrived that Bruce and Lola should meet at her house in the afternoon; she left them alone together when she could, and sent them in the twilight, watching them from the window of the house with a fervent prayer that they might marry, and that another danger might be thus removed from her son's path.

"I am doing the greatest kindness of Lola," she justified her manoeuvres to herself. "She loves the man. He has genius; her influence will elevate it, as marriage with her will reform him. It is long a service to both."

She drove over to Bruce's hotel on the pretext of bringing him some rare old books from her library, and bothered him considerably in the midst of planning out a plot.

"I want to talk to you about my dear child Lola," she said, while she watched her face and puzzled himself over the keen anxiety that shone in her eyes. "You really ought to put her in a book, for character is such an unusual blending of the passionate and poetical, the perfectly innocent and the quickly intelligent. Besides, among girls of the present day—frivolous, meaningless, and absorbed in dancing, flirting, and love-letters—she stands by her capability of self-sacrificing devotion, and blind love. I am afraid she is made to suffer, for she is so lonely."

"Have you any reason to believe that Miss Marsden has formed some unfortunate attachment?" he asked.

He had been nearly a month in the town, and had heard that Lola was voted a beautiful beauty among the local lady-killers.

"I don't know yet whether it is unimpaired," she replied, and, fixing her eyes so searchingly upon Bruce that he felt it necessary to look away.

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