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THE TWO BROTHERS.

AN IRISH TALK.

The village of Ballydhas was situated in as sweet a valley as ever gladdened the eye and the heart of man to look upon. Contentment, peace, and prosperity, walked step by step with its happy inhabitants; and the people were marked by a pastoral simplicity of manners, such as is still to be found in some of the remote and secluded hamlets of Ireland. Within two miles of the village of Ballaghmore, the market town of the parish. It also bore the traces of peace and industry. Around it lay a rich fertile country, studded with warm homesteads, waving fields, and residences of a higher rank, at once elegant and fashionable.

Many a fair day, have we witnessed in this quiet and thriving market-town, and it is pleasant to go back in imagination to one of these hilarious festivals. About twelve o'clock the fair tide is full, when the utmost activity in solid business prevails. For an hour or two this continues. About three o'clock the tide is evidently on the ebb; business begins to slacken; and now it is that the people fall into distinct groups for the purpose of social enjoyment. If two young folk have been for some time "cortin' one another," the "bachelor," which in Ireland means a suitor, generally contrives to bring his friends and those of his sweetheart together. The very fact of these accepting the "trate," on either side, or both, is a good omen, and considered tantamount to the mutual consent of their respective connexions.

Amidst such scenes as these, at the fair of Ballaghmore, several years ago, a party of the kind now alluded to was seen to enter a public house. It was less numerous than was usual on such occasions, and consisted of a young man, a middle aged woman, and her two daughters—one grown, the other only about fifteen. Who is—ha!—it is not necessary to enquire. Alley Bawn Murray! Gentle reader, how with heart-felt respect to humble virtue and beauty! She is that widow's daughter, the pride of the parish, and the beloved of all who can appreciate goodness, affection, and filial piety. The child accompanying them is her sister, and that fine, manly, well-built, handsome youth, is even now pledged to the modest and beautiful girl. He is the son of a wealthy farmer, some time dead, and her mother is comparatively poor; but in purity, in truth, and an humble sense of religion, their hearts are each rich and each equal.

Their history is very brief and simple.—Felix O'Donnell was the son of a farmer, as we have said, sufficiently extensive and industrious to be wealthy, without possessing any of the vulgar pride which rude independence frequently engrafs upon the ignorant and narrow-hearted. His family consisted of two sons and a daughter—Maura, the last named, being the eldest, and Felix, by several years the junior of his brother Hugh. Between the two brothers there was in many things a marked contrast of character, whilst in others there might be said to exist a striking similarity. Hugh was a dark browed, fiery man when opposed, though in general quiet and inoffensive. His passions blazed out with fury for a moment, and only for a moment; for no sooner had he been borne by their vehemence into the commission of an error, than he became quickly alive to the promptings of a heart naturally affectionate and kind. In money transactions he had the character of being a hard man; yet were there many in the parish who could declare that they found him liberal and considerate. The truth was, that he estimated money at more than its just value, without having absolutely given up his heart to its influence. When a young man, though in good circumstances, he looked cautiously about him, less for the best or the handsomest wife, than the largest dower. In the speculation, as far as it was pecuniary, he succeeded; but his domestic peace was overshadowed by the gloom of his own character, and not unfrequently disturbed by the violent temper of a wife who united herself to him with an indifferent heart.

His brother Felix, in all that was amiable and affectionate, strongly resembled him; but there the resemblance terminated. Felix was subject to none of his gloomy moods or violent outbursts of temper. He was manly, liberal, and cheerful—valued money at its proper estimate, and frankly declared that in the choice of a wife he would never sacrifice his happiness to acquire it.

"I have enough of my own," he would say; "and when I meet the woman that my heart chooses, whether she has fortune or not, that's the girl that I will bring to share it, if she can love me."

Felix and his sister both resided together; for after his father's death he succeeded to the inheritance that had been designed for him. Maura O'Donnell was in that state of life in which we feel it extremely difficult to determine whether a female is hopeless or not upon the subject of marriage. Her tempers had begun to ferment; her temper became shrewish; still she loved Felix whose good humour constituted him an excellent butt for her irascible sallies. He was her younger brother, too, of whom she was justly proud; and she knew that Felix in spite of the pungeny of her frequent reproaches, loved her deeply as was evident by the many instances of his considerate attention in bringing her home presents of dress, and in contributing as far as lay in his power, to her comfort.

The courtship of Alley Bawn and Felix had arrived, on the fair-day of Ballaghmore, to a crisis which required decision on the part of the man. They had been seen together, shown the reader, to a public-house. Their conversation, which was only such as takes place in a thousand similar instances, we do not mean to detail. It was tender and firm on the part of Felix, and affectionate between him and her. With that high pride, which is only another name for humility, she urged him to forget her, "if it was not plasht" to his friends. You know, Felix, she continued, "that I am poor an' you are rich, an' I wouldn't wish to be dragged into a family that couldn't respect me."

"Alley, dear," replied Felix, "I know that both Hugh and Maura love me in their hearts; and although they make a show of anger in the beginnin', yet they'll soon soften, and will love you as they do me."

"Well Felix," replied Alley, "my mother and you are present; if by my mother says I ought—" "I do, darling," said her mother, "that is, I can't feel any particular objection to it. Yet somehow my mind is troubled. I know that what he says is what will happen; but, for all that—oh, Felix, aroon, there's something over me about this same match—I don't know, I'm willin' en' I'm not willin'."

They rose to depart; and as both families lived the beautiful village of Ballydhas, which we have already described to the reader, of course their walk home was such as lovers could wish. The arrangements for their marriage were on that night concluded and the mother, after some feebly expressed misgivings, at which Felix and Alley laughed heartily, was induced to consent that on the third Sunday following they should be joined in wedlock. Had Felix been disposed to conceal his marriage from Hugh and Maura, at least until the eve of its occurrence, the publishing of their banns in the chapel would of course have disclosed it.—When his sister heard that the arrangements were completed, she poured forth a torrent of abuse against what she considered the folly and simplicity of a mere boy, who allowed himself to be caught in the snares of an artful girl, with nothing but a handsome face to recommend her. Felix received all this with good humour, and replied only in a strain of jocularly to everything she said.

Hugh, on the other hand, contented himself with a single observation. "Felix," said he, "I won't see you throw yourself away upon a girl that is no fit match for you. If you can't take care of yourself I will. Once for all, I tell you that *this marriage must not take place.*"

As he uttered the words, his dark brows were bent, and his eyes flashed with a gleam of that ungovernable passion for which he

was so remarkable. Felix, at all times peaceful, and always willing to acknowledge his elder brother's natural right to exercise a due degree of authority over him, felt that this was stretching it too far. Still he made no reply, nor indeed did Hugh allow him time to retort, had he been so disposed.—They separated without more words, each resolved to accomplish his avowed purpose.

The opposition of Hugh and Maura to his marriage, only strengthened Felix's resolution to make his beloved and misrepresented Alley Bawn the rightful mistress of his hearth, as she already was of his affections. At length the happy Sunday morning arrived, and never did a more glorious Sun light up the beautiful valley of Ballydhas, than that which shed down its radiance from heaven upon their union. Felix's heart was full of that eger and trembling delight, which, where there is pure and disinterested love, always marks our emotions upon that blessed epoch in human life.—Maura, contrary to her wont, was unusually silent during the whole morning; but Felix could perceive that she watched all his motions with the eye of a lynx. When the hour of going to chapel approached, he deemed it time to dress, and, for that purpose, went to a large oaken tallboy that stood in the kitchen, in order to get out his clothes. It was locked, however, and his sister told him at once, that the key, which was in her possession, should not pass into his hands that day. "No," she continued, "nor the key that you put on the door."

During the altercation which ensued, Hugh entered. "What's all this?" he enquired; "what racket's this?" "Oh, he wants the key to deck himself up for marrying that pet of his." "Felix," said his enraged brother, "I'm over you in place of your father, and I tell you that I'll put a stop to this day's work. Be my soul, it's a horse-ship I ought to take to you, and lash all thoughts of marriage out of you; if you marry this portionless, good-for-nothing hussey—" Felix's eyes flashed. He manfully repelled the right of his brother to interfere. It was in vain. After several unsuccessful remonstrances, and even supplications very humbly expressed, a fierce struggle ensued between the brothers, which was only terminated by the interference of the two servant-men, who, with some difficulty, forced the elder out of the house, and brought him across the fields towards his own home. Maura then gave up the key, and the youthful bridegroom was soon dressed and prepared to meet his "man," and a few friends whom he had invited, at the chapel. His mind, however, was disturbed and his heart sank at this ill-omened commencement of his wedding day.

Let us follow him on his way. He had not gone far when he saw his brother walking towards him through the fields, his arms folded, and his eyes almost hidden by his heavy brows; sullen ferocity was in his looks, and his voice, for he addressed him, was hollow with suppressed rage. "So," said he, "you will ruin yourself! Go back home, Felix." "For God's sake, Hugh, let me alone, let me pass." "You will go?" said the other. "I will Hugh." "Then may bad luck go with you, if you do. I order you to stay at home, I say." "Mind your own business, Hugh, and I'll mind mine," was the reply given him.

Felix walked on by making a small circuit out of the direct path, for he was anxious not only to proceed quickly, as his time was limited, but, above all things, to avoid a collision with his brother. The characteristic fury of the latter shot out in a burst that resembled momentary madness as much as rage. "Is that my answer?" he shouted in the hoarse, quivering accents of passion and, with the rapid energy of the dark impulse which guided him, he snatched up a stone from a ditch, and flung it at his brother, whose back was towards him. Felix fell forward in an instant, but betrayed, after his fall, no symptoms of motion; the stillness of apparent death was in every limb.—Hugh, after the blow had been given, stood rooted to the earth, and looked as if the de-

mon that possessed him had fled on the moment the fearful act had been committed.—His now bloodless lips quivered, his frame became relaxed, and the wild tremor of horrible apprehension shook him from limb to limb. Immediately a fearful cry was heard far over the fields, and the words, "Oh! yeah, yeah, Felix, my brother, agra, can't you spake to me?" struck upon the heart of Maura and the servant-men, with a feeling of dismay, deep and deadly.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, with clasped hands and upturned eyes, "Oh! my boy, my boy!—Felix, Felix, what has happened you?" Again the agonized cry of the brother was loud and frantic. "Oh! yeah, yeah, Felix, are you dead?—brother, agra, can't you spake to me?"

With rapid steps they rushed to the spot; but ah! what a scene was there to blast their sight and sear the brain of his sister, and indeed of all who could look upon it. The young bridegroom smote down when his foot was on the very threshold of happiness, and by the hand of a brother.

Hugh, in the meantime, had turned up Felix from the prone posture in which he lay, with a hope—a frenzied, a desperate hope—of ascertaining whether or not life was extinct. In this position the stricken boy was lying, his brother, like a maniac, standing over him, when Maura and the servants arrived. One glance, a shudder, then a long ghastly gaze at Hugh, and she sank down beside the insensible victim of his fury. "What," said Hugh, wildly "Oh! Felix, Felix! you are bappy, you are happy, agra, brother; but for me, oh, for me, my hour of mercy is past an' gone.—I can never look to heaven more! How can I live?" he muttered furiously to himself; how can I live? and I don't die. My brain's turbin'. I needn't pray to God to curse the hand that struck you dead, Felix dear, for I feel this minute that his curse is on me."

Felix was borne in, but no arm would Hugh suffer to encircle him but his own.—Poor Maura recovered, and although in a state of absolute distraction, yet had she presence of mind to remember that they ought to use every means in their power to restore the boy to life, if it were possible.—Water was got, with which his face was sprinkled; in a little time he breathed, opened his eyes, looked mournfully about him, and asked what had happened him. Never was pardon to the malefactor, for the firm tread of land to the shipwrecked mariner, so welcome as the dawn of returning life in Felix, was to his brother. The moment he saw the poor youth's eyes fixed upon him, and heard his voice, he threw himself on his knees at the bed-side, clasped him in his arms, and with an impetuous tide of sensations, in which were blended joy, grief, burning affection, and remorse, he kissed his lips, strained him to his bosom, and wept with such agony, that poor Felix was compelled to console him.

"Oh! Felix, Felix!" exclaimed Hugh, "what was it I did to you, or how could the enemy of man tempt me to—to—Oh Felix, agra, say you're not hurted, Felix, dear—say only that you'll be as well as ever an' I take take God an' every one present to witness, that, from this minute till the day of my death, a harsh word 'ill never cross my lips to you. Don't you know, Felix, in spite of my dark temper's puttin' me in a passion with you sometimes, that I always loved you?"

"Yes, you did, Hugh," replied Felix, "you did, an' I still knew you did. I didn't often contradict you, because I knew, too, that the passion would soon go off you, and that you'd be kind to me again." After uttering these words, the suffering Felix gradually recovered, but it was only at intervals that he was free from pain or clear in his faculties. His partial recovery, however, such as it was, gratified both Hugh and Maura, and each strove to assure him of their hearty concurrence in his marriage with his dearly beloved Alley, and hastened to make preparations for entertaining the company which might be expected to be present at the marriage feast.