

mation as would hang a few baronies, and swear then and for evermore upon the bones of Cromwell to be a loyal, true and pious Sassenach."

"An oath that I'm afraid you yourself would wince at, good father," smiled the old nobleman, "though, of course, you are a loyal man."

"Pardon me if I have wronged you even in thought, Father John," cried Gerald earnestly. "God knows, I ought not. But perhaps those in my position have need to be suspicious of kindness—"

"And turn a cold shoulder to their nearest and dearest friends," remarked the Earl, reproachfully.

"My lord, if you had not been Cabinet Minister, and this had not been a traitor's cell, I ask you to believe I would have known how to welcome you, though perhaps I can never know how to thank you as I ought. But it is a condition of the fate I have earned for myself that there should be no grumbling, no begging for favours, no receiving them when they offend our poor principles, such as they are."

"But," rejoined the old nobleman, good humouredly, "suppose that, having travelled pretty much at lightning speed all the way from Dublin, with our good friend here, Father John, on purpose to do you good service; suppose, after all my break-neck hurry, a wayward boy gets into sublime sulks and says he'll have none of my good service; and suppose I, like the stubborn old man I am, say I won't go back to Dublin with a fool's cap for my pains, but will make myself at home whether you like it or no, and force my favours like good physic down your throat—what will you say to that, sir?—supposing one of these favours is your liberty?"

"My liberty! Then, my lord, I should think of the conditions."

"But suppose I say I will have no conditions. Suppose I turn you outside this prison door, and lock it forever in your face?"

"Then—then—Oh my! lord, you do not, cannot mean it?"

"Gerald, I do!" cried the old nobleman, embracing the youth with childish enthusiasm.

"Your free pardon is in my pocket. You are a free man this moment!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

RATIONAL REBEL.

Whether Lord Atholston cried more behind his spectacles than Father John did behind his

red pocket handkerchief, or which of them made the bravest show of utter and unchristian indifference, we will not pretend to decide, but that both one and the other were so happy they were prepared to stand on their heads or give any other equally convincing proof of hilarious blessedness, no right-minded historian would dare conceal. As for Gerald O'Dwyer the announcement of his freedom was for some moments a dizzy ravishment of sense, such as one might feel who had been suspended by a thread over a fathomless abyss and was suddenly safe. It was Freedom?—the being snatched from the grave into atmosphere of life—to feel the young blood of more throbs in veins almost frozen with Despair!

The cold walls stared in white wonder at the irreverent scene of happiness they were forced to witness. The rats in their dark burrows agreed it was a scandalous desecration of the place. But such scenes should be unviolated.

For a space Gerald hung on his uncle's neck without speaking a word. His heart was too full. At last he could say:

"I did not deserve this from you, Lord Atholston."

"You will never deserve it as long as you persist in calling me 'Lord Atholston,' and talking as if 'twere quite an heroic achievement to save only my nephew's life by a pen-stroke. If there are any compliments in the way, why thank Father O'Meara, my boy, and say all the nice things you can of him, for, if Father O'Meara had not travelled to Dublin and told me your whole story, you might have died, my poor boy, and I, who could save you by only stretching out my hand, would most probably have never heard of your danger till it was too late."

"It is not my first obligation to Father O'Meara," said the young man, gripping the priest's hand fondly.

"And if Father O'Meara is to have a word at all," broke in the priest, good humouredly, "he'd say he's repaid cent per cent by knowing there's *one* Cabinet Minister at last under the sun who has a heart inside his vest, and that there's *one* dear old rebel who has a head on his shoulders and is likely to keep it. The only thing I want now before I sing my *Nunc dimittis* is to see the roof on Kilsheelan Castle, and to finish just one tumbler of punch in the old dining-room with O'Dwyer Garv."

Gerald smiled sadly. The aspiration recalled to his memory that he was only free to be once more a homeless wanderer on the earth, for