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AILEY MOORE;

A TALE OF THE TIMES.

CHAPTER VIII.—HOW SHAUN A DHERK CONSULTS FOR THE PEACE OF THE COUNTRY, AND MR. JOYCE SNAPPER LOSES THE BOND.

On the following evening, just when the hand of the clock on Mr. Snapper's mantelpiece was pointing to twenty minutes past ten, there were three heavy knocks heard at or on Mr. Snapper's hall door.

Mr. Joyce Snapper had, at the moment, taken off his cravat and put on his dressing-gown. For a very considerable period Mr. Snapper had been accustomed to put on his dressing-gown when he expected any stranger—for a dressing-gown is quite a modish kind of garment, and Mr. Snapper thought he 'looked well' in it.

'Sarawl Dhia sling,' cried Jude in the kitchen—for Jude's horror was night visitors. In fact she had nearly lost her life by them twice already, as John and herself had been on these occasions put upon their knees to produce Mr. Joyce Snapper's person, and only saved themselves by producing Mr. Snapper's guns, and swearing their book oaths that Mr. Snapper himself had received a sudden call to go to some place, of which they, Jude and John, knew nothing, only the direction.

'Chi an-riagh e!' said John, in a low voice, and looking out under his eyelids, as if he feared to see the new comer present himself in the ceiling.

'Aishib!' answered Jude in the same voice. Three knocks heavier than the preceding were heard, and John seized the poker. Jude was starting for the barn.

'What the hell are ye about there down stairs? Gone to sleep and so on, as usual?—John! John! I say—'

'Choke yer gauchter neck,' prayed John, only not loud. 'Yis, sir,' he continued, 'thee's dhredful rappin', faith, sir,' he said, going to the foot of the staircase; and—'

'Open the hall-door, you cowardly spalpeen,' said Mr. Joyce Snapper. 'Open the hall-door, and don't be there like a dog in a sack, and so on; a nice defender of the house, and so forth, we have.'

John stood rebuked, and happily too: for John knew Mr. Joyce Snapper sufficiently to believe there was nothing to be feared when Mr. Joyce Snapper was courageous.

'Knock! knock! knock again; but this time John is just opening the door.'

John's heart rose up to his mouth, as he said himself, when he saw the person that stood outside. In fact, only two things prevented him from catching the intruder by the neck; for John had his own intentions and his own views about the country. The two things were, that he saw no use in it, and that he was afraid to do it.—John suspected that the fellow whom he that moment looked upon was an informer, for he had seen him at the house two or three times before, and at the same unseasonable hour.

The visitor was Shaun a dherk, who came to give his assistance in 'doing justice' and in 'pacifying the country.'

Mr. Joyce Snapper stood at the top of the staircase, and recognised his friend.

'Let in that man,' cried Mr. Joyce Snapper.

'Yis, sir,' answered John.

'Benaacht Dhia cruil!' said Shaun, as he moved across the threshold. 'God's blessing on you!'

'Dhia as Mhuire goith,' John answered mechanically, and heartily. 'God and Mary with you; for the Irish salutation is always repaid by something more than it gives. But John, as has been intimated, most sadly belied the reply on his lips, by the curse inside his teeth.

'Och, but you're the handsome boy, sure,' said Shaun, as he passed by the servant.

But as if recollecting himself, he turned back after two steps, and sinking his voice to a whisper, while he looked as knowing as a petty session attorney; 'I saw some wan, a vic!' continued Shaun; 'and throth I don't blame her for signin', so I don't; for faith you have a pair uv eyes uv yer own, a gra,' and Shaun shook his head admiringly. 'Mary Fling,' added Shaun, 'is the finest colleen in the barony, and a good father and mother's child. Never blush, a vic, 'tis the proud boy you ought to be, this night, a vic; and be sartin I have a word at the Flings, 'Tbhigin the trahair?' which means 'Do you understand brother?' and Shaun looked more knowing than ever. 'I left her just now,' said Shaun, moving off, 'and I hard ur sayin to a showman, that had London show in 'em, and all the world, that he'd do well if he come up here, uch! but he have the sights sure enough.'

The time of this dialogue was not so long as it may appear; at all events, it did not appear long to Mr. Joyce Snapper. Mr. Snapper was very fond of graceful positions, and he also liked to see himself in the looking-glass, at night.—Why the former was so—that is, why Mr.

Snapper liked a graceful position is no mystery to the reader;—why he delighted to stand between two candles, and admire himself at night let us leave to the learned in human nature. But assuredly Mr. Snapper did like, at night to stand between two candles and view himself in his mirror; and then he tossed his hair most fantastically, and looked numberless times at his teeth, and flung open his vest, and looked at the studs in his shirt, and at his eyes and eyebrows, and front face and side face, and very naturally Mr. Snapper concluded that if he was not a handsome man, he was a smart-looking, interesting person, and worthy of any respectable 'match'; particularly, considering the 'cool-thousands' he had 'laid by.'

It is not wonderful, either that Shaun a dherk found Mr. Snapper only just seated in his arm-chair, his arms folded in a free, gentlemanlike way, and one leg thrown over the other.—Moreover, on his feet were two very red slippers.

Let us not omit, however, to mention that just as Shaun placed his foot on the lowest step of the stairs, and as Mister John was about closing the hall door, a man appeared approaching the house, who beckoned his hand very familiarly, and nodded his head very knowingly, and made certain movements with the palm of his right hand towards the earth, all of which signified that John was to wait for him a little, and that he, John, would not be sorry for it, if he did.

The image of Mary Fling rose up in John's imagination, and the images of fifty pounds, and four milch cows, which her grand uncle had left her, and which some fortunate man was destined to receive with herself; so he waited for the new comer, whom he rightly judged to be the showman, who showed people London and a power o' places abroad. Shaun a dherk looked like one who would have a long sit above stairs; it was quite reasonable that John, Jude, and the showman should have a pleasant sit below.

And, in fact, so they had—for the showman was the identical 'north countryman,' with the large nose and large grey eyes, any heavy eyebrows and thickish lips, that the whole barony was speaking of. Several religious people gave him 'the other side of the road,'—old innocent people, however,—for he had a lantern; and when he dark-ned the room, he brought out upon a sheet, before whom he placed the lantern, a great variety of places and persons—the Devil and the Miller being some of the latter. Besides, he was known to have told the fortunes of several with great exactness. Young people welcomed and feared the 'north countryman!' and old people, as we have intimated, would have nothing to do with him; but all admitted that when he came the way he never ate his bit alone—and for that purpose often opened his wallet in a poor woman's cabin, where he left more than men that came there in their jaunting cars, or on their carriages. That was Mr. Brian McCann.

Mr. Joyce Snapper welcomed Shaun a dherk, very patronizingly, of course, and as he was in his 'best style,' he sat with the light full upon his face—upon his shirt-bosom—and upon his grey pantaloons—and red slippers. Shaun a dherk, through humility, and because he wasn't in any style at all, would rather sit 'over neir the window,' if his honor 'pleased'; and as Mr. Snapper made no objection, this minor detail was arranged.

'Well, Shaun, how goes the world, as the saying is—eh?—Gone regularly through that affair, and so on? And Mr. Snapper smiled—a very meaning smile—and looked at least one hundred ways in one half-minute of time. He had an advantage in his eyes, the reader is aware.

'In throth, yer honor, I done a grate dale, an' I hope yer honor will consider me, fur I am a poor man, yer honor, you know.'

'What does Shaaban say?'

'Och, by coorse he made a poor mouth, and he said his owldest boy was in the favor, God bless the bearers! and his owld father was sick, he said; and he hadn't the money, and so he couldn't.'

'Couldn't, and all that? Shaun, eh?—Couldn't?'

'Faith, yis—he couldn't. The place looked poor, sure enough—and 'twasn't like the house o' the Shaanahans a bit, an' tellin' the truth.'

'Well, Shaun, is that your news—confound it—and he couldn't—couldn't—I know—then he'll march, as the saying is—the rogue's march. He'll march, if he was to carry his father's coffin in the cart, and his son sitting upon it—he'll march—march,' cried Mr. Joyce Snapper, indignantly.

'I hinted that, yer honor,' returned Shaun a dherk. 'And I told him that 'twas better fur 'im to ofsur, bekase yer honor couldn't ax id—but he shuk his head, milancholy-like, and he looked in sorrow.'

'Well?'

'So I said I was sorry for 'im; and I was goin' away, when he called me back again.—'Shaun,' sis he 'war you spakin' to the agint? 'Me?' sis I, 'spakin' to the agint? Do ye think his honor 'ud spake to the likes o' me?' 'Well,' says he, 'Shaun, what 'll I do—what 'll I do?' and his eyes was full o' tears like. 'It 'll take all my stock—every bit uv it—to pay all that money, Shaun; and thin—och one—not a dhrup o' milk to feed the owld or the young—and the poor owld man that never shut his dure agin any oop, he'll be hungry—the father that rared me, Shaun.'

'Well, all that's very good, and so forth—we all know—well.'

'Arrah, your honor, faith, I was near cryin' myself, so I was—case you know—Mich have the name of a bein' a good son to the owld people, and I'm growin' o'uld now,' said Shaun, with a sigh. 'But to make a long story short, yer honor, he looked round the owld house—he was born in the little room where's the owld father, yer honor—and I saw he wouldn't fly from the nest. 'My father's heart will brake,' he said, 'if I'm turned out; and he hasn't long to stay wid us now.' And thin, he paused, yer honor. 'Yis,' sis he, 'buy the renewal of the lease, and the son of owld Paddy Shaaban will have enough left to berry his father, and thin he can go out wid his childer and his wife to beg.' 'Yis—yis,' he said, 'My father shan't never know—never! He'll be here to-morrow, yer honor.' 'Shaun, you are 'Solomon the Wise,' as the saying is; Shaun, there's a golden guinea for you.'

'Thank yer honor—yer honor deserves all I'm doin' and I'll do more, please God.'

'The remains of that Hynes family—and so on—is a great bother; but the vagabond always pays up.'

'Och, sure, nothin' is asier than the way yer honor knows.'

'What way?' asked Mr. Snapper, with quite a complacent smile.

'Faith, thin, yer honor, 'tisn't I would be better, yer honor, I'm sure. But you know, yer honor, 'tis parties that way, that disturbs the pace of the country always. Little bits of howldin's that can't stand; and thin they want to get a change, somehow, and all that; and thin they join the 'terries' and the 'boys,' you see; and when all the time, if the land was together, the place 'ud be full o' respectab' people, and we'd have pace and quietness.'

'Shaun, you speak like a man of sense.'

'Oh yis, yer honor, and that's the reason you put the powder in that beggarwoman's sou's thatch, that he was transported fur.'

'Me!—eh—what do you mean—what do you mean, eh?'

'Och, yer honor,' Shaun replied, in a low, confidential tone. 'Sure Grimes and I war hand and-glar,' and I know'd all of it.'

Mr. Joyce Snapper looked full at Shaun, and Shaun looked as open and candid as the sky.—Mr. Snapper was quite red this time, and he turned away from the candles a little—a very prudent course.

But Mr. Snapper said nothing, he felt as if the beggarman knew everything and every one. He could kill Shaun, and he might attempt it—the thought struck him; but to dispute with him was impossible. Shaun knew too much, and he looked like adamant—Shaun did.

'And yer honor,' Shaun continued as if nothing at all had occurred; 'I hard something about another that you know; faith, this house would look handsomer if a body I know was there. I hard something that brings home the foul murder of Mr. Skern.'

Mr. Joyce Snapper absolutely stood up.—He looked like a man blackening for death. Shaun spoke in so solemn a tone—it looked like accusation.

'Do you want anything, yer honor?' said Shaun, very solicitously. 'Can I do nothing for yer honor?' he asked.

'Nothing—nothing. Well Shaun, you were saying something, and so on.'

'I was, sir—yes I was. Gerald Moore can—'

Mr. Joyce Snapper's heart beat like two horses racing.

'Gerald Moore can be convicted by evidence.'

'Eh?' cried Snapper, entirely reassured.—'Eh—what's that—tell me that again; Moore, the proud scholar—the—Moore—eh?'

'Yes.'

'How? Speak, man.'

'I know a man that saw him speaking to another; that other swore his book oath the same evening to murder Skern, and appointed the place and the hour to do it; it was done at the place and the hour, and there is witnesses that can swear it.'

'Glory to Shaun a dherk, you are better than a dozen police and justices of the peace, as the saying is. What are the people who help you?'

'Och, sir, many a wan I have to help me, be-

kase I travel the world wide, and I sees the world's heart—the inside and the outside, you know, Mr. Snapper, and I know you're loyal—a loyal man, you know—and I'm doing my duty by a loyal man, in helping him to be a magistrate, and to keep the pace.'

Mr. Snapper was flattered by this speech; but still he Mr. Snapper did not feel perfectly easy.

'Any more, Shaun?' demanded Mr. Joyce Snapper.

'Och, yis—a dale more, yer honor,' answered the beggarman. 'I have, in a secret place, something the dead man had about him that night, and I got it from Mr. Moore's own house.'

'You have?—the d—eh?'

'Throth, I have, then—and I paid well for it, too.'

'What?'

'A bond.'

'A bond!—to whom?'

'To Mr. Skern, from old Moore.'

'For how much?'

'For one thousand pounds.'

Mr. Joyce Snapper burst out laughing; he laughed very heartily. Never before or since had or has Mr. Snapper laughed so loudly.

Shaun looked very confounded.

'Is all your information like that, Shaun—as the saying is?' demanded Mr. Snapper.

'Why, yer honor?'

'Because that's not true.'

'Not true?'

'Not true, Shaun.'

And Mr. Joyce Snapper's heart dilated, and his chest stretched proudly out, when he said to Shaun a dherk—

'Shaun, be easy on that matter—you're wrong—I have that bond.'

Shaun shook his head.

'I have, Shaun, I have that bond, I say.'

Shaun put out his hands, and shook them.

'A mistake,' said Shaun—'a mistake. Ax the people. Shaun a dherk is always right.—You have a copy, may be?'

'No.'

'Yes.'

Mr. Joyce Snapper, more proudly still—a little indignant in fact—rose from his chair, and rapidly went to a desk—an old fashioned standing mahogany desk. There stood the venerable piece of furniture, with all its brass handles up the front and its broad polished breast. It was against the wall beside the mantel-piece. The bell-pull hung just beside it.

Mr. Joyce Snapper slowly opened the desk; and having put in his hand, without any search, at once—but tenderly, ever so tenderly—he took out a piece of parchment. The parchment was nicely rolled and taped—taped with red tape. Solemnly rather, he unrolled the knot and unrolled the parchment. He brought it over to Shaun.

'Now?' said he.

Shaun looked at the parchment, and then at Mr. Joyce Snapper.

'Well?' said Snapper.

'The copy,' said Shaun.

'Why, you omadhawn, as they say, I'm one of her Majesty's attorneys-at-law. Look at the names, and so on! Look at the names, Shaun! Look here! And he spread the paper broadly over the table.

Shaun a dherk rose. He stood right between the candles and the window blind, until his figure was perfectly defined upon it; and he struck his stick on the floor as he made a step towards the table.

As Shaun looker over the parchment, there was a shriek from the kitchen which startled Mr. Snapper, and apparently very much startled Shaun a dherk.

'What's that?' said Shaun. 'What's that?'

Mr. Snapper, like a courageous man, rushed to the door; but, like a cautious man, he stood there. Shaun a dherk, like a pious man, went on his knees to say his prayers. Having listened for a moment, and heard nothing below, Mr. Snapper was gaining courage, and really opened the door to go down stairs. But at the same moment the window of the drawing-room was raised as if by magic.

Mr. Snapper's heart sank—he rushed towards the end of the room, and cried 'Thieves.'

Shaun a dherk roared 'Murder.'

And the people below stairs were crying anything and everything, but no one paid them any attention.

The barrel of a brass blunderbuss now made its appearance at the open window, and was soon followed by the owner, or the bearer. Mr. Snapper's blood curled in his heart—he thought his hour had come.

The burglar was a powerful man—a fellow of light step and proud bearing. He wore a shirt over his clothes. On his head was a woman's beaver bonnet, and his face was covered with a crape mask.

He laid down the window, walked right into

the middle of the room, and summoned Snapper to his presence.

'I'm only a poor man as looks for his bit, sir,' cried Shaun, 'and have mercy on me this night! Och, sure you wouldn't,' continued Shaun; 'shure you wouldn't injure a poor ould crathur.'

'Hold your tongue,' said the stranger peremptorily. 'Hold your tongue, you old spy. Your gray hair saved you many a day and night, or your old carcass would be feeding the crows long ago.' The fellow spoke quite majestically.

Again he summoned Snapper and commended him to go on his knees.

The land agent shivering obeyed, but cried for grace. Shaun a dherk struck his hands on the table in an agony, and cried mercy.—The stranger placed the blunderbuss at Snapper's breast.

'If you believe in God,' said the assassin, in a solemn tone, 'if you believe in God, pray.'

'Oh, mercy! mercy!' cried Snapper.

'Villan!' said the stranger; 'the graves and the high ways is full of the dead and the broken hearts, that you tormented, and scourged, and drove from home, and happiness and hope. Oh, you dark, black devil, the curse of the poor is upon you, day and night; and justice is come at last. Pray, if you have a prayer to say.'

'Och, one! och, one! och, one!' cried the beggarman.

'Spare me,' said Snapper, 'and I'll swear—oh, I'll make every amends, every amends, all amends. I'll swear, I'll swear. Oh spare me.'

The rebel deliberately, and fastly, too, tied Shaun and Snapper together, and just as deliberately tied them both to the grate. He then quietly—even slowly—it was so quietly, he quenched all the lights—the murderer seemed to have conceived some frightful thought. He would not shoot them perhaps—he would beat out their brains, or cut their throats, or—'

Snapper felt a knife at his neck.

Humily and fervently, though not loudly, he cried for mercy.

'Och one! och one!' repeated Shaun a dherk.

'Silence! silence! like the grave of poor Brown,' said the stranger. 'Silence, like the empty cabins of the roadside,' he continued, 'or by the eternal—you shan't get one innit longer.'

Mr. Snapper shook from head to foot. He pushed closer to Shaun a dherk, who still muttered his low 'Ochone.'

There was an awful silence. The heart of Mr. Snapper thumped so loudly at his breast, that it was audible through the whole room.

Having engaged himself for some minute or two about the old desk, and muttered some other threats and curses, the assassin went down stairs. He was determined to be secure. The servants were first to die, or to be prevented from giving the alarm. What moments these were to Mr. Joyce Snapper and to Shaun a dherk!

However, five minutes passed, and no one was heard returning; ten minutes passed, no one came; a quarter of an hour, and steps were heard at distance—a measured tread it was, and more than one. Steadily, steadily, the steps approached the land agent's house.

A gleam of hope—he knew not why, shot into the soul of Mr. Snapper.

At length the steps were heard on the walk approaching the door; and then at the door, and then in the hall, and then on the stairs. There was scrambling, and tumbling, and cursing, in the hurry; but Mr. Snapper recognised the voices of the police.

'Hurra!' cried the land agent. 'Hurra!' he cried again. 'Here! here! here!' he cried.

'God save the Queen!' exclaimed Shaun a dherk.

Caps knocked against the door-frame, and bayonet scabbards against the door, and guns made frightful noises as they were grounded on the floor, and during all the time Mr. Joyce Snapper was laughing—laughing immoderately. He was almost beside himself with joy—a thing not very surprising, we should think, considering the time he has had.

'Why, Mr. Snapper,' said the serjeant of police, 'here is dreadful work indeed. Where are you? Johnston, will you strike a light. So. Thunders!' said the serjeant, when he beheld the pair of captives. 'Thunders, but the rascals have left you in an awful pickle, Mr. Snapper.'

There was no resisting the impulse to a simultaneous roar of laughter.

'Desk riled,' said the corporal.

'Devil mind him!' said a private in a side whisper to another, who answered, 'Amen!'

Meantime Mr. Joyce Snapper was liberated, much to his comfort. He was so rejoiced, that for a moment he did not dream of his losses.

Shaun a dherk came beside him, and gave him a nudge.