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HUNTED

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CHAPTER I.

THE BURSTING OF THE STORM.

IN a valley opening on the shore of one of those wild but beautiful lochs that form a striking feature in the landscape of the west of Ireland, stood a farm-house that in itself and its surroundings bore evidence of being occupied by one of the better class of tenant-farmers. Humble, indeed, it seemed, with its heavy covering of thatch and its whitewashed walls; but in its muslin-curtained windows, in the woodbine festooned around the little rustic porch, and in the well-kept piece of lawn stretching down to the waters rippling on the beach, there was an air of simple refinement not commonly found among the peasantry in the surrounding district. A belt of plantation sheltered it from the wild gusts that sometimes swept down the glen and lashed the loch into fury, while in front the cottage looked out over the water to the gloomy heights that bounded the horizon beyond.

It was the close of an autumn day in 18—; dark clouds were sweeping across the sky, the fallen leaves were swirling in eddies over the lawn, and the sigh of the wind foreboded a bleak and wintry night; while the gleam of light from the cottage windows spoke of warmth and comfort within. In a little parlour, plainly but comfortably furnished, where everything, from its substantial character and antique style, appeared to be an heirloom handed down from father to son for generations past, sat William Dillon and his wife.

He was a man in the prime of early manhood, bronzed and weather-beaten somewhat, as one accustomed to attend to the practical duties of his farm, but with unmistakable signs of intellectual culture that told of influences other than those which usually fall to the lot of a young farmer in a remote country district. For William Dillon had been intended for a professional career, and the sequestered home in which he was had

been his father's and his father's father's through generations. His father had sent him, being an only son, to Trinity College, Dublin, there to qualify for a different sphere. Circumstances had prevented that intention being realised, and the sudden death of his father had changed the whole current of William Dillon's life. He found it necessary to return and take charge of the farm, but the sudden blighting of his professional prospects had been a sore trial to him. He was reconciled to it by the fact that he was all the sooner able to gratify a long cherished wish and give a home to one very dear to him, who had been orphaned like himself.

Minnie Leslie was the daughter of the late medical man in the country town, and her fair face and winning ways had brought her many a suitor, but on her father's death she found herself wholly unprovided for. But her heart was true to her early love, and she bravely determined to earn her livelihood until the time when William Dillon would be able to redeem his vows. Events had hastened the realization of their wishes, however, marring their future prospects, and for seven years now the student, transformed into a farmer, had been bravely battling with difficulties incident to bad seasons and disappointing harvests, cheered the while by the companionship and counsel of his sweet and gentle little wife. Three beautiful children had added to the responsibilities and chastened the spirit of William Dillon, giving him a keener interest in events at the time proceeding in the district around him, and in the dark outlook presented to the tenant farmers.

For a very dark cloud was lying over the west of Ireland, and men's hearts were failing them for fear. Crops had failed, and rents were in arrear, and it was the period of those wholesale clearances of the poor starving peasantry, which sent a thrill of grief and horror through the empire.

Not that William Dillon felt that he had

a personal concern in the progress of these evictions, for he knew that his family had always stood high in the estimation of his landlord, and his rent was not in arrear further than had been the custom of the estate since time immemorial; still there were flying rumours of deer parks and extensive sheep farming, and foresting, and other schemes for utilising the district, more profitably than was now done from the precarious rentals of an impoverished tenantry, so that sometimes in his sombre moments he thought anxiously of the possible future.

During the past few weeks those rumours had been thickening, and this was the theme that filled the columns of the *Independent* in which William Dillon's attention was now absorbed. At last laying the paper aside with a sigh he said: 'Oh, why has man the will and power to make his fellow mourn?' His wife raised her head from the sewing with which she had been engaged.

'What is that, Willie? Is there any more news about the tenants?'

'Ah yes. Minnie, dear, it's heartbreaking. Another ukase has gone forth, and thirty or forty poor families on the other side of the Loch have to go.'

'Poor things! God help them; in the very beginning of the winter too.'

'Aye, Minnie, that is the time they choose for it. Oh, but it seems a hard dispensation of Providence. No wonder there are people who question whether there is a Providence at all!'

'Don't say so, Willie. Providence allows these things for wise ends, and we are not able to judge of them.'

'The ends may be wise enough, but the means are hard; and if these wise ends are to be obtained why should, poor, unoffending people be the victims? Here are about a hundred, I suppose, of men, women and children, who, though they know nothing about it to-night, are doomed to be turned out in the pitiless winter, to starve and sicken and die, perhaps, at the back of a ditch, and the author of all that wretchedness will spend his nights amid the gaiety and glare of ballrooms and all the other resorts of wealth and fashion, without one moment's regret, without a thought thrown away to the weeping mothers and dying children who are sacrificed to feed his pride and pamper him with luxuries.'

'But do you think that Lord Errington really knows about this?'

'Why should he not? And if he does not is it not equally criminal negligence that hands over such powers to another to use them as he will?'

'Lord Errington has always had the name of being a man of the most humane and even generous feelings, and I can hardly think that he can have given his sanction to turning out these poor creatures in the depth of winter.'

'True, dear; I believe he has not directly sanctioned it. But what does he care to know about their condition, or the state to which they will be reduced? He has never been over on the estate but once in his life, and then he only saw the people in their go-to-chapel best, drawn up in review for him — a smiling, happy, and contented peasantry. And there was the agent, too, Captain Lewis, benignant and condescending, asking them if they had any request or complaint to make to "his lordship," and generally conveying the impression that the estate was an Arcadia of simple rustic contentment. Never till my dying day will I forget the contrast to the haughty and imperious way in which he usually speaks to the tenants on rent-day, as if he thought himself still in India, hectoring a lot of wretched ryots, or giving orders to a troop of dragoons. I say, dear, that a man like Lord Errington, who gives absolute control over his tenants to a man of the antecedents and training of Captain Lewis, is responsible for all the consequences. There is not a cruelty perpetrated on the estate which his lordship could not prevent if he wished, but being pressed by his own necessities, brought on by extravagant living, he has handed the whole thing over to a heartless man, who, if he can only squeeze out the money that is wanted, is utterly regardless of the suffering he inflicts. I certainly have no reason to complain of Captain Lewis myself, for he has always treated me with courtesy, at least so far as his nature would allow, but it has made my blood boil to hear him sometimes talking to some of the tenants when they were pleading for delay. I think it would be a terrible thing for any man to have to cast himself on his forbearance, for his tender mercies are cruel.'

'But what does the paper say about the evictions; is there any one that we know among those to be turned out?'

'There is a long article about the whole affair, but this is the part that refers to the new evictions. "But the work of depopulation goes on apace. We understand that on the neighbouring estate of Lord Errington, the angel of death has been again commissioned, to go forth to slay with famine, and cold, and pestilence. Some five or six townlands on the shores of Loch —, viz.: Ballagh, Killena, Mullahmore, Drumcran, Ballimore, and Killevan, are to be swept with the besom of destruction, and the wretched inhabitants are to be cast out to die in the shoughs. That estate has already an uneenviable notoriety—"

'Did you say Killevan? Why, that is where poor Tom's mother lives: poor old thing, and she has been bedridden for years, surely they will have mercy on a poor old creature like that, and not turn her out?'

'Mercy, Minnie dear, mercy is a quality

that does not enter into that kind of business. But poor Tom, I'm really sorry for him; how he will be cut up when he knows of it, for he is as good a son as he is a servant, and is greatly attached to his old mother.'

'But, Willie dear, would it not be a kindly thing to take her here when she is turned out?—at least, for a little while until they have had time to look about them and see where they are to go. Poor Tom would gladly give up his bed to his mother and take a shake-down anywhere.'

'But, Minnie, you forget; the rule of the estate is that anyone giving bread or sup to anyone evicted, will be punished and perhaps evicted himself. The object is to clear them out of the district and drive them to the workhouse—or the grave, perhaps, which would be a greater relief to the estate and, probably to the unfortunate creatures themselves.'

'What is that—a knock at the door?'

'No, it is the flapping from the wind. How stormy it is, Surely nobody would be coming here at this time of night, and such a night. It is a knock?'

'Don't go out, Willie, you don't know who it may be.'

'Oh, I must see who it is. Who is there?'

'It's me, Mr Dillon. Phil Murphy; can I spake wid you a minute?'

'Oh, come in, Phil; come inside.'

'No, Mr Dillon; my shoes are too dirty—the lane is so muddy; but I want to spake wid you a minute at the door.'

Mr Dillon took his hat off a peg in the hall, and, saying to his wife that he would be back in a moment, went outside, closing the door behind him.

Mrs Dillon, as she went on with her sewing, could hear the two men engaged in a low tone of conversation; although what was said or what the subject of conversation was she could not make out. Half-an-hour had passed, and still the conversation continued, until Mrs Dillon, anxious for her husband standing out in the cold, was on the point of opening the door and interrupting the conversation. At length she could hear their good-byes, when the door opened and her husband entered. Replacing his hat in the hall he came into the parlour, and the quick eye of his wife at once perceived that there was something wrong.

'Minnie,' he said, 'the bolt has struck us.'

'What bolt? What is it? Tell me what you mean, dear.'

'We have to go, Minnie; turned out of the house in which my family has lived for centuries.'

'Oh no, dear, surely not. Is that what Phil Murphy told you? How does he know? How has he heard it?'

'He has just come from town, where he says everyone was talking about it. It appears that the whole of the district round

is to be cleared to be turned into grazing parks or something, and we have to go with the rest. It was heard first at the office from the Captain himself.'

'But we are not behind with the rent.'

'It doesn't matter; it is the land, not the rent they want, and we must go.'

Mr Dillon rested his face on his hand, and a tide of sorrow swept through his heart as he gave way to the sombre thoughts that this sudden change in his prospects inspired, while his wife bending over her sewing went quietly on with her work; on which from time to time a tear silently fell. The moaning of the wind among the trees without seemed to sing the requiem of departed hopes, and a dark cloud of sorrow had suddenly settled down on the home of the Dillons. At last, quietly laying her work on the table, Mrs Dillon, throwing her arms around her husband's neck, seated herself on his knee. 'Never mind, dear, it may not be as bad as it looks, we have passed through troubles before, and we are not going to let this one crush us. It may be that it is only an idle rumour that Murphy has got hold of.'

'No, Minnie, I feel sure it is true; not merely that Murphy has heard it, but it looks so likely. It appears that the whole district is to be cleared out, and we cannot expect to be made an exception. In fact it would interfere with the plan of their arrangements, if what is stated be correct. However, I will go into town in the morning and learn the worst; and, if we must leave, the world is wide enough for us, we are both young and with plenty of energy, and there is no doubt, we will find a way through somehow.'

'Yes, dear Willie, that is the way to look at it; there is no use in being cast down; if the worst comes to the worst our dear little children will not want; we can both work; thank God we are both healthy and strong, and education may enable us to do better than ever we could have done with the farm.'

'I will go into town and see the agent. I hardly know anything I dislike more than seeming to ask a favour from Captain Lewis, but if it is so that he intends to take the place, I might be able to persuade him to so far modify his plans as to let us remain. At all events I shall learn the truth, and the sooner we know the position the better.'

But when his wife had retired, and William Dillon remained alone with his thoughts, the severity of the sacrifice which he was called on to make presented itself in all its sadness. In this little room in which he sat the happiest hours of his boyhood had been passed. On that couch, old-fashioned and time-worn, he had often flung himself to rest weary with play. The table, the chairs, the very carpet, were all associated with his earliest recollections, and were hallowed to his eyes by the memories that they brought

of all the tender cares of indulgent parents. There from the walls father and mother still looked down on him with that affectionate and anxious tenderness with which they had followed him in his boyish waywardness; indeed, there seemed to him a deep and more sympathetic tenderness in the look, as if they were conscious of the great trouble that had come to him.

And then his thoughts went wandering back over the events of his life, to the days when, without a care or any knowledge of the troubles that life brings, he had roamed about over the hills that were soon to be his no more; he thought of the joyous recklessness of his student years, and of the opportunities of professional distinction that were suddenly quenched; and then of the brave, firm effort he had made to contend with the difficulties of farming life, cheered and stimulated by the thought that every year was giving security to the comforts with which he was surrounding those that were dearer to him than his own soul. Over all this long vista of the past he looked with a softened saddened feeling, prepared to be satisfied if any condition of the past could return in place of the dark cloud of uncertainty and difficulty that now hung over the future.

True enough with all his strength and energy life presented no hopeless problem for William Dillon; but the sudden severance of the ties that bound him to the home of his fathers was hard to bear. Although enjoying the comforts of life and regarded as a well-to-do farmer, he felt that when all arrears of debt were paid and other engagements met, he would have little if anything to begin life over again; and as the remote district in which he lived presented few opportunities for his engaging in any other employment he could not conceal from himself the fact that the loss of his farm meant exile from the scenes to which he so fondly clung. Depressed and saddened by the suddenness of the change that had come over his prospects, it is not strange that William Dillon, as he sat on into the silent hours of the night, brooding over the present, over the past, and over the future, gave way to despondency; and that in the slow and measured cadence of the old clock in the corner he seemed to hear 'Ever forever, forever, never.'

CHAPTER II.

PLEADING FOR MERCY.

NEXT morning William Dillon was up betimes, and with the energy born of a new day, he had emerged from the cloud of despondency of the previous night; he even

felt buoyant with the hope that he would combat the difficulty by which he was beset. He determined that he would make every effort to stay the sentence of exile from his home, and with this object he adhered to the conviction that his first and wisest course was to proceed to town and see the agent at once, to assure himself of the position of affairs, and if necessary, to try and persuade him to make an exception in the case of his farm.

In this he was confirmed by the opinion of his wife, who, with her faith in the inherent goodness of human nature, could not believe that the agent, on the case being presented to him, would persist in the determination to deprive them of a home, in which the family of her husband had resided for generations, maintaining a character for integrity and a position of high esteem, not only with the landlord and successive agents of the estate, but among the entire population of the district.

When, therefore, Dillon mounted his horse and bade good-bye to his wife, it was with considerable confidence that his mission would be successful. It was the monthly fair in the county town, and as Dillon proceeded on his way, he passed throngs of country men and women proceeding in the same direction, who respectfully saluted him as he passed, according to the fashion of the country. For though Dillon neither in race nor religion was related to them, there had always been in the district a high respect for his family, and for the young farmer himself, because of the warm sympathy he had always shown for the trials and sufferings of his humbler neighbours.

On reaching the town he found that the news of his being included in the general eviction had spread, and many were the expressions of regret with which the people gathered around him. Determined, however, to know the worst, he proceeded, as soon as he had put up his horse at the inn, to the office of the estate.

It was a large building of cold grey stone, having more the appearance of a prison than of a place of business. Indeed, portion of it was occupied by the constabulary, and in a small room within it, justice was periodically dispensed by Captain Lewis and his brother justices, so that the alliance between property and authority was significantly impressed on the minds of the population.

There were few people in the street as Dillon approached, as if a sense of awe kept the crowds aloof, but he could not help noticing a little group standing on the steps leading up to the door of the office; it consisted of an old man and his wife, and apparently their son, to whom they were communicating their advice as to how he should deport himself in the coming interview with the great man.

They were of the humblest of the peasantry, but there was an air of decency and

respectability about them that excited Dillon's interest. The nervous excitement and flushed face of the young fellow showed that he had no relish for the ordeal he was about to pass, but from the anxiety of the aged and venerable pair it was apparent that much was considered to depend on the impression he should make. While from time to time in his nervousness the young man removed his cap and brushed his hair with his hand, the mother continued to improve his simple toilet by fixing his neckerchief, or whisking some imaginary dust off his coat with her handkerchief, and the old man, with anxiety depicted on every feature, explained and impressed on his son the details of the case to be submitted.

Dillon's heart sickened within him at the sight, and at the thought of such agony inflicted on any human creature by the prospect of having to approach into the presence of a fellow being. He stood aside, unwilling to interrupt the proceedings, and as the young man entered, he watched the old couple standing as if transfixed, with heads bowed, as if seeking to catch something of what was proceeding within.

Whatever the nature of the interview it was a brief one, and when in a few moments the door opened and the young man came out, it was evident from the look of silent distress with which the whole party walked away, that the result had not been satisfactory.

On Dillon entering he found the agent seated at a table, with his attention fixed on some documents before him. For some minutes he stood before him without being noticed, when at length Captain Lewis, without raising his eyes, said 'Well, Dillon, what do you want with me?'

The young farmer narrated what he had heard, that it was intended to take his farm from him, and to send him away from a home which had been occupied by his forefathers through many generations. He went on to say that they had at all times endeavoured to prove themselves good tenants and had never given any trouble in respect of their rent.

Captain Lewis listened in silence as if absorbed in the contents of the papers before him. 'It was true,' he remarked, 'it had been determined in the interest of the estate that certain arrangements should be carried out, and these unfortunately did involve the taking of the farm, as well as a number of others. It might seem hard, but he had a duty to perform for Lord Errington, and for the improvement of the estate, and he could not allow other considerations to interfere with it.'

'I should be very sorry to stand in the way of the interests of the estate,' said Dillon; 'nor could I expect you, sir, to prejudice those interests. But I am sure I can count on your sympathy when I appeal to you in behalf of a young family dependent

on me to whom the blow will be disastrous; in fact I do not know where I am to turn or what I am to do, if I am in present circumstances deprived of the farm, and my children of a home. Season after season has been bad, and the result has been to deprive me of all the little means I had, so that I am in a worse position now than ever I was in my life before, for meeting such a calamity.'

'That may be all true, Dillon, and I have no doubt it is, but if I were to attend to such pleas it would bring the whole of my plans for the improvement of the estate to a standstill. You are a young man in the prime of life, and you can easily make a living anywhere—far more so than many others I am obliged to evict. But these are considerations that I cannot permit to stand in the way of the improvement of the estate. It has been allowed to get into a dreadful condition, overrun with a swarm of paupers who are only struggling to eke out a wretched livelihood, doing no good for themselves, and paying nothing to their landlord.'

'This cannot be said of me, Captain Lewis, nor of my family. We have been faithful to our obligations, and we have all received much consideration from the Errington family, as well as from your predecessors who had the management of the property, and I think that in the circumstances an exception might be made in my case. Indeed I can hardly think that if Lord Errington was aware of it, this harsh treatment would be inflicted.'

'You have no reason for thinking so; his lordship in no way interferes with my management of the property; and when I have resolved on a certain course, I am accustomed to carry it through. It is part of my plans for improving the value of the estate, that I take your farm, as I am taking others to convert them into large pastoral properties, and to take it I am resolved, and there is no use in bandying words about it. You have heard my decision.'

'Well, sir, it is hard, very hard, but if your decision is formed, I would only ask that you give me a little time, a year or so, that I may make arrangements and see where I am to take my family.'

'That I cannot do. I want to clear the country, and you must go with the rest. We have had quite enough on the subject. Good-day.'

'Sir, I have been born and lived my lifetime on the estate, and I am compelled to say that your management is not after the traditions of the Errington family, and if—'

'Dillon, I've had enough of this. How dare you, sir, to come to my office to lecture me in this fashion?'—then turning to one of the bailiffs—'Porter, see that this farm is cleared as quickly as the forms of law will allow, and further see that everything on the farm is at once seized for the rent now due,

and that not a hoof or a stick of furniture is removed till my claim is satisfied. Leave this office, sir.'

'Captain Lewis,' said Dillon, calmly, 'I shall leave your office; I shall leave your farm; there is no reason for your getting into such excitement. You know that you can crush me, and I know that you will; and it is unmanly—even though you are a soldier, I say it—for you to increase the harshness of the act, by the violence of your words. You are doing this, as you are doing many another cruel thing on the estate, on your own responsibility, and without the will of Lord Errington. You are doing as no other agent did before, and if there is a God in heaven you will be punished for it. Sit down, Captain Lewis, and hear me: I am not threatening you; I know that you will do your worst, but though you do your worst, you cannot prevent me from giving free expression to my opinion as to the cruelties you have been perpetrating on the unfortunate tenantry, cruelties which, if they were only known, would find no sympathy with any one with a drop of the blood of the Erringtons flowing in his veins. You have driven tenants to their death; under your own orders they have been left to sicken and die and rot by the wayside; and the blood of your murdered victims is crying for vengeance from the ground. That cry for vengeance will not rise to heaven in vain, and as sure as God is true and heaven is just, God's vengeance will fall on your head.'

The agent cowered under the torrent of invective and denunciation, and a spell of horror seemed to rest on bailiffs and clerks, and to strike them silent as Dillon calmly turned and walked out of the office.

When the cool air fell on his heated brow the young farmer felt agitated at what he had done. He turned rapidly into a side street, that in its comparative privacy he might gather his thoughts and reflect on the scene from which he had just emerged. He could not upbraid himself with having done a wrong thing, but there was a revulsion of feeling when he thought of the consequences that would be sure to ensue from his violence.

That he would have altered the determination of Captain Lewis to seize all he possessed, to turn him and his family out into the highways, he felt fully convinced, and that conciliatory language would have been thrown away on him; but then, while he could not repress a certain feeling of exultation at the agent having been compelled for once in his life to hear the honest truth, his heart sank within him as he thought of the loved ones at home and the pitiless treatment to which they, as well as himself, would be subjected if they only came within the power of the tyrant. The look of startled fear in the agent's face as he denounced him as a murderer presented itself in such an as-

pect to him that he could not repress his sense of the ludicrous, but he knew that the tyrant was only momentarily baffled, and that his rage would blaze forth with all the greater fierceness.

As the flush of excitement passed away, he felt that his action had been indiscreet, and that in giving way to his indignation he had brought suffering on those he loved. But there was no use in regrets; what he had done was beyond help, and his duty was to meet the trouble in its aggravated form and overcome it in the best way he could.

CHAPTER III.

THE VOICE OF THE TEMPTER.

ON returning to the principal street, which was crowded with country people, Dillon found that the one subject engrossing their attention was the wholesale eviction that was pending. Little groups of men stood here and there in earnest but subdued discussion of the news, and curses, not loud, but deep and bitter, were on many a lip.

The appearance of Dillon attracted the attention of several of these little clusters of excited men, and more than one of them endeavoured to enter into conversation with him, for they all knew that his farm was included in the latest order for eviction, and, respected as he was, his now being involved in the common suffering seemed to unite him to them in the bonds of a closer brotherhood.

But Dillon avoided the crowd, and sought as speedily as he could the comparative privacy of the inn with the intention of leaving at once for home. There, however, he was joined by one whose sympathy he did not repel. He was a man of middle-age, lithe and wiry, his quick and restless eye lighting up a face bronzed with a southern sun, and his whole bearing giving evidence of energy and determination.

He was no stranger to Dillon, his intelligence and knowledge of the world acquired in travelling having made him a more fit companion for the young farmer than the ordinary run of the peasantry by whom he was surrounded.

Thomas Manson, though a native of the district, was a comparative stranger to the people, having gone away in his boyhood and only returned a few months before, having, it was said, acquired a large fortune in the colonies, to find that the family which he had hoped to meet in the old home were all dead or scattered.

Manson had acquired something more than mere pelf in his travels; and the ideas of social life which he had imbibed in the free atmosphere of the colonies, and which he had taken no pains to conceal, had made

him to be regarded by certain circles in the district as a rather dangerous man.

Although Dillon did not agree in all respects with his views of men and politics, there was something in his strong vigorous way of treating things that was particularly captivating, and at the present moment there was no one that Dillon would have so desired to see.

'Dillon,' said Manson, 'I am heartily sorry to hear of your trouble, but bear up, old man, it will be all for the best; it will root you out of this cursed hole and take you to where a man's a man and can call his soul his own. It's the best thing ever happened to you.'

'It may be, Manson, but it certainly doesn't seem so now to me. But I suppose it will be all right.'

'To be sure it will. However you could live under a brute like that, and be subject to his whims and all his cursed myrmidons, is more than I know. However, let's have dinner, and I'll ride out with you; you're going home, are you not? I want to have a long talk with you.'

It was early afternoon when the two men mounted their horses, and threading their way through the still crowded streets, proceeded on their journey. Small straggling parties of country people were already beginning to make their way homeward, with the proceeds of their marketing, but the roads had not yet assumed that boisterous and turbulent character which they usually have at the close of an Irish fair.

The road which they had taken was not exactly in the direction of Mr Dillon's home, but led over the hills down through a plain, which for some years had been occupied for pastoral purposes by a stranger to the district.

'Dillon,' said Manson, after they had been riding two or three miles together, 'do you see that little clump of trees?'—pointing with his whip to a place two or three hundred yards from the road; 'that blackened beam you see was the roof-tree under which I was born; in that little tangled shrubbery I used to gather gooseberries when I was a child; it was our garden then. You see the little brook there below where our house was; that is where I bathed a hundred times, before I knew what care was, and before trouble fell on our house. I ran away abroad, so that I did not see the trouble come, but I have heard of it all since I came back. The house was fired over their heads, and on a cold winter's night my mother sat cowering beside the blazing timbers, with my little sister in her arms. Sister was dead in the morning. My mother died in the poorhouse. Brothers and sisters are all gone; I don't know where. I have tried to find them, but nobody knows. I was too long silent,' said Manson, as he wiped away a tear with his handkerchief—'I was too long

silent. I wanted to return wealthy, and surprise them all. But Captain Lewis was before me. He had scattered them before I came.'

'Manson,' said Dillon, 'I did not know that was your history. You never told me so much as that before.'

'No, Dillon, I have not spoken much of my affairs. I have locked my secrets in my own bosom. There was no use in parading my sorrows. You seemed happy in your farm and in your household, and I did not care for obtruding my grief. You are in trouble yourself now, and can sympathise with me.'

'Yes, Manson, I am in trouble, indeed, and God only knows what I am to do. But why should I speak of my troubles by the side of the suffering that you have been called to endure.'

'And yet, Dillon, the man that has wrought that ruin lives, and is honoured, while in my case, and in the case of many others of the poor wretches who have been driven to death by his cruelty, he is a murderer, if ever there was a murderer in the sight of heaven. Dillon, there are crimes for which the law has given no redress. All that Captain Lewis has done has been strictly within the limits of the law, and yet the people are expected to reverence the law as something just and good. How can one wonder that they feel inclined to take the law into their hands? I have been mixing to-day among the people in the fair, and I found their minds filled with a desire for revenge. And who can wonder? "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed," was one of the earliest commands given for the regulation of the relations of man with man, and it is, or it ought to be, at the basis of all human laws. These laws do not reach all crime, and in such a case it is hard to deny the right of man to fall back on the original command and take the law into his own hands.'

'No, Manson, your principles might be right enough for a disorganised state of society, but there would be no safety for a man, and it would shake the foundations of society, if every time a man felt himself aggrieved he was entitled to constitute himself a minister of his own vengeance.'

'Mark me, Dillon, I am not maintaining such a right; but I cannot wonder that an impassioned and impulsive people, maddened by cruelty and wrong, should listen to the instinctive voice of human nature, and make a law unto themselves. They cannot but feel here that law is their enemy, that it has been framed by their enemies for the protection only of what are called the rights of property, and in utter disregard of the rights of human life. Those poor wretches who are driven out in winter to die are murdered by the law, and the man that is the author of their deaths is a murderer before Heaven, whatever the law may

say. Captain Lewis is the murderer of my poor little sister who died on that bitter wintry night. He is the murderer of my poor mother who died from the effects of that night's sufferings, aggravated by a broken heart. I can place myself in the position of some of those outcasts who have sickened and are dying of hunger and fever, the direct result of that villain's exterminating policy, and I can understand their feelings when they say he ought to die.'

'Manson, I am neither in the mood nor circumstances to defend the heartless conduct of which I am myself one of the victims; but however it cuts against myself, I am forced to admit that however many the defects of the law may be, the suspension of law and the substitution in its place of the right of personal satisfaction and revenge would be a disaster, and must fill with alarm the mind of any man that has given hostages to society, and is solicitous for the welfare of a family to which the protection that society gives is a necessity.'

'I am not advocating a reign of personal law, but have been only stating how natural it is that a passionate people, maddened by cruelty under the name and protection of law, should feel inclined to adopt the wild justice of revenge. This wretched murderer has quickened the natural instinct into life. I saw it in the dark brow and flashing eyes of the people to-day, and I will not be a bit surprised if we shortly hear of some dreadful catastrophe. You and I, Dillon, may regret that it should be so, but violence begets violence, and depend on it, in the present excited state of the public mind, Lord Errington's agent is likely to reap as he has sown.'

There was an air of disappointment in Manson's manner as he bade good-bye to Dillon at the cross roads at which they parted, Manson returning to town and Dillon turning off in the direction of his home.

CHAPTER IV.

AN APPEAL UNTO CÆSAR.

On returning home, Mr Dillon found his wife awaiting him with great anxiety. He narrated the whole of the incidents that had taken place in his interview with the agent; his pleading for a reversal, or at least a mitigation, of the sentence of expulsion, and the abrupt and peremptory manner in which the agent had shown the uselessness of his suit. He upbraided himself for having given way to his feelings, and for having used language that he now saw could have no other effect than closing the door of com-

passion, and increasing the evils of his unfortunate position.

The whole of the remainder of the day and far on into the night they spent in considering every aspect of their affairs. To alter the determination of the agent after what had occurred seemed beyond hope, and their thoughts were mainly as to what course they should take when deprived of their farm and home. Still one ray of hope presented itself, and when it was suggested by Mrs Dillon that possibly Lord Errington, if personally appealed to, might interpose his authority, the idea was grasped as a straw is clutched at by the drowning.

The high character which the noble owner of the estate bore, and which his family had always borne, as well as the favour that had been always shown to Dillon's family by the various agents who had managed the property before it had unfortunately come into the hands of Captain Lewis, encouraged the hope that a statement of the case made to his lordship personally, might not be without effect. Even if it only resulted in a respite, and a year or so were given in which they might wind up their affairs and make arrangements as to the future it would be something. Lord Errington was at present in London, and thither it was determined that Dillon should proceed before the agent had time to put his sentence into execution.

It was necessary that the whole thing should be done with secrecy as well as expedition; and the following evening was fixed on as the time for Mr Dillon's starting for the metropolis. But here they were confronted by a difficulty which the most recent determination of Captain Lewis had aggravated. Mr Dillon had stock and property sufficient to meet any engagement, and his arrangements in the town precluded any difficulty in the ordinary supplies of his household, pending the sale of his produce. But now the agent's order had put an embargo on the sale of everything, and as they had not ready money sufficient, the question of ways and means in relation to the intended trip became a serious one.

Mrs Dillon promptly solved the difficulty by offering her little stock of jewellery and trinkets, the accumulations of happier days; many of them presents and love-tokens from her husband himself, but which now must be sacrificed, at least temporarily, to meet this sudden emergency. It went to the heart of Mr Dillon to accept the sacrifice, but there was no other course open, and they could only hope that the success which would attend his mission to London, would soon enable them to redeem the little treasures, as well as emerge from the troubles by which they were beset.

The following day was spent in quietly making preparations for the journey, the arrangement being that Mr Dillon should take the night coach, passing shortly before mid-

night, so as to catch the early morning train leaving the nearest railway station, which was some twenty miles away. As the time approached for his leaving, Mrs Dillon had brought together her little stock of trinkets and laid them on the table with a cheery smile, and the assurance that they would not have to part with them for long, that she was very glad she had them, and was very much pleased to give them, for she was sure that they would be the means of lifting them out of their trouble.

Dillon looked on the little pile with some emotion, for there was not an article but had its own tender associations. There were the bracelets which he had given her in the first dawning of his love, when all the world looked bright, and he had no thought that ever such a day of darkness as this would come; and there was the locket in which one day, when roaming over the hills together as lovers, they had entwined their hair; and there the brooch, his gift to her after the birth of their little Elsie, with the sweet baby face on the reverse; and under all, as if hidden away, was the engagement ring. He took it up and held it in his fingers, and his eyes filled with tears. She knew his thoughts, and, placing her arm round his neck, she pressed her lips to his.

'Never mind, dear Willie, it does not signify. It is only for a short time; it will be all right,' and then taking the earrings from her ears she added them, and proceeded at once to fold up the little parcel.

In order to avoid observation, Dillon intended to walk to town, and having transacted his little financial arrangements, to go on a few miles of the way before joining the coach. This preparation completed, husband and wife proceeded to the room where the children were sleeping. It was the first time Mr Dillon had ever left his family for more than a day, and the circumstances in which he was going, and the uncertainty of the result of his journey, made the parting a tender one. He stooped down and kissed the little sleepers, and hurried from the room. He saw that his feelings would unman him if he lingered, so putting on an air of stoical firmness, and bidding an affectionate good-bye to his wife, he started on his journey.

It was a dark still night; heavy banks of clouds covered the face of the sky, with here and there a little rift through which the stars were shining. Mr Dillon had not exactly disguised himself, at the same time he had so arranged his clothing as, if possible, to evade being recognised. A low felt hat, 'slouched,' and his coat buttoned to the throat, were sufficient to conceal his identity, unless from a very close observer, and as there were but few people abroad at that time he met with none that were likely to know him.

On reaching the town he turned down a side street where the Lombard Arms, which he had often noticed, though never with the expectation that he would some day find there a friend in need, afforded the opportunity of arranging the finances of the journey. Pulling his felt hat a little further down over his eyes he entered, and submitting his little parcel he asked for the requisite accommodation. The pawn-broker examined each article separately and agreeing to give the amount, asked for the name. Dillon was taken aback for an instant but answered 'Thompson,' and being handed a piece of paper filled up the name 'John Thompson.' Having received his money he passed round by the outskirts of the town till he reached the main coach road.

As it was nearly an hour yet till the coach would be due, Dillon proceeded along the road for about two miles. He had ascended a long, steep hill, on the top of which he meant to rest and await the coach. The clouds that had covered the sky had passed away and the stars were now shining brightly so that he could command a view of a great extent of country below.

Seating himself on a milestone his eyes naturally turned in the direction of his home. He could distinguish the hills in the neighborhood, and the waters of the loch, and even fancied that he could recognise the white walls of his cottage through the trees four or five miles away. Perhaps it was only fancy—perhaps it was from the straining of his eyes—but he almost believed that he could see the faint glimmer of a light, and he thought of the lonely watcher, and of the tenderness with which he knew she was thinking of him; and of his dear children sleeping unconscious of the trouble that was hanging over them all.

The whole plain below was slumbering and there was not a sound to break the stillness, but the barking of a solitary dog in the far distance whose persistent protest against his loneliness, and unheeded appeal to canine sympathy, even added to the loneliness of the scene.

Dillon had been for some time gazing across the plain, and brooding in the melancholy silence of the hour, when his attention was arrested by a flash—a second flash, and then the report of fire arms—and all was silence again. What could it be? The spot where this had occurred must be, he calculated, near the road by which he had come into town and about two miles from where he sat. His thoughts on the subject were interrupted, however, for just then he caught sight of the lights of the coach toiling up the hill. In a few minutes it had reached him. He hailed the driver, who pulled up and took him on board, and William Dillon was on his way to London.

CHAPTER V.

ON TO LONDON.

The coach was well filled with passengers, but in the darkness Dillon could not observe whether there were any that were known to him. His desire was that if possible his visit to London should be unknown, not only to the agent, but in the district, so that the intervention of Lord Errington, if happily he should obtain it, might appear to have been spontaneous. On this account he subsided unobtrusively into his corner of the coach, and drawing down his hat over his face as if preparing for sleep he evaded possible recognition.

The jolting of the coach and the exhaustion consequent on the tension to which his mind had been subjected during the day, did their work, and he fell into an uneasy slumber. The grey of dawn was appearing when the coach rolled up to the railway station, barely in time to transfer its passengers and their luggage to the train leaving for Dublin. No incident of interest occurred during the day, and, arriving in the evening, Dillon at once took passage on board the steamer for Liverpool, which he reached the following morning.

All this time his journey had been so rapid that he had not had a glance at the papers; indeed his mind was so absorbed in the circumstances connected with the object of his journey that he had little inclination to concern himself with outside affairs. But when he had taken his seat in the train at Liverpool, and they were just moving from the station, his attention was aroused by a conversation between two of his fellow passengers. With the noise of the train he could only catch snatches of their words, but he heard enough to quicken his curiosity.

'No; the agent was shot dead. The other was dangerously wounded. Poor Ireland—always unrest—large number of people evicted—Lord Errington—murderers supposed to have fled—strangers in the district.'

'What did you say may I ask about a murder?—is it in Ireland?' said Mr Dillon.

'Yes a very dreadful murder; have you not heard of it?—it is in this morning's papers. It is a case of an agent who had been evicting a number of tenants on the estate of Lord Errington, somewhere in the west of Ireland. He was shot dead the night before last, when returning from a meeting of Justices, and a bailiff with him was dangerously wounded, so dangerously that he is not expected to survive.'

'How very dreadful,' said Dillon, but he did not tell how his heart almost ceased to beat, and how earnestly he longed for the full details. These he could not obtain without evincing a curiosity which he felt it hard to conceal, and which an instinctive feeling

told him to restrain. At the next station his two fellow-passengers alighted, and Dillon lost no time in obtaining a newspaper from one of the boys selling them on the platform and calling out 'Dreadful murder in Ireland! Morning paper!'

Hurrying back to his place in the carriage, Dillon tore open the paper and cast his eyes rapidly over the pages. There it was under 'Telegraphic':

'ANOTHER AGRARIAN MURDER IN IRELAND.'

'AN AGENT SHOT.'

'SUPPOSED CLUE TO THE MURDERERS.'

'Last night about eleven o'clock a terrible murder was perpetrated on the highway, about three miles from the town of——, in the County of——. From such particulars as we can gather, it appears that Mr R. W. Lewis, the agent of Lord Errington, was returning from a meeting of Justices of the Peace, which had been held to consider the disturbed state of the district. He was accompanied by one of the bailiffs on the estate—a man named Porter. They were driving in a gig, and at half-past eleven o'clock, when within about three miles of the town, they were met by a man partially disguised, who deliberately fired at them with a double-barrelled gun. The first shot took effect on the body of Mr Lewis, killing him dead, the second seriously wounding the bailiff, who was enabled to retain his seat in the gig and escaped, driving rapidly into the town and giving the alarm. The police at once proceeded to the spot, where they found the unfortunate gentleman, the bullet having pierced the lungs. Medical aid was promptly on the ground but only to find that life was extinct. Bodies of police immediately scoured the district, but though it is said that they have a clue to the perpetrators of the crime, no arrest has been made. The wounded man Porter was attended to immediately on reaching the town, and though greatly exhausted by loss of blood, the ball having entered his shoulder and escaped at the back, his case is not considered hopeless. He is said to have stated that he recognised the murderer, but he is in too exhausted a condition to give any further information. Should he revive sufficiently during the day, his depositions will be taken.'

'It appears that a large number of notices to quit had been served on the tenants of Lord Errington's estate, and that a very threatening state of feeling had existed in the district against Captain Lewis as the author of the system which is now being carried out for converting the small holdings of the tenants into large grazing farms.'

'It will be recollected that last year, after harvest, some forty or fifty families on the same estate were dispossessed, their houses

being burnt to the ground, and harrowing tales were told of the sufferings of the poor people who were obliged to camp on the road sides, without proper shelter from the rains and snows of winter, where numbers of them are said to have died of cold and hunger and famine fever.

'This year a number have been similarly dispossessed, and notices have been served on all the residents in other six or eight townlands to quit forthwith. A feeling of great exasperation existed in the district, the life of the agent was threatened, and this dreadful catastrophe appears to be the melancholy result.'

William Dillon read the terrible story with painful and increasing interest; and every angry feeling against Captain Lewis, as the cause of his troubles, disappeared from his breast. In the face of such a fearful vengeance he felt even pity for the man who was regarded as incapable of feeling any pity for others. With the exception of the last occasion, to which his own intemperate language had contributed, he had received nothing but uniform courtesy and respect from the agent; and now that death had come in such appalling circumstances there were even words and acts of kindness the memory of which drew the veil of oblivion over the harsher traits of his character, and Dillon bitterly regretted the severity of the words in which he had denounced the agent on the last occasion on which they had been fated to meet on earth.

As the train sped along in its rapid flight through the midland counties of England, his thoughts were diverted for a time by the rich and varied panorama that passed before his eyes. The pleasant undulating hills, the woods clad in the varied tints of their autumnal foliage, the great manufacturing towns with their dense canopy of smoke, all presented scenes so different from those to which he had been accustomed, that his mind was lifted from the sombre thoughts connected with the death of Captain Lewis, and he even began to speculate as to the effect which this dreadful incident would have on the events proceeding on Lord Errington's estate.

Captain Lewis had been the originator of the new scheme, which had produced such melancholy results on the hapless peasantry, and it might be that the death of the principal actor in them might lead to a total alteration in the conduct of the estate.

But this would be a concession to the spirit of turbulence that had been spreading, and might be regarded as a direct incentive to crime. It seemed natural to suppose that the murder had proceeded from the hands of some of those who had been dispossessed; and to turn from the path intended, and to allow the tenants to return to their holdings would be giving the victory

to violence and directly rewarding the actors and sympathisers in the murder.

Looked at in any light, this [dreadful occurrence seemed a misfortune, and Dillon felt the awkwardness of his present mission, and of his presenting his complaint to Lord Errington, against the proceedings of his agent, pleading for possession of the farm from which he had got notice of dispossession from the agent, while that agent himself was lying dead, the victim to his zeal in the improvement of Lord Errington's own property, slain by the hand of someone belonging to the class of evicted tenants among whom Dillon himself was included. Had he yet to start on his journey he would not have come, but having gone so far in it he felt bound to see it through.

It was late in the afternoon when the train arrived at Euston, and after disentangling himself from the confusion of the crowded station Dillon found his way to a quiet hotel in the neighbourhood. It was too late to call on Lord Errington that evening, but Dillon's desire to hasten his business prompted him to find out that nobleman's residence, and the most convenient time at which it would be possible to see him on the following day.

Accordingly, after some refreshment, he made his way to the West End, and called at his Lordship's residence. On enquiring, he found, to his great disappointment, that Lord Errington was absent on the continent and was not expected to return for several months.

This was a contingency which he had never anticipated, and one that in the circumstances was particularly embarrassing. He returned to the hotel. In an undecided state as to whether he should prolong his stay till the return of his landlord to London—and this might be of indefinite duration—or hasten back to Ireland, the object of his mission unattained, he threw himself on a couch in the coffee-room.

But he was soon to learn that which was to throw a new and lurid light over the position and impel him to prompt decision. The waiter entered the room with the latest editions of the evening papers and laid them about on the tables. Several persons went forward and took copies, and a paper having been placed close to where he was lying, Dillon took it up mechanically, for his thoughts were wholly absorbed in the decision which he felt as to the next course he should take.

But the first thing his eye rested on fully aroused his attention:—

'THE IRISH AGRARIAN MURDER.

'REPORT OF THE INQUEST.

'FLIGHT OF THE SUPPOSED MURDERER.

'WARRANT FOR WILLIAM DILLON.

'£100 REWARD.'

He was unable to read further. His head swam, and his eyes felt like balls of fire. 'Warrant for William Dillon,' he muttered. '£100 Reward. Flight of the Supposed Murderer.' Suppressing every outward sign of emotion, he read the headings over and over again, till the words seemed to burn themselves into his brain: 'Warrant for William Dillon; £100 Reward.'

He glanced stealthily around to see if anyone observed him, for he felt conscious that, despite his efforts at preserving a calm appearance, his looks must betray the agitation within.

The people seated in different parts of the coffee room were generally perusing the papers, except a group of two or three in the further corner of the room who were engaged in conversation. He thought they glanced at him from time to time, and he felt sure that with any longer continuance of this ordeal in the presence of strangers he must break down.

Taking up the paper he quietly passed to the door and upstairs to his room, where, locking the door, he flung himself on the bed. What horrible thing was this? A murderer, a fugitive from the law? A reward on his head. Surely this could not be real. And he bethought him that he had merely read the sensational headlines, and that possibly the news itself did not bear out the dreadful thought. He hastily sought for a match, and lighting the candle placed on his table proceeded to read the account.

An inquest was held this morning, at the Crown Inn, on the body of Captain Lewis, the late agent of Lord Errington. The depositions of the bailiff, Porter, who was accompanying the unfortunate gentleman at the time when the murder occurred, and who was himself severely wounded, were read, the sufferer being unable to appear, and being still in a critical condition.

These were to the effect that Captain Lewis and himself had left the meeting of County Justices about half-past ten, and, when at a point on the road about three miles from the county town, they saw a man approaching them from the opposite direction. Witness was driving and Captain Lewis was sitting on his left. When about ten yards from the horse's head the man deliberately presented a double-barrelled gun at Captain Lewis and fired, the shot taking effect. Instantly after the man fired the other barrel at witness, the ball striking him in the left shoulder. Captain Lewis fell forward out of the gig, and the horse being frightened, bolted. Witness was able to retain the reins and drove rapidly to town, though fainting from loss of blood.

'The man was dressed in a long dark-coloured overcoat, and had a soft dark felt hat with a large leaf pulled over his face, his coat being buttoned so as to conceal the lower portion of the face.

Could not swear positively as to the identity of the man, but, to the best of his knowledge, he believed it was one William Dillon—a tenant who had the previous day visited the office. Dillon had become violent on the occasion, and threatened the agent with vengeance for cruelty in dispossessing the tenants.

* Robson, a pawnbroker, deposed that on the night of the murder certain articles of jewellery had been pledged with him by a man corresponding to the description given of the murderer. He had given an assumed name. It was also proved that on the night in question, and some time after the murder had been committed, a man bearing the same appearance had joined the night mail-coach for Dublin a few miles from the town, in the direction of the place where the murder had been committed.

* From information received, the police had proceeded to the residence of the man Dillon, and found from his wife that he had left home on the evening of the murder, with the intention, as she said, of going to London in order to see the landlord and obtain permission to retain his farm.

'After hearing the medical evidence as to the cause of death, the jury found "That the deceased had come to his death from a gunshot wound, inflicted, as they believe, by the hand of William Dillon, against whom they return a verdict of wilful murder."

'A warrant has been issued for the murderer, and a reward of £100 has been offered for his apprehension. It is thought that he may have escaped from Ireland, though the statement of his intention of going to London is believed to be merely a ruse for the purpose of putting pursuers off his track. However the police have been everywhere communicated with, and though he has got a start there is little doubt that the fugitive will be hunted down.'

The paper fell from Dillon's hands. Here was no case of mere unreasonable surmise and suspicion, but the chain of evidence seemed complete. He covered his face with his hands and tried to settle his thoughts. He heard the roar of London streets, and it grated on his shattered nerves; he put his fingers in his ears and sought to shut it out. For a moment he could hardly realise the position. He felt that there was some horrid dark cloud resting on him he knew not what; it seemed one long troubled dream, and he prayed that it might burst and leave him in his own home, escaped from the horrors of a hideous nightmare. But no, he looked around him. It was too real. There was the newspaper, and this was London; in the eyes of the law he was a murderer and the bloodhounds were on his track.

There was not a moment to be lost. Was he to fly from the charge, so explicit in detail, so confirmed by circumstances; or should he return and face it conscious of his

utter disconnection with the crime? In quiet seclusion in some distant sphere he might leave it to time to prove his innocence. But then the stigma of such a crime! What wretchedness for his family! while the fact of his flying would have confirmed the public belief in his guilt. Even now what sufferings must be endured by his beloved wife. What indignities she must be subjected to as the wife of a fugitive murderer. What if she even suspected that he had committed the murder; that maddened by trouble and incensed against the agent for the harshness of the treatment he had received, he had imbrued his hands in blood! He could not bear the thought. At least he must tell her that he was innocent. She would believe him whatever others might think, and however difficult he might find it to disentangle the meshes of the net that seemed woven around him.

If he could only escape the hands of the police, who were watching for him, and reach home, and there surrender himself to the law, he felt at least that it would tell more in his favour than if he was arrested at a distance and brought back in handcuffs.

CHAPTER VI.

HOME AGAIN.

Dillon looked at the time. In half-an-hour the express would leave for Holyhead. He gathered his little effects together. Putting on as much calmness as he could command, he proceeded to the office and paid his bill. On going into the street he saw the people eagerly buying up the papers giving an account of the murder. 'Dreadful murder in Ireland,' he heard the newsboys cry. One little urchin held a paper to him. 'Full details of the 'orrid murder, sir; escape of the murderer. A hundred pounds reward for William Dillon.' On the platform, in the great surging crowd, he felt more seclusion. A tall policeman, sauntering to and fro, fixed his eye on him, but Dillon returned the look unabashed and hurried on.

Having obtained his ticket through to Dublin and taken his place in the train, from his corner in the carriage he eagerly scanned every passenger entering, but the compartment was soon full; he heard the welcome whistle, and felt relief as the train moved out of the station.

During the night the passengers were transferred to the steamer awaiting them at Holyhead, and before dawn they were steaming up Dublin Bay. Dillon had the kindly shelter of darkness in going ashore. So far he had eluded the vigilance of the police, but he knew that every hour now he was being surrounded by an atmosphere of excited interest regarding the horrible crime which had been committed, in which his personality

would be keenly discussed, and the chances of his being recognised by someone greatly increased.

He accordingly determined to finish the rest of his journey by a rather circuitous route, taking a northern branch of the Great Midland and Western Railway for his return, instead of the line by which he had come, and by which traffic between his county and the metropolis more usually passed.

It was early in the afternoon when the train stopped at the village, about fifteen miles from his home. From this place there was very little communication with his district, so that he felt comparatively confident that he would be able to rest a few hours and finish the remaining distance after dark without much likelihood of being recognised.

So soon as the night had settled down he hired a car to take him to a spot within a few miles of his own house, and about nine o'clock having arrived at the indicated place, he paid and dismissed the driver that he might finish the remainder of the journey on foot.

He had now been travelling for four and twenty hours without sleep or rest of any kind. Body and mind were both exhausted when he reached the brow of the hill hanging over the little valley in which his home lay. It was a clear starlight night, and he dimly saw his cottage nestling among the trees below, the light shining through the parlour window as if lovingly welcoming him home. But he knew that there was a heavy heart there and tearful were the eyes that were looking for his coming.

He sat down on a stone by the wayside, sad and weary, and he shrank from the ordeal through which he was about to pass. She would not doubt his innocence, but she would expect him to show how all the suspicions that had been woven around his name could be dispelled, and that, in the cheery way in which he had many a time before made light of his troubles, he would scatter her fears to the winds. He felt hardly able for the task, and he knew that his inability to see the way, at present, to rebut the charge would confirm her worst fears as to the result, and that her gentle heart would break under the weight of anxiety.

Turning from the cross-country road by which he had been travelling, he slowly descended the hill through the trees, and when about half-way down turning his eyes in the direction of the house he fancied he saw the figure of a man crossing the light that was streaming from the window. Could it be that the house was watched, and that he was stepping into the snare that had been laid for him? Placing himself under the shelter of some underwood where he knew he would be concealed, he watched for nearly an hour but he saw nothing further to confirm his suspicions, and he was on the point of continuing his way to the house when he heard a rustling among the leaves at some

distance to the left. Nearer and nearer it came, and as he crouched closely under the shrub he saw a man pass up the hill to the road at the top. He concluded that it was some belated traveller who had been taking a near way from the path that skirted the loch to the public road, and observing that he had passed on and that there was no other sign of any person around, Dillon proceeded towards the cottage.

Skirting the lawn under shelter of the trees, he tapped gently at the door, and mentioning who he was, the door was quickly opened, and husband and wife were in each other's arms.

'Oh Willie dear, what is this they are saying about you? You are not guilty, dear, I know you're not.'

'I am not guilty, darling. I have had neither part nor lot in it, though I believe I saw the flash of the gun that shot poor Captain Lewis, as I was waiting for the coach on the top of Knockmore hill, about two or three miles off.'

'But, oh, Willie, they have woven together such a story about it, bringing in your going to the pawn-broker's, and your leaving on the coach.'

'I know it, Minnie, dear. I read it all in the papers, and that is why I have hurried back as rapidly as I could travel, that I might give myself up to the police and face the charge.'

'But, oh, dear, is there any danger? Porter swore that he believed it was you.'

'There cannot be any danger, Minnie, when I am innocent. If I had thought there was, I need not have returned.'

'I am sure, dear, that you have done right in coming at once, and God's providence will surely save you from this dreadful charge. Oh, it is dreadful.'

Little Elsie had come running to meet her father, and stood by with great wondering eyes, awed by the passionate and tender scene that was passing before her.

He took the child in his arms and affectionately kissed her. Claspings her little arms around his neck, she sobbed out, 'Oh, father, you did not kill the man?'

'No, my pet, I did not; I had nothing to do with it.'

'But the policemen came here, and they were so cross, and they frightened mamma, and poor ma cried so and said you never killed the man. Oh, father! will the police come to take you away?'

'My pet, I have come back to go to the police myself, to tell them that I did not kill the man. I will have to be away from you, dear, for a little while, to show them that I did not do it, and then I will come back again to you.'

'Oh, dear father, I wish you would not go away; ma will be so frightened when you are gone, and we are so very, very lonely without you. Do not go, dear father.'

The little family party had seated themselves on the couch in the parlour, and were pouring out their fears and sorrows together, when they were suddenly startled by a loud knocking at the door.

Dillon started to his feet. 'Open in the Queen's name!' said a voice from without, and almost immediately, with a crash, the door was burst open, and a number of policemen entered the hall.

'Dillon, I arrest you in the Queen's name, for the murder of Captain Lewis.'

'Well, sergeant,' said Dillon, calmly, 'you have only your duty to perform. I have hurried back from London as quickly as I could travel, when I heard of the charge, in order that I might place myself in your hands. You have only anticipated me by a few hours. I am ready to go with you.'

'Madam,' said the officer to Mrs Dillon, who was standing by pale and speechless in her agony, 'I am sorry for having this unpleasant duty to perform, the most unpleasant I have ever performed.'

'Do not apologise, sir; you have only done your duty. My husband is innocent, and is not afraid to face the charge.'

'Mr Dillon,' said the officer, as his prisoner was about to speak, 'it is my duty to warn you that you are not bound to say anything to me as to this charge, and that anything you may say may be used against you at your trial.'

'I have nothing to say at the present, but that I am entirely innocent. I believe I saw the crime committed, but I was miles away at the time, and had neither part nor sympathy in it; and when I heard of it first when travelling to London, I am sure there were few more grieved for Captain Lewis than I was. Do I look like a man, sergeant, that would do such a deed?'

'Well certainly not, Mr Dillon, I must say you are one of the very last in the county that I would have suspected of being capable of such a dreadful thing. But the evidence seems to bring it very closely home to you.'

'So I see by the papers, and I cannot say that after reading the statements made I am surprised at people thinking me guilty.'

'God grant that you may be able to prove your innocence,' said the sergeant. 'No one will be more heartily glad than I will be.'

'Sergeant,' said Mrs Dillon, 'may I prepare some little things for my husband to take with him; he has only returned from London and—'

'Certainly, madam; Mr Dillon will remain with me here, and you can put such things together as you may wish us to take for him.'

Mrs Dillon left the room, and Dillon, seating himself on the sofa, his little girl stole up to him and threw her arms round his neck; her long flaxen hair streaming over his shoulders.

'Father,' she whispered, 'are you going to gaol?'

'Yes, my child,' whispered the father, tenderly, 'I am going to gaol for a short time, till I show them that I did not do it; but don't fret, Elsie darling, I will be home again with you shortly.'

'Father, dear father,' whispered Elsie, 'I will pray to God for you.'

The sergeant was looking down on the little scene, and he had heard the whispered words, and a teardrop trickled down his bronzed cheek.

'Father,' continued Elsie in the same whispered tone, after a pause, 'will they let me come and see you in the gaol? Would they let me stay with you there? You will be so lonely, dear father, and mamma would let me come and stay with you, and talk to you.'

'You will be able to come and see me often, darling, and I will be so pleased to see you; but little children could not stay there. Will you come and see me sometimes, Elsie?'

'Oh, yes, dear father, I will come very often, and when I am not there I will be always talking to dear mamma about you, the way we talked together about you since you went away; and when mamma is too busy and cannot talk to me about you, I will talk to dear little brother Harry, and I will tell him how to pray for you, and we will both pray to God for poor, dear father in gaol, and I am sure God will hear us and will bring you home again.'

Mrs Dillon returned with a bundle, which the sergeant took and handed to one of the constables, assuring her that every attention in his power would be shown to her husband, and that he would see that every opportunity she desired would be afforded her for visiting him in the gaol, and providing him from time to time with anything further he might require.

As Dillon rose to depart, he asked the sergeant if he would accompany him into the room in which his other children were sleeping, that he might see them and bid them farewell, not having seen them since his return.

Accompanied by the officer, he entered the room, where the two children were sleeping. Bending over them, the father tenderly kissed the lips of each, and with a long lingering look of tenderness he turned away.

Hitherto Mrs Dillon had passed through the ordeal with firmness, but now her firmness failed her, and throwing her arms around him she sobbed on his neck. Disengaging himself from her embrace, he bent down and kissed little Elsie, and unable any longer to bear the parting scene he signified to the officers to proceed.

After they had left the house, the sergeant, who had delayed the operation till

out of sight of Dillon's family, placed the handcuffs on his wrists. Proceeding a short distance on the road they were met by a conveyance on which the officers and their prisoner drove into the town; and worn out in body and mind, Dillon slept that night in the county gaol.

CHAPTER VII.

IN GAOL.

The news soon spread that the murderer of Captain Lewis was in the hands of the police. It produced a profound sensation. With the party of 'law and order' there was a sense of satisfaction that a crime so daring had been promptly followed up, and that the arm of justice had reached the criminal. Few seemed to doubt the guilt of the accused. The evidence was circumstantial, but it was so conclusive at the coroner's inquest. But the satisfaction was tempered with astonishment that a man so respected, one who was thought in no way connected with the turbulent classes, could have involved himself in such a desperate business.

With the masses of the peasantry the feeling was of a very different kind. Dillon was to them a hero, the avenger of their sufferings. He had taken on him to free the country from a tyrant that had been the terror of their lives, and if there had been any way in which he might have been rescued, there were daring spirits and ready hands for the attempt.

But that was out of the question. Owing to the unsettled state of the district, the authorities had massed a force of police in the place, and any idea of open resistance to the course of the law was idle.

But Dillon had not been in gaol more than two or three days when overtures were made to him respecting his defence. They came to him through an attorney who was known to have the confidence of the lawless classes of the district, and who had, on many an occasion before, been engaged in the defence of offenders of this class who had brought themselves under the grasp of the law. Dillon was assured that funds in abundance were at his disposal, and he was offered the assistance of one of the ablest counsel on the circuit.

The day of the trial was rapidly approaching, and he fully recognised the necessity for the best legal assistance he could have. However confident he was that an innocent man could not be found guilty, he realised the peril of his position, and the difficulty surrounding him in proving his case. For the time he could not see how he could afford to obtain the requisite assistance, but he peremptorily declined the offered aid. He felt that it was only made on the assumption

that he was guilty, and he knew that any recognition of sympathy from such a quarter would only confirm the belief that he had taken upon him to avenge their wrongs, and would tell against him at the trial.

His wife had frequently visited him in gaol, and often and anxiously had they considered the necessity for the best legal advice; but though Mrs Dillon had made every effort that her intense anxiety could suggest to obtain the means of seeing counsel, she had failed. Everything on the farm had been seized, and the sympathy of friends, and of the classes which alone could afford the help required, seemed, to have been frozen up for the time by indignant anger against her husband, whom they assumed to be guilty of such a revolting crime.

But there was one whose heart had not been steeled against the sufferer, and in the wife of the clergyman of the parish Mrs Dillon found a friend in need. Mrs Maurice had been a school companion of Mrs Dillon's, and years had not cooled the friendship that had existed between them. In common with everyone in the district she had been shocked at the terrible charge laid against Mr Dillon, but nothing could persuade her of his guilt. Not so her husband. He was in constant association with the gentry of the district, and had imbibed their sentiments, and with them there was not a shadow of doubt that Dillon was guilty. Mr Maurice had even gone so far as to make the occurrence a theme for pulpit eloquence, and in violation of the principle that a man should be deemed innocent until he is found guilty, he had taken the assumed guilt of Dillon to point a moral as to the inherent depravity of the human heart; and although he guarded his words by saying that it would be presumption in him to anticipate the course of justice, or pronounce on any man's guilt till it was proved, he descanted on the protean forms of guilt, and the impossibility of fathoming the depths of human iniquity that may lie beneath a smooth surface, for the heart was deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, who can know it?

Nothing daunted by all this, Mrs Maurice determined to stand by her friend in her trouble, and though surrounded by those who sneered at the idea of the innocence of the accused, and upbraided her with her sympathy with crime, she proceeded to put her resolution in practice. By dint of perseverance, she succeeded in raising, often from reluctant contributors, a fund more than sufficient to cover the cost of the defence, and this she handed over to Mrs Dillon.

The help came none too soon. The day of trial was at hand, and nothing had been done to collect evidence for the defence. Dillon knew that his flight to London immediately after the occurrence of the murder was the point that chiefly prejudiced his case,

and that which most required elucidation; and if time only had allowed, he meant to have had evidence as to his having actually called at the residence of Lord Errington as to some extent a proof of *bona fides* in the explanation of the causes of his visit to London. It was too late now.

However, at the earliest possible moment, the devoted wife called on one of the ablest and most respected attorneys of the county, and placed the whole affair in his hands. He listened with patient attention to her account of everything that had transpired, from the first intimation of their losing their farm till the arrest of Dillon on his return from London. At first there was an air of hesitancy and incredulity in the manner of the attorney as she unfolded the plausible tale, but there was such an earnestness in her manner and such a candour in the statement of every incident, even those which told most against her husband, that the attorney felt irresistibly impelled to the belief that she at least was convinced of her husband's entire disconnection with the crime.

He questioned her minutely as to the circumstances of Dillon's leaving for London, the hour of leaving, the visit to the pawnbroker's, the hour of the starting of the coach, comparing it with the time at which it was stated the murder had been committed; and as a result of all, he seemed so impressed by her statements that she ventured to ask him what he thought of the position of her husband.

He replied that if she could only prove these facts in the court as she had stated them to him, it might go well with her husband; but as by law a wife was precluded from giving evidence either for or against her husband on a charge of murder, she would be unable, unless she had independent evidence, to prove the circumstances of his unfortunate departure for London on this very night of the murder.

Mrs Dillon had not been aware of this before, and all her hopes of helping her husband seemed shattered with one blow. Was there no servant, nor child, nor any one cognizant of his preparations and intentions and the object of his going? No they had desired to conceal his visit to London, and though there were servants in the house as well as her children, who in any case would have been too young to give testimony as to their objects, no one but herself and her husband had been acquainted with the intention of the visit to London.

He said the case looked very grave, and would tax their utmost efforts, and he wished he had had longer time for getting up evidence. However, he would retain a counsel, whom he mentioned, and he would spare no pains to do his very utmost in the case.

Several interviews which he had with the prisoner, confirmed the attorney in his belief that the accused was innocent, but in what way to prove that innocence was a problem that he felt very difficult to solve.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TRIAL.

On the morning of the trial the intense interest felt in it was shown in the crowds that filled every available space in the court-house, and thronged all the approaches to it. The benches set apart for magistrates were filled with the Justices of the county, among whom Captain Lewis had for many years been the reigning spirit, while the space available for the public was packed as densely as it could contain with a motley throng of wild-looking countrymen, whose sympathies were far more with the dock than with the representatives of law and authority on the bench.

A large additional force of police had been drafted into the district, as it was feared that a rescue might be attempted; and an unusual number of the guardians of the peace were posted at different points in the building.

Mrs Dillon had resolved that nothing would prevent her from being near her husband when passing through the dreadful ordeal. She had taken the advice of her lawyer, as to whether it would be wise, and he had strongly advised her to be present. He knew enough of human nature, and of the susceptibilities of jurymen, to know what an adjunct to the eloquence of counsel there might be in a fair face saddened by the sight of her husband in peril, and he had learned how, after the first indignant burst of anger against her husband, public feeling had been leaning to the distressed wife and children of the accused, and how the faithful devotion of a lovely woman prompting her for weeks past to unceasing efforts in trying to hunt up evidence, and doing everything that could possibly tend to save her husband had fanned the general sympathy. It was therefore with his approval and advice that, taking little Elsie with her, she was present. And he had even gone to the pains of quietly arranging through the court officials that they should have seats in such a position as to be in full view of the jury.

The Courthouse was a quaint old building. On one side was a great blank wall up to which in terraces ascended the seats giving accommodation not only to the jury, but to the magistrates and other county dignitaries and their friends who usually attended the sittings of assize. On the other side were two or three rows of similar seats usually occupied by witnesses and their friends or others personally interested in the trial pro-

ceeding, two or three small windows a little higher up than the back sitters looking out on the huge brick wall of the neighbouring gaol and throwing a 'dim religious light' over the proceedings.

Between these terraced seats, in the body of the court, was located the machinery of Justice; the Judge's bench, canopied and curtained; the tables for the clerk of the court and the bar; the dock; with a seething mass of people in the background, kept without the sacred precincts by a line of policemen with fixed bayonets.

On the entrance of the prisoner between two warders he was marched into the dock and his handcuffs removed. Taking his place in the front of the dock, a constable with fixed bayonet on either side of him, his eyes wandered round the crowded building as if in quest of someone that he expected to see, and when at last they rested on the little group, a faint smile flitted over his pale face.

As her eyes met her father's, little Elsie clasped her hands together, her face aglow for a moment with delight; while pale and unmoved her mother returned his look with an intensity of yearning affection that told how her whole soul was absorbed in the peril in which her beloved husband was placed.

The grand jury had found a 'true bill' against the prisoner, and some time was spent in the formality of empanelling the jury and the arraignment.

Then the counsel for the prosecution proceeded to open the case, detailing the evidence he was about to lead.

The first witness called was Porter, the bailiff, who was in the company of the ill-fated gentleman at the time of the murder. After narrating the circumstances of the murder, he was asked if he identified the prisoner as the man who had committed the crime; he replied that to the best of his knowledge and belief he was the man. In cross-examination by the counsel for the defence he declined to swear positively that Dillon was the man. He had known Dillon well for many years, but the night was very dark and the man who committed the murder was disguised. He had a dark felt hat drawn over his face, and a long dark-coloured overcoat which was closely buttoned over the chin. Had seen but a small portion of the man's face; it was not sufficient to enable him to positively identify him as the prisoner at the bar.

Being pressed by counsel he admitted that he was not positive as to the identity of prisoner, and he would not have suspected him at all had it not been for the threats which Dillon had used to Captain Lewis in the office on the previous day. Was positive as to the hour at which the murder was committed; had struck a match and looked at

his watch but a short time before reaching the turn of the road where the murder occurred, and knew that it was exactly half-past eleven.

The next witness was the pawnbroker, Robson, who deposed to the pawning of the articles on the night in question by the prisoner at the bar. Had a slight knowledge of Dillon before that occasion. Prisoner was partially disguised and endeavoured to evade the witness' observation. It was before eleven o'clock, a circumstance which he knew from the fact that he always closed his establishment at eleven.

In cross-examination, witness said that it was not an unusual thing for persons pawning articles to endeavour to evade observation and conceal their identity. Had not thought it singular that prisoner gave the name of 'Johnston.' Prisoner evinced no agitation on the occasion, such as might have been expected in a man about to commit a murder. The counsel for the defence admitted that his client was the person that pawned the articles on the night in question.

The driver of the night up-mail to Dublin deposed that prisoner had taken passage on the coach on the top of Knockmore hill. He was sitting on the side of the road at the milestone, and rose up as the coach approached. It was half-past eleven at the time of the coach reaching Knockmore hill.

In cross-examination witness expressed himself positive as to the hour; knew the time he had got the mails from the post office and knew the hour at which he reached Knockmore Hill. It could not have been a quarter past eleven; it could not have been a quarter to twelve; he knew this from the fact that—as seen in his way-bill—he had kept time punctually at every stage all along the road that night.

He could swear positively that it was at half-past eleven the prisoner had joined the coach. Prisoner was not excited on joining the coach; he had no firearms; he could not have been running; he was sitting on the roadside when first seen by witness in the light of the lamps of the coach. Had spoken with him and received the fare before prisoner got into the coach. Was positive that he showed no symptoms of agitation such as might be expected in a man who had just committed the crime of murder. Had the appearance of a man who had been sitting for some time waiting for the coach.

On the conclusion of the case for the crown, the counsel for the defence arose. He said he did not intend to call any witnesses, as unfortunately the only witness who could give any material testimony as to the proceedings of his client on that unhappy night, and his objects in being abroad from his home, was prevented by the law from giving evidence. Gentlemen of the jury could see that that witness was in court, and they could perhaps realise her feelings when

obliged to listen to the proceedings intended to wind this net of blood-guiltiness around and around her husband, while she, who knew the whole of the circumstances was prevented from offering a word of explanation.

That explanation counsel then proceeded to give—the threatened eviction, the visit to London, the incidents in the pawn office and on Knockmore hill, characterising the evidence of the pawnbroker and the coachman as perfectly truthful. He related graphically how it gradually dawned on the mind of his client that he was suspected, and how on learning that he was charged with the crime he hastened back from London by the most rapid route and means of conveyance he could find. 'Gentlemen of the jury,' he said, 'why did my client rush back to the scene of this cruel murder if he was guilty? what object could he have had? He was virtually out of the reach of the law; in a few hours he might have been in a foreign land and beyond pursuit. Even if there had been any conceivable reason for a man of his character and position committing such a crime, what reason can suggest itself for his hastening back to give himself up to justice?'

Counsel then dwelt on the question of time; on the positive knowledge of the witness Porter as to the moment at which the crime was committed, and the equally positive knowledge of the coachman that at that same moment the prisoner presented himself at his coach on Knockmore Hill, two or three miles away from the scene of the murder, and the total absence of any signs of agitation in the prisoner. He admitted that circumstances pointed suspiciously towards his client, but showed that every one of those circumstances was consistent with the statement of the prisoner about his proceedings that night, and the three or four days and nights succeeding. If everything else was consistent with his guilt, the distinct and evidently truthful statements of Porter and the coachman, with regard to the time of the crime and of the presence of prisoner on Knockmore Hill, could not fail to throw more than a doubt on the possibility of his connection with the offence, and he reminded them that it was their duty to give his client the benefit of the doubt.

In a peroration of great eloquence he referred to the blameless character which his client had ever maintained, and the high respect in which he stood throughout the whole of the district; to the powerful influences of domestic ties, which must have restrained him under any circumstances from involving his family in disgrace and ruin.

He asked them to think of the strain that had already been put on the feelings of those who were near and dear to him, and of the terrible stigma that his condemnation and ignominious death would attach to his innocent children, who did not, and could not,

realise their position, or the danger that was hanging over their beloved parent's head, and concluded by expressing his own absolute belief that his client, however circumstances conspired against him, was entirely innocent of the dreadful crime that had been undoubtedly committed.

In summing up the judge explained the nature and limits of circumstantial evidence, and reviewed the evidence in detail. Referring to the question of time, on which the learned counsel for the defence had so largely relied, he asked them to not attach too much importance to the point which the learned counsel had so ably and eloquently raised. It was true that the witness, Porter, was very positive as to the crime having been committed at a specific moment, and that the coachman was equally positive as to the presence of the prisoner on Knockmore Hill at the same hour some two miles away.

But it was unnecessary to tell them as men of the world how liable men are to mistakes on such a subject; and how from the variation in the time-keeping qualities of watches no absolute certainty could attach to opinions of this nature. The learned counsel for the defence, who, he was bound to say, had done all that great ability and skill in pleading, and his well-known eloquence, were able to do for the case of his unhappy client, had not seen fit to adduce evidence to show what time, whether that of Dublin or that of the Western portion of Ireland, is observed on the coach on which are carried the Royal mails, nor yet did he choose to elicit from the witness, Porter, to what time his watch was adjusted. He, the judge, was bound to admit that the learned counsel, from his well-known faithfulness and zeal in behalf of his clients, had not accidentally overlooked the importance of this element in the question, and in consequence he, the learned judge, felt warranted in advising gentlemen of the jury to not attach much importance to the question of twenty minutes or half an hour in relation to the precise time of the committal of this most heinous crime, especially if in their judgment other circumstances combined in pointing to the prisoner as the man who had committed the offence.

'With regard to the ingenious explanation,' said the learned judge, 'which has been given to counsel, and which that learned gentleman has so eloquently stated to you, as to the cause of the prisoner's hasty and somewhat furtive flight from the district, but in support of which I need not say to you, no evidence whatever has been adduced, it is for you to judge of the probabilities of the story. Men do not usually seek to conceal their movements without some reasonable object to be served, and it is difficult to assign any adequate reason for the secrecy and apparent disguise in which the prisoner involved his

movements. As to what motive may have induced the prisoner to return to Ireland, it is not necessary that you should satisfy yourselves. We frequently see men when under a feeling of remorse doing things which do not seem to commend themselves to right reason, if self preservation is the object, and whatever may have been the motive, it cannot in any way be regarded as invalidating the force of the testimony, which otherwise may seem to you to connect the prisoner with the crime with which he is charged. In conclusion I would warn you to not be influenced by any consideration of what may be the effect of your verdict on the friends or family of the accused. You are in a judicial position and are bound by your oath to act judicially and without being influenced by feeling or sentiment. Crimes such as that with which the prisoner is charged leave widows and orphans whose sad and undeserved position should appeal much more to the humane feelings than the case of the family of the murderer. These are matters that should not enter into your consideration of the line of duty, and your duty is simply to give a true verdict according to the evidence.'

The jury retired to consider their verdict. The judge leaned back in his chair, and the court lapsed into a condition of wearied wakefulness, exhausted with the prolonged attention that had been given to a case in the issues of which the minds of all had been wrapped up, but still keenly anxious for the result now on the eve of being known. Two or three candles on the judge's bench and a few scattered through the building gave a dim and dreary aspect to the scene, in which absolute silence reigned, except for the suppressed whisper which occasionally passed between members of the bar, or the opening and shutting of a door as some of the messengers passed in or out of the court.

The prisoner had been standing with his hands on the front of the bar since early morning, except for the short recess during which the judge had retired in the middle of the day for refreshment. His attention had keenly followed the witnesses in their evidence and the counsel in their pleadings, and now and then his eyes had turned away to the two weary watchers, whose eyes had scarcely been lifted off him throughout the proceedings. There they were, and there they had sat the livelong day, Elsie's bright and merry face now pale and weary and drawn, a counterpart, on a diminished scale, of the pale and anxious face of her mother.

Dillon now had leisure to turn his looks to the two who, of all on earth, were the most keenly alive to the painfulness of his position. There was an exchange of wearied smiles between the husband and his wife and child, and long and tenderly they looked on one another, their looks conveying an expression of anxious and unspeakable love. Many in the dim and silent court-house noted the

interchanges of sympathy, and more than one eye moistened at the scene.

But at last there was a rustle of aroused attention, and every eye in court was fixed on the door of the jury-room, which slowly opened and the jurors filed into their places in the box.

'Gentlemen,' said the clerk of the court, 'answer to your names;' and the roll of jurors was called.

'Gentlemen, are you agreed upon your verdict?'

'We are,' in a subdued and hardly audible voice; while every head was stretched forward to catch the words.

'How, say you, gentlemen, that the prisoner at the bar is guilty or not guilty?'

'Guilty!'

CHAPTER IX.

THE ESCAPE.

A suppressed murmur passed over the Court as the fatal words were faintly heard, which was succeeded by a stillness like the silence of death. Every eye was turned to the prisoner at the bar, who had raised himself to his full height and was looking straight at the Bench. Then his eyes turned to the little group with a look of yearning tenderness. Mrs Dillon was leaning forward in her place with her hands over her face, while little Elsie's eyes were fixed on her father with a bewildered look as if she knew nothing of the nature of the proceedings.

At last the silence was broken by the words 'Prisoner, have you anything to say why sentence of death should not be passed on you?'

There was a pause in which not a whisper disturbed the awful stillness of the court. Dillon slowly raised his left hand and placed it over his eyes as if to collect his wandering thoughts. The judge bent forward, pen in hand, apparently absorbed in the notes before him; and in the painful silence that succeeded, men almost heard the beating of their own hearts. At last the prisoner removed his hand from his brow and raised himself erect.

'My Lord, I am innocent. Before God, I swear I am innocent. In His presence I will soon stand, but to my last breath I will declare before Heaven and earth that neither in sympathy nor act had I anything to do with the murder of Captain Lewis. I thank you, my Lord, and I thank the jury for the patience and fairness with which you have conducted the trial. I do not blame you. With the evidence which has been laid before you, I can hardly wonder that you have come to this verdict. It so involved me that, with my own mouth closed and no evidence that I could bring in explanation, I could myself see little chance of escape. You have done your duty, and when the hour comes, as I am sure it will yet come, when my name will be cleared from this foul

crime, I wish it to be remembered that I freely forgive you for the part you have had in my death.

'I had no ill-will against Captain Lewis. In a moment of excitement I denounced his conduct. I did not threaten him, nor did a thought of doing injury to him ever enter my head; and I had not passed from his presence for two minutes till I regretted the excitement of my words. My counsel, whom I thank for his able and earnest efforts in my behalf, has explained to you the cause of my visit to London. Every word of what he has said is true, and I feel assured that the time will yet come when you will find it so. It was my only hope of saving my farm, to see Lord Errington. It was a forlorn hope at the best, and we had to make a great effort to do so. I was sitting on Knockmore hill when I saw, miles away, in the darkness, the flash, and heard the report, of the gun with which, I have no doubt, the unhappy gentleman was slain. That was the only connection I had with the melancholy event. I can hardly expect you to believe me, but you will know the truthfulness of my words when I am gone. It was only when I was in London that I learned to my horror that I was suspected of the crime. As my counsel has truthfully said, if I had been guilty I could then have easily escaped from the law. But I did not hesitate a moment. I did not waste an hour, but hastened to return by the quickest possible means, to face the charge. I had reached my home. I wished to see and to comfort my dear wife, intending to go the same night to town and give myself up to the police. I had not been in the house for half an hour when my intention was anticipated, and I was arrested; and I have come before you for trial, with the additional suspicion of having been apprehended as a culprit. My Lord, it is in no spirit of bravado that I say I am not afraid to die. For myself I would not grieve to die; but I own that I do grieve for others who are very dear to me. The ignominy of such a death will not continue. My name will be cleared, and when the time comes I ask that society make reparation to my loved ones for the wrong it has done them. If I had been ever so much impelled by madness to commit such a wicked and foolish crime, my love for these would have kept me from it, and what grieves me most is to be compelled to leave them at the time when they most require my protection.

'Oh, when I think of this crushing blow to them, the shame and disgrace that will press them down when they have no help and no friends, it almost drives me to madness. Without friends, without means, and crushed with the contempt of society, they must now go forth and battle with the world alone. Oh, it is a bitter thing to die. Oh God, why is this? why should I have to die for a crime I have never done? Why should my poor

wife and children have to bear this heavy burthen? Is there no justice in Heaven? Is there no mercy, is there no help, in either heaven or earth? Oh, this drives me to madness; it cannot, it must not be. I cannot, I will not die!

With this impassioned utterance he raised his hands and his eyes to heaven. 'Oh God, he cried, 'help me, oh, God, save me!'

He placed his hands on the front of the dock; with a bound he cleared the enclosure; he sprang over the benches, there was a crash of glass, and he was gone.

For a moment the whole court was paralysed at the suddenness of the scene. Then every man sprang to his feet, there was a wild yell of satisfaction from the crowd behind. Hurried orders were shouted, the police rushed to the window, but no one ventured to take the plunge into the alley below. There was a rush of the police to the doors, which were jammed by the crowd; there was hurrying hither and thither; the judge arose majestically from his seat, and standing, viewed the confused and struggling throng as if his presence should have awed it into order, while the screams of women and the shouts of men being trampled under foot added to the wildness of the scene. At last the police made good their exit from the building, and the hue and cry of pursuit died away in the distance.

Order in the building was soon restored, and it was observed that a woman had fallen to the floor in one of the side seats, a little girl weeping passionately over her. The court had been rapidly cleared, and the excitement of the past few moments among those remaining was turned into sympathy with the little scene of domestic distress, and the officers of the court vied with one another in soothing the sobbing of the child, and seeking by restoratives to bring back the mother to consciousness. Mrs Dillon had listened to the impassioned address of her husband; she had heard his appeal to Heaven for mercy. She had seen him bound from the dock and disappear, her nervous system had reached its utmost tension, the reaction came, and she had fallen unconscious to the floor. Gentle hands raised her tenderly, and bore her to the floor of the open court; even the judge, abruptly as the discharge of his duty had been interrupted, was touched by the scene, and while directing that she should be carried to the fresh air of an adjoining room, gently tried to soothe the passionate sobbings of the child. Taking Elsie by her hand, he led her along to where her mother was being carried and laid. By the aid of restoratives, Mrs Dillon soon recovered consciousness.

'Oh, where am I! What has happened?' she passionately exclaimed, as she began to recall the incidents that had occurred.

'Compose yourself, madam,' replied the

judge, 'your feelings have overcome you, but you will soon be quite well again.'

'Oh, where is my husband, where is my husband? Has he escaped?'

'Well, madam, I believe he has, but—'

He was going to add that the police would soon have him again, but he suddenly thought that in the circumstances it would be better left unsaid.

'Oh, Sir, he is innocent: he is innocent. My husband never could have committed that dreadful crime. Oh, Sir, spare him: spare him; he is not guilty.'

'Pray, madam, do compose yourself. You must not let your feelings overcome you in that way. Your husband is in no immediate danger, and if you permit your feelings to carry you away you will be very ill.'

Elsie threw her arms around her mother's neck and sobbed as if her little heart would break; while the court officials stood around, nor could all their sense of regard for law, and annoyance at the sudden escape of the prisoner, prevent them from being touched by the distress of his wife and child.

'Did my husband escape?' asked Mrs Dillon with calmness, when she realised the fact that it was the judge himself in whose presence she was.

'Yes, Madam,' replied his Lordship, 'he has escaped from the court, but it is my duty to say that of course it will be our painful duty to have him arrested again.'

'Oh, Willie, Willie, my poor dear Willie, hunted, hunted like a wild beast,' and she broke down again in a fit of sobbing.

From his inmost heart the judge would like to have said there was a chance that he might not be arrested, for clear as the evidence had been, he felt that there was a link in the chain wanting, and that purely circumstantial as it was, there was still a possibility that the explanation of the prisoner may have been true. But he knew that no recommendation for a reprieve or a reconsideration of the case could be made so long as the prisoner was at large. He saw too the impropriety of holding out any possibly delusive hopes either as to the possibility of the prisoner evading pursuit, or his case being submitted to the prerogative of mercy in the Crown. The awkwardness of the situation was embarrassing, and after some further words of kindness in the endeavour to soothe the agitation of the afflicted woman, he recommended her to go to her home, and seek to calmly resign herself to whatever Providence might be pleased to have in store for her.

When Mrs Dillon, holding her little Elsie by the hand, went out into the cold, bleak night, the full force of her desolation came over her mind. The snow was falling heavily; there were few people abroad; and as she wearily trudged along the silent streets, her little girl by her side, she realised the dreary hopelessness of her position. She had come

into town in the morning in the confidence that she would return accompanied by her dear husband honourably acquitted of the foul crime with which he had been charged. Where was her husband now? found guilty, and with the sentence of death hanging over him, flying desperately from the hands of the law. She knew how little chance there was of his escape with the county filled with police, who every night patrolled the country roads, and whose vigilance would now be tenfold increased by the fact of a condemned murderer being abroad. To what straits her poor husband would be reduced in his wild flight from the gallows she could hardly allow herself to think, and in her distress she sent up an agonised plea to heaven to spare her husband, and save him from suffering and from a painful and disgraceful death.

Little Elsie walked in silence by her side. The day's proceedings had added years to her intelligence, and though the poor child could not fully realise all that had occurred, she had seen her father's desperate effort to escape, and knew that there must be something very dreadful behind. So her child wisdom prompted her to not put any question to her mother although she would have given worlds to know where her father had gone, and whether he would be waiting for them when they got home.

Wearily Mrs Dillon found her way to the inn at the farther end of the town where she had been set down in the morning from the conveyance in which some of her humble farming neighbours had given her a lift to town. She found them waiting for her, and anxiously wondering what had become of her after the exciting incidents of her husband's escape, the news of which had spread like wild-fire through the town. She received a gentle and kindly welcome, the thoughtfulness and good taste of her friends preventing them from making any allusion to what had happened.

Once only during the journey home was the escape referred to. Little conversation had passed, and that of a general and indifferent kind, but the continuance and extraordinary density of the snowfall suggested to Mrs Dillon to break the silence by saying how heavily the snow was falling. 'Yes, thank God,' said the farmer. Mrs Dillon suspected what he meant, and clutching at anything that would give her a little hope, she asked why he thanked God for the heavy snow. 'It will hide the tracks of a man,' he said, 'if he does not want to be followed.'

'Phillips,' said Mrs Dillon, 'do you think there is any chance of his escape?'

'Yes, a thousand chances, if it pleases God he'll never be found by all the policemen in the county.'

'But where could he be concealed, Phillips?'

'Niver you fear, Mrs Dillon; the boys will hide him where devil a peeler will come near him.'

'Mamma,' said Elsie, 'is father not at home now?'

No one replied to this, but Mrs Phillips uttered an ejaculation of pity and distress.

'God bless the child,' said Phillips gently.

'No, Elsie,' said Mrs Dillon, 'father is not at home. You will not see your father for some time.'

The child lapsed into silence but shortly a soft sob revealed that her poor little breaking heart was realising the true state of affairs. And when the Phillips set them down at the foot of the lane, and Mrs Dillon, taking Elsie by the hand, entered the lonely house, and had sent away the kind-hearted neighbour woman that had taken charge of the other children in her absence, and mother and child were alone, Elsie asked no more questions about her father. But when in her little nightgown, the child knelt beside her cot and spread out her little tale in prayer, it may be that, more than litanies rolling up from cathedral aisles and dying away in fretted domes, the still small voice of the little broken heart reached the ear of the Father of all, and ministering angels may have sped away that night to hover over the hiding place of the lonely fugitive.

CHAPTER X.

THE PURSUIT.

When William Dillon formed the sudden resolution to make a dash for liberty and life, he had not the faintest idea of how he was to accomplish his wish, or what chance there was of his making good his escape. It was entirely unpremeditated, and was the result of the overwhelming anxiety caused by his allusion to the coming probable destitution of his family, when the sight of the windows within reach gave a stimulus to the desperate thought.

Had he known the height at which the window was from the alley below, he would not have tempted certain death. Fortunately for him, the swirling winds had piled up a huge snow wreath in the alley, into the middle of which he fell, so that when he was able to extricate himself from the snow, he found himself, somewhat to his surprise, entirely uninjured.

To rush from the passage and turn the corner was the work of an instant. He knew that the sight of a man flying up the street at headlong pace was likely to attract attention, but he equally knew that the least delay would insure his capture by the police, who would soon be on his tracks.

Fortunately, the severity of the night had shut up the townspeople within doors, and in the side-street into which he turned on the first opportunity, there was not one abroad. Looking back, he could see and hear the rush of policemen past the head of the street in

which he was, but not one of them seemed to think it necessary to turn down the way he had come.

It led him into a small country road, on which he felt assured that he would be unlikely to meet with anyone on such a night, and as this led to a bleak upland moor in a remote and unfrequented district, he thought that it might afford him at least temporary safety from pursuit.

All this time he had but little hope that he would make good his escape from the hands of the law. The country was swarming with police; the poor people were cowed down and terrified, and though he knew that hundreds of them would sympathise with him or with anyone that they might suppose to have violated the law, he did not think they would be able, even if they were willing, to give him concealment. Rewards, too, of a greatly increased kind, as for an actually convicted murderer, were sure to be issued and to prove an irresistible temptation to people so wretchedly and hopelessly poor.

With these considerations gradually sapping the courage of his resolution, he had begun to regret that he had made such a futile attempt to escape, where any means of leaving the country seemed so utterly out of the question, and as he struggled up a long steep hill leading to the moor, he felt inclined to give it up and go back and surrender to justice.

But life was very sweet, and the little taste he had had of freedom, and the new hope of life which had been inspired within the past half-hour, made disgrace and death doubly repulsive; and then, when he thought of his beloved wife and children, and the possibility that he might yet meet them in some land of safety far away, where the pursuer could not follow, it nerved him for another effort.

As he reached the top of the hill, he was compelled to pause for breath. Looking back the way he had come, he listened attentively. The snow was falling so heavily that he could see but a small distance, and he was pleased to observe that it totally concealed the track of his footsteps. But his sense of hearing, intensely quickened, detected the rattling as of sabres, and instantly after he recognised the muffled sound of horses' feet on the soft snow on the very road on which he had come. He was pursued, he felt convinced that he was, and that whether they had actually traced his footsteps, or whether it was that the patrols meant to search every road in the whole country round, the troopers were on his track.

Nearer and nearer the muffled sound approached, and though the thickness of the snowfall prevented him from seeing them, he knew that his pursuers could not be many hundred yards away.

What was he to do? To move from where he was would leave fresh tracks which the snowfall would not have time to cover, to stand where he was was, of course, certain capture. He could almost fancy that he saw the troopers through the haze.

He was beside a stone fence, on which, from the position of the stones, the snow had been irregularly retained, the dark lichen-covered slabs alternating with the white covering of snow. He saw that his footsteps on the rude stone wall could hardly be recognised. He cautiously planted his feet between the stones so as to cause as little disturbance of the snow as possible, and bounded over the wall. He landed in a deep snow drift, in which he quickly buried himself, burrowing along the bottom through the snow.

Not a moment too soon. He heard the tramp of a cavalcade of troopers sweeping past, and the rattling of their scabbards, and the earnest, but suppressed orders of the officer in command. Whether they had seen and lost the tracks, or had come to the conclusion that the prisoner could not have succeeded in reaching such a distance from the town in the short time that had elapsed since his escape, the troopers shortly after returned and stopped opposite his place of concealment.

Though the sound was deadened by the snow in which he was surrounded, he could pick up words of the conversation, among which he distinctly heard his own name mentioned.

After the consultation had proceeded for about ten minutes he heard the troopers mount their horses and slowly ride off in the direction of the town. He hesitated whether he should remain in his place of concealment, or continue his flight. Perhaps it was but a ruse to lure him from his hiding place; perhaps having lost the trail they had given up the pursuit. He felt a stifling sensation from the closeness of the covering of snow. He raised his arm and gradually scooped out a hole in the covering, so as to admit the air.

For two long hours he lay concealed chilled to the bone by the melting snow, which had penetrated and saturated his clothing. At last, when no sound was heard to indicate that his pursuers had returned, he proceeded to extricate himself from the snow-drift.

He raised his head and looked around. The snow was still falling, but he could see or hear no sign of the presence of the foe. He slowly raised himself and looked over the fence. He glanced up and down the road, but he could see nothing through the blinding snow.

He had begun to feel that he was safe and raised himself a little higher, when his eye fell on an object that transfixed him with horror. There, right before him, on the other side of the further fence, was a trooper deliberately looking at him.

There are moments, we are told, in men's

lives, crises of their being, when the whole events of one's past history pass in a moment in detailed review before the mind. Men who have been rescued from drowning say that in the moment when the vital spark was flickering, and they stood on the confines of death and life, all their past with all its tale of joys and sorrows, anxieties and hopes, passed slowly over the page of memory, and years of life and its vicissitudes were lived over again in an instant of time.

It was only for a moment that Dillon and the trooper looked eye to eye, but in that moment the fugitive saw all the past with all its burthen of happiness and grief, pass like a burning picture before his eye.

It was but a moment. He saw the trooper raise his carbine, he heard the click of the lock, and he knew that the carbine had missed fire. He saw the trooper fling the weapon away and leap the fence.

Now, Dillon, for dear life! He bounded from the ditch. Onward! Onward! with the trooper but a few yards behind. Over the fields, with their deep covering of snow; over fences; past houses and farmyards, where the startled cattle in their shelter sheds jumped to their feet and pricked their ears; where the startled watch-dogs sounded their alarm. Onward! Onward! still onward!

It was at this moment that miles away a little white-robed angel on bended knees was pleading for her father, and asking that the guardian angels might be sent away to cover him with their wings. Was it this that gave the fleetness to his feet, cramped and chilled as he had been with lying in the snow? Was it this that gave him courage to persevere when the possibility of final escape from his pursuers must have passed beyond the bounds of hope? Onward! still onward!

Dillon looked around, and he could see that he was gaining on his pursuer, that the heavy accoutrements, the riding boots, the scabbard, with which the man was hampered had begun to tell, and he felt that if he could himself but keep the pace, he must ultimately distance his pursuer.

Onward! still onward! Keeping a keen look-out as to where he was running, he approached a ravine in which he saw that the snow drift had accumulated. With a terrific bound he barely cleared the chasm. He looked around, his pursuer had disappeared, buried in the snow.

Onward! still onward! but no sign of his pursuer. He felt that now he had been lost to sight he should double on his pursuer instead of continuing the straight course which the trooper would be sure to follow on extricating himself from the snow.

He turned away to the left, plunging down into the valley below. Crossing a number of meadows and ascending the hills on the farther side, he knew that now it would be safe to pause. Facing confidence that for

the time at least he had escaped pursuit, he threw himself on the snow.

The place seemed known to him. He had taken no note of the direction of his flight, his thoughts had been so entirely absorbed in the effort to escape. But now the hills seemed familiar to him. He stood up and looked around, when he found that the place on which he stood was on the top of the heights on the farther side of the loch from his home, a wild and desolate district, where the inhabitants were few, eking out a miserable existence on an inhospitable soil.

It was the scene, he knew, of the latest evictions that had been authorised by the unfortunate agent, and for which no doubt that gentleman had come to his untimely end. Dillon expected therefore to find no inhabitants, and his prospects of shelter and food—for he felt completely exhausted—were very scanty.

After he had rested for some time he saw the necessity of continuing his journey, and, if possible, finding a habitation, if he was not to spend the whole night on the bleak mountain-side.

After crossing some fields, he reached the road, a narrow bridle track which led from the public road that skirted the margin of the loch, away up over the desolate highlands that stretched away for miles and miles to the west.

With the still falling snow he could not make out the waters of the loch, but he felt assured that in daylight or in a clearer night not only could he look down on the loch, but on his own farm and the cottage in which all that he loved best on earth were contained.

Proceeding along the road in the direction of the loch he soon became conscious that he was approaching human habitations. He heard the barking of a dog, and, as he thought, the distant sound of human voices, and while he listened—from a little glen below, into which the road descended—there arose that weird wail of grief which once heard is never to be forgotten.

It was the 'keena,' or Irish cry for the dead, in which the pent-up grief of the affectionate and passionate Celtic nature finds utterance. In melancholy cadence it rose and fell on the still night air, now breaking forth in a wild plaintive melody, then dying away till it blended with the sound of the winds sweeping up the desolate hill-side.

Dillon knew it well, and how the mourners, in their own poetic way, apostrophised the dead and asked the spirit why it had gone away, and reminded it of the loving services and the kind hands that had tried to stay its flight to the great spirit-land.

As he descended the hill, he soon realised the position. On either side of the road, in the ditch or 'shough,' as it is called, were a number of rude shelters formed in some

cases of blankets or old counterpanes or bagging, reaching across the shough and resting against the fence, the miserable shelter sheds to which hundreds of evicted peasantry have been compelled to betake them in the bleakness of an Irish winter when driven from their homes.

A heavy covering of snow gave uniformity to the motley structures, and, no doubt, closing the rents gave greater warmth to the inhabitants within; but as Dillon passed noiselessly along on the snow-carpeted road, an occasional moan of pain, and the incoherent mutterings of delirium quite as much as the doleful keena which had first arrested his attention, told him that the terrible famine fever was doing its baleful work within.

Dillon had passed nearly the whole length of this settlement of sheds, some thirty or forty in number, without seeing any one from whom he could make enquiry. At last stopping at one of them, he asked if there was any one within. A little ragged girl with hair unkempt and wild, her scanty clothing fluttering in the wind, came out of the hut and asked the stranger what he wanted. He said he wished to know the names of the people on the hill, and she told him a number of names, from which he knew that they were mainly the last batch of sufferers that had been dispossessed of their farms, with a few who were surviving or remaining of those who had been evicted a few months before.

He asked if Widow O'Shea was among the number on the hill, and she answered 'Yes,' and directed him to the hut where the old woman lived; and with a sore heart Dillon stood before the wretched shelter covering the aged head of the mother of his late and faithful servant, Tom O'Shea. He asked if there was anyone within; the old blanket that served for a door was drawn aside, and Tom himself was before him.

'Tom, is that you? Don't speak loud, Tom, take me in.'

'God save us all! it's the Masther. Oh, mother, here's—'

'Hush! Tom, for God's sake hush! take me in and hide me!'

'Oh, masther! masther!' whispered Tom, 'for the love of God what is wrong wid you; or have you got away from the devils, or how-iver is it, at all, at all?'

'Can I be safe here, Tom? Can you hide me? They were going to hang me, Tom, and I got away from them.'

'Yes, masther, dear, the peelers will niver come near us; they're afraid of the faver, and devil a one of them will come nearer than a mile of you if they think ye've got the faver.'

'Oh, Tom, I have had a terrible escape.' And Dillon told his old and faithful servant of the incidents that had occurred, and the way in which he had found his way to the hut,

Tom listened with breathless wonder to the story; while the old mother, who could hardly follow the whole account, but only knew that Tom's master had been in danger of being hanged and had escaped, kept rocking herself to and fro with a melancholy whine that sounded like a suppressed keena, and seemed the very expression of heart-broken despair.

The plan of action was soon formed. Tom declared that he was ready to shed his last drop of blood for his masther, and promised to act strictly by his orders.

The first of these was that no one should know who he was, and that if the police came around, Dillon was to be laid up with a dreadful case of fever.

Tom laid before him such simple food as he had, which Dillon, who had taken nothing to eat since the morning, and had gone in that time through such a physical and mental strain, partook heartily. The faithful fellow then, seeing that his master's clothes were saturated with wet, insisted on exchanging at least part of them for some of his own.

On the dry straw spread for him on the few boards which formed the flooring of the hut, Dillon laid himself down at Tom's request; exhausted nature could do no more, and the poor hunted fugitive was soon soundly and calmly in the arms of Nature's sweet restorer, balmy sleep.

CHAPTER XI.

THE PARTING.

Of all the trials to which poor suffering nature can be subjected there is none so wearing out as suspense. When once the blow has fallen and we know the worst, the mind commonly girds itself up for action, and effort gives strength and courage and hope. But suspense, when no action of ours can help forward the solution of the difficulty, is the paralysis of effort and the purgatory of the soul.

For a fortnight Mrs Dillon had heard nothing of her husband. She knew that a reward had been offered for his head, and that five hundred pounds would be given to any man who would bring him dead or alive to the police. She knew that almost every house in the district had been searched, that day and night the country was patrolled by the police; the trains, the coaches—and she had even heard that the steamers leaving Ireland—were all watched in the effort to arrest him; but though rumours of every kind were afloat, she had heard nothing to tell her where he was, or in what circumstances he was placed.

She had but faint hopes that he would make good his escape from the country, and every day she dreaded to hear of his capture; and under all these circumstances she had nearly broken down. Nor had she the solace

of that companionship and sympathy which might have been fairly claimed in circumstances so trying and so appealing to all that was kindly in human nature, for everyone that came near the house became a suspect, and though there had always been among the neighbouring farmers a feeling of friendship and respect for the Dillons, in the altered state of affairs it was at their peril they could show the least evidence of sympathy.

The eldest son of the deceased agent had temporarily assumed the management of the estates, and he had not only rigidly carried out the intention of his father in evicting, but he seemed determined that the utmost severity should be shown towards the family of the man to whom he attributed his father's death. Proceedings had been taken for expelling them from the cottage, and notice had been published of the sale of everything on the farm, together with the furniture and effects in the cottage.

Intimation of all this had been from time to time conveyed to her by persons who had secretly visited her. All the horses and cattle had been driven off, and even the farm produce had been removed for sale.

Still she clung to the cottage in hope that some intelligence might reach her of the position and circumstances of her husband; and until the day came when she saw the cottage emptied of its furniture, which was carted away to town for sale, she had some faint hopes that she might be allowed to remain.

She had made no preparation for removing, nor did she know where she was to go. None of the neighbours would be allowed to give her shelter, and she knew that if driven from the cottage she would have to leave the district.

Hoping therefore against hope, she clung to the spot where alone she thought it was possible that any news might reach her of her husband, and when the last of the furniture was gone, she continued to wander through the lonely rooms. From a few blankets, which alone she had been allowed to retain, she made a bed for her little ones in the corner of the parlour, and sitting down beside them on the floor she had hushed them to sleep.

But she had not yet reached the bottom of the abyss of misery into which she had been plunged. Even the shelter of the roof was denied her. Just as darkness was coming on, the ministers of vengeance came and ordered her to leave, as their instructions were to raze the cottage.

Huddled up with her children under the shelter of some shrubbery, she saw them put a light to the thatch. She saw the flames leap up and envelope the house; she saw the roof go down with a crash, and ere an hour had passed all that remained of the home, in which so many happy days had been

spent, was blackened walls and burning timbers.

The night was bitterly cold, and though she had done all she could to shelter the tender little ones, they were crying with cold. She took them to the burning timbers. She found a spot within shelter of the walls where they were protected from the cutting wind. She piled up some burning logs, and wrapping the children in the blankets, she lulled them to sleep.

She had been sitting beside them for about an hour when she was startled by hearing a sound as of some one moving through the shrubbery. She listened, the sound ceased; again she heard it, then by the flickering light of the burning timber she saw a man stealthily approaching.

'Who is that?' she called.

'Hush, Minnie, hush,' he hastened forward, and husband and wife were in each other's arms.

'Oh, Willie, my own, my darling husband,' she whispered softly, 'why, oh why, did you come? This place is watched and you will be caught.'

'I could not help it, darling. From the hills the other side of the loch I saw the blaze, and I knew the house was being burned. I could not stay away. I could not leave you in your misery without seeing you.'

'But oh, Willie, where have you been hidden? What are you going to do? Oh, fly, fly from this place; try and get away from the country if you can, and let me follow you to some place away beyond the seas, where danger cannot find you.'

'Yes, darling, that is what I am trying, but I could not go without seeing you once again. Oh, my darling children, and he stooped and fondly kissed the little sleepers.'

'Oh, Willie,' she said, 'where have you been hiding? They are hunting for you every place and there is a reward for your head.'

In a corner of that ruined cottage they stood, husband and wife clasped in each other's arms. Blackened walls around them, with the dark canopy of a wintry sky above, and their beloved children at their feet. She leant her head wearily on his shoulder as she listened to the story of the peril he had passed through. He told her where he had been hiding and how the fear of fever had guarded him from the search of the police; how peering through a hole in the miserable shelter he had seen the police passing and repassing in the neighbourhood of the encampment, but they had never dared to pass along the road between the huts, or to come in any way in contact with the dwellers, how this had enabled him to remain in security till the first rush of pursuit had passed; how he felt he could no longer continue to place confidence in the sanctuary he had found, for it was rumoured that medical men had been ordered to

visit the huts and examine into the cases of fever they might find; and that the huts themselves were to be removed, and the unfortunate owners of them to be driven off to find shelter in the poorhouse. In these circumstances he found that he would be forced to leave at once, unless he wished to risk the chance of almost certain capture. But he could not go without coming over and seeing her and the children, and arranging how they might communicate, if ever he got away from the country; that he had seen the fire from the hills, and knew it was the cottage, that taking Tom with him he had run down to the side of the loch, where Tom had the boat in which they had crossed.

Rapidly and with quivering lips, he told his tale of peril, and Mrs Dillon, absorbed in thought by the dangers he had passed, forgot for a moment the greater danger of the present. Fondly as she clung to her husband, she suddenly remembered that of all places of danger, none could equal where he now was.

'Oh, Willie!' she pleaded, 'go away from this; you are risking your life for me. Do not, do not stay! If there is one place more than all others where they will look for you, it is here. Say farewell. Oh, Willie, we will meet again. I know we will, my heart tells me we will, but go away and try to make your escape from the country.'

'But, oh, Minnie, how can I, or where can I fly? Every road is watched—night and day they're watched—and I feel that it is useless struggling against fate. Oh, Minnie, if I could only provide for you, if I could only know that you and the children had not to face starvation, I could face the gallows to-morrow. I know that the disgrace will be wiped away. I will yet be proved to be innocent, and there would be no disgrace attaching to my death. But, oh, Minnie! what are you to do in the meantime? I cannot think of you being left to starve. Minnie, I have been thinking that I might give myself up, and that the reward might come to you.'

She started back with a look of horror. 'Oh, Willie, what do you mean?'

'Minnie, listen to me, dear. I have been speaking to Tom about this. Listen to me. We have but a few minutes to talk. I can trust Tom. If I get Tom to give me up I feel confident that he would give the money to you.'

'And did Tom agree to this?' she asked.

'Not exactly agreed; he refused firmly, but when he sees how it would save my children from starvation, I believe I could persuade him to do it; and there is no use in my trying to escape. I shall be surely caught, and someone will have the reward.'

'Oh, Willie, do you know what you are saying? Is it to me, dear, that you speak of such a thing? And is that the opinion you have of me, that I would take the price of your blood? Oh Willie, Willie,' she sobbed,

'you should not have said that. I would rather see my children lying frozen dead in the snow before my eyes, than eating bread that had been bought by their father's blood.'

'Minnie, listen to me.'

'Oh, Willie, is this your love for me that you would insult me with such a proposal? Tom would not do such a thing, and if he did, and came before me with his offer, I would drive him from my presence like a dog. Oh, my husband, is this the way we are going to part? Are your last words to remain with me a proof that you doubt my love, and that you think I would save my life and the lives of my children at the price of yours? Oh, Willie, have I ever shown myself to be so selfish? Have you ever seen anything in me to lead you to think I would be capable of this? Do not dare to think of such a crime, for crime it would be. You are innocent, and you would think of giving yourself up to certain death for hire—yes, for hire.'

'But, Minnie dear, my life is forfeited as it is, and do what I will I feel that certain death is before me. Every place is watched, I feel that there is no escape, and as I must die, why should I not make of what I cannot avoid the means of keeping from death little innocent babes who are dearer to me than my own soul? Oh Minnie, I would willingly die for you.'

'Oh, Willie, you break my heart by persisting in speaking of this! If you have to go before your Maker, go with clean hands. They are clean from the blood of others; do not stain them with your own. For self-murder it would be, if innocent, as I know you are, you would give yourself up to death, and rush unbidden into the presence of your Maker. No, Willie; God has helped you, and God will help you still. I feel sure you will yet be saved, if you have only courage. I promise me, Willie.'

'I will promise, Minnie, if you will have it so.'

'Swear to me, Willie—swear to me that you will do all you can to save your life, and to meet us again in some distant land where we will be safe, and will try to forget the terrible sufferings of the present.'

'Yes, dear, I swear it; I will do what I can for your sake.'

'Yes, for mine, dear Willie, and the children's. The hope of seeing you again, dear, will bear me up and make me able to face difficulties more than any money you could leave me. Do not be afraid for us. We will leave this place. We will get away where nobody knows us, and I am sure I can make a living, and I will teach the children to love you, Willie, and to think and talk about you, and to look forward to meeting their dear father again. Oh, Willie, try to live for their sake and for mine.'

'My poor, poor children,' said Dillon. 'God help you.'

Father and mother knelt down on the floor by the side of their sleeping children. The flickering flame from a piece of burning timber shed an uncertain light over the scene in which Dillon bade a lingering long farewell. Little Elsie had pushed down the coverlet; her arm encircled the waist of her little brother. One long ringlet of soft flaxen hair lay on her shoulder. Dillon lifted it and fondly pressed it to his lips. Mrs Dillon taking her scissors, cut the lock of hair and handed it in silence to her husband. The child's lips were moving and a smile lighted up her face for a moment. Dillon bent nearer to listen, and heard her whisper 'Father.'

'She is dreaming about you, Willie.'

'Yes, dear, and it is a pleasant dream, for see she is smiling in her sleep.'

'Do you not know that angels whisper to them when children smile in sleep? They are telling her that she will meet you again, Willie.'

'It may be so. God grant at any rate that the promise may be fulfilled.'

'It will be fulfilled. Something tells me you will be saved, and that we shall meet again.'

They listened. 'The banging of a gate in the direction of the road was followed by the sound of a footstep on the gravelled path. Dillon started back behind a wall that hid him from the light of the burning log. Presently the footsteps approached and some one called in suppressed voice. 'Mrs Dillon.' She stepped forward and asked, 'Who is that.'

'It's me, Mrs Dillon—Phillips. Me and the missus have come to ask you to come home with us.'

'Oh, Phillips; stay there a moment. Don't come near; I will go out to you. Oh, Phillips, I thank you so much; but you know you will suffer for this if you do anything to help us.'

'Never mind, Mrs Dillon; we'll chance it. We can't bear to see you die out here of cold, and the poor little children. Come home with us; we have the cart out here at the gate, and some blankets to roll up the children; and you can stay with us, and nobody will be a bit the wiser till you have time to see about you, and know what you are to do.'

Mrs Dillon could not refuse such an offer, given at so much risk to them. Lifting up Elsie, she gave her to Phillips. Delaying a little behind, she approached the wall behind which she knew her husband was concealed, and whispered, 'I will be back in a moment, wait.' Having taken up the children and borne them to the cart, she gave them over to Mrs Phillips, and seeing them being made comfortable in the cart, she hurried back to the building. Her husband was still there. A few moments sufficed to arrange to what address he was to write from the first place of refuge, should he succeed in escaping from

the country. She pressed a little package into his hand, and standing there among the blackened smoking walls of the home in which they had spent so many happy hours, husband and wife bade each other a long farewell.

CHAPTER XII.

INTERVIEW WITH MANSON.

THE grey dawn was breaking through the window of the little room in Phillips' cottage when Mrs Dillon awoke. The children were still sleeping, and everything in the house and around was silent. As the events of the previous day passed before her memory, she could hardly realise them. They seemed so like the phantoms of a dream. The cottage in which so many happy years had passed, she had seen blazing before her eyes; her children homeless and shivering with cold, sleeping under the canopy of heaven, without a shelter but the blackened walls; the desolation of the hour, and its depth of hopeless misery, swept like a wave of grief over her heart. And then the vision of her outlawed husband, worn and haggard, as he appeared to her in the dim light of the burning logs; cowering and hiding from pursuit, he who had been so brave and buoyant before; driven in his despair to think of giving himself up to death as the only way he could think of to get them food. Oh, that the sweet oblivion of sleep should ever pass away! sleep that seals up the senses, that rests the racked and wearied frame, that stills the fevered throbbing, and lulls the mind into forgetfulness. Oh, why does awakening come unbidden to the weary, with its leaden skies and heavy atmosphere, with its sinking of the heart, its fevered pulse and aching brain? Why can we not turn on the other side, and shut out the cold grey light of real things, and sink again into oblivion? Mrs. Dillon would have closed her eyes to shut out the terrible vision; she tried to think that it was only the trouble of a distempered dream. But no, it was all too true, as she was face to face with life and its stern realities. Then the children awoke and crept up to their mother, and little Harry, nestling to her bosom, tried to beguile her with his prattle, and Elsie, calm and solemnised as one who had looked on life in some of its sombre aspects, told her mother that she had been dreaming about father, and how he had kissed her and said farewell and told her he was going far away; and the tenderness of the mother's love for her little innocent and helpless ones gave poignancy to her anguish.

It was late in the morning when Mrs Dillon and her children rejoined the family. Already Phillips had been to town, and had brought a letter addressed to her which he had found at the post-office, where it had been lying for a week uncalled for. It bore

the London post-mark, and for some time she looked at it, wondering from whom it could be. To her surprise it was from Thomas Manson. He regretted that urgent business had taken him away to London, otherwise he would have been by to aid her husband and his very dear friend in his great trouble. He had just heard of the escape from the Court-house, and was anxious to know the upshot. He would be over in Ireland in a few days, and would call on her at once in order to consult with her for the safety of her husband, and as to the future of herself and children.

This was glad news to Mrs Dillon; she had wondered at Manson's absence. He had left a few days after her husband's arrest, and he had never communicated with them in all their trouble. And yet he was the one friend that both her husband and herself had expected to be true to them, unless, indeed, he believed in the guilt of Mr Dillon; for he at least was not under that fear of 'the office,' which seemed to have paralyzed all kindly aid from residents in the district. Often enough had he spoken with contempt of the spiritless servility of the tenants, and the petty tyrannies of 'the office;' and he had often cheered her husband with visions of what awaited him if he would only cast in his lot in the bright and beautiful lands far away in the southern seas.

On carefully examining the letter, Mrs Dillon found that it was on that day he was to call on her, and as she supposed he would scarcely have heard of the burning of the cottage, and would most probably seek her there, and as she wished their interview to be private she determined to walk to the ruins of her former home.

He had arrived before her, and was sauntering in a melancholy mood through the little plantation that lay between the blackened ruins and the loch. As he approached her she hardly recognised him. Only a few months had elapsed since she saw him last, but how changed! The elastic step, the buoyant air, the cheerful smile were gone, and he seemed to have aged a dozen years. He saw that she was surprised at the change; he explained that he had been very ill, and that nothing but very severe illness would have kept him from coming to the aid of his friend in the hour of trouble.

But where was Dillon? Could he be of service to him now; he was prepared to do anything on earth to aid him in escaping, for he felt perfectly convinced that his friend was innocent; that indeed he was incapable of such a crime.

Mrs Dillon was in doubt as to how far she was safe in revealing her husband's movements. She had known but little of Manson herself; his acquaintance even with her husband had been but a matter of a few months. What if the interest he expressed was but a

ruse? But why should it be so? Manson was rich, the few hundred pounds of reward could be no consideration to him, and there could be no other possible reason prompting him to act otherwise than fairly by her husband. Besides there had sprung up a warm and apparently genuine friendship between him and her husband; and why should she doubt its sincerity, or stand in the way of Manson's aiding him in making good his escape?

All this was passing rapidly through Mrs Dillon's mind, as she endeavoured to waive the questions of Manson. She said, and truthfully, that she did not know where her husband was concealed. She had been visited by him, but he had come and gone in the darkness. True, he could not be very far away, for it was only the previous night she had seen him, though whether he was still remaining in the neighbourhood, or had left, she was not able to say, as their interview had been suddenly interrupted.

Manson told her that he could be of no service to Mr Dillon unless he found out where he was; that it would be an impossibility for any man to get out of the country and get away to a safe distance, unless he was well supplied with money for the purpose. That he assumed Mr Dillon was not, but if he could only find out where Dillon was he would see that every difficulty of that kind was removed.

Then Mrs Dillon told him all that she knew. It might be that her husband had left the district as he had expressed the intention of doing, but the place where he had been lying concealed till the previous night was on the hills beyond the loch among the huts of the evicted tenants.

'What a risk he runs,' said Mr Manson. 'Mrs Dillon, I must see him. I will give him whatever money he requires, but he must fly from that place. How am I to find him?'

'You remember Tom O'Shea, our old servant. He and his mother are in the huts on the hill, and it is with them that my husband has been hiding. Oh, Mr Manson, my heart is breaking.'

'Hush! Take care, Mrs Dillon, the very trees have ears. Is there any way of sending a message to him?'

'I do not know. I am afraid not. It was the only time he had ventured out. He had seen the cottage on fire, and he came. Tom had come with him in the boat, but Tom had not been over before, and I do not think he is likely to come again. I am afraid you could hardly go to the huts without exciting suspicion. People know your acquaintance with my husband, and your going to the hill would at once arouse suspicion.'

'I know it, I know it; it will not do. But could I send a message to Tom, to say I want to hire him, to take him to the colonies, or something of the sort? If I could only meet Tom.'

'Perhaps the Phillips' might be able to send a messenger, that is, the people I am staying with, some kind neighbours who have taken me and the children in, at the risk of being turned out themselves. But, oh! it will bring ruin to them too, if they are found communicating with the people across the loch.'

'Never mind the ruin, Mrs Dillon, I'll see to that; they won't lose in doing me a service. The wretches can hardly kill them, and if they turn them out, I'll see to it. You must get them to find Tom for me. It is of the utmost moment to me. If I could only communicate with Dillon, and manage to get him out of this dreadful country, there will be happiness in store for you all, yet.'

'Oh, Mr Manson, there is no more happiness on earth for us. My poor husband hunted like a wild animal; and yet he is as innocent of that dreadful murder as an angel in heaven. Do you think there is any chance of his escape?'

'I hope so; if I could only send him supplies, and tell him where to find me beyond the seas. But we must find Tom. And what are your plans, Mrs Dillon? What are you going to do?'

'I have no plans, Mr Manson. I have not had time to think about anything but the trouble my poor husband is in. But I can't do anything till I hear something of him. My poor children—God will provide for them; but this is breaking my heart.'

'Mrs Dillon, don't trouble yourself on that account. I give you my assurance that you and your children will never want. I am not a poor man, Mrs Dillon, and as long as I live, and as long as you require it, I will see that you are provided for in comfort.'

'Oh, Mr Manson, that is kind indeed of you to say so. I am not anxious for myself, but oh, my poor husband, do what you can for him.'

'Yes, Mrs Manson; indeed I will. He shall be saved if I can do it, and I shall leave no effort untried. But you must prepare for coming away from this place.'

'I know I must. Indeed, as soon as it reaches the office that I am here, I must go; and the poor Phillips, I am afraid, will have to go too for giving shelter to me and my poor homeless children.'

'However, I shall be in the neighbourhood; and neither you nor they will suffer any inconvenience, so soon as we can hear anything of Mr Dillon. If he gets out of the country, you had better leave here. I shall take you to France, or somewhere abroad, so that you may be spared the pain of being constantly reminded of this dreadful misfortune, and where you may remain in quietness with the children till you can rejoin your husband.'

'Oh, Mr Manson, that is too bright a vision to think of. I fear the chances of his escape are so slender that I cannot allow myself to picture the prospect of

our ever meeting again except in heaven. But it will be well to get away from here if I can. As the wife of a murderer—oh, Willie, Willie, my poor unhappy husband! To think that they suppose you to be guilty of such a crime! Oh, my poor husband!'

'Do not, dear Mrs Dillon—do not give way so. You will require all the fortitude you can command, and nothing good will come of your losing heart. I will see that you get away from this as soon as possible; but we have first to hear something of Mr Dillon, and you must get these friends of yours to send for Tom. There is not a moment to be lost. I shall go with you, if you permit me, and see if we can get a messenger.'

They passed the ruined cottage on their way to Phillips' house, and Mrs Dillon, who had only seen the ruins in the darkness, paused and gazed on the blackened walls in silence. The roof had fallen in, even the smoking of the embers had ceased, and everything was cold and still and dreary. No word passed from the lips of the afflicted woman, nor did Manson intrude on the sacredness of her grief by idle words of comfort, and in silence they proceeded to the cottage of the Phillips, when on the request of Mrs Dillon one of the sons at once undertook to cross around by the head of the loch and take a message to Tom O'Shea.

In the note which he sent, Mr Manson made no reference to the real object he had in view, but offered to Tom to take him to the colonies, and requested that whether willing or not to go, he would come over and visit him at the earliest possible moment on matters of the very greatest importance.

Manson waited till the evening for the reply, and it was not till after sunset that the lad returned, and only to say that Tom was not at the encampment, that he had left after sundown the evening before, and had not since returned, and that his old mother, whom the lad had seen and spoken to, was in a state of much anxiety, as it was rumoured among them that the next day their shelters were to be torn down, and themselves driven off by the police.

On Manson learning that Tom had not returned he and Mrs Dillon had a long consultation on the position. Both believed that it was an omen of good, and they concluded that Mr Dillon had taken the opportunity of the boat for escaping down the river in the night. Before leaving, Manson arranged with Mrs Dillon that immediately on her hearing anything of Mr Dillon, or of Tom, who was sure to return to see after the trouble in which his mother was, a message was to be sent to him.

He requested Mrs Dillon to want for nothing that she might require, and assured her that because of his friendship for her husband, he would impose on himself the duty of providing for her and her children until all their troubles were over, and to do

everything that in him lay to assist Mr Dillon in escaping, and to bring the scattered afflicted family together again in some distant land of refuge,

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ESCAPE.

When, after that last sad parting with his wife amidst the smoking ruins of his cottage, Dillon heard the sound of the wheels of the cart bearing away from him all that he loved best on earth, a sense of his utter loneliness and desolation came over him. They had parted; where and when would they meet again? Would it be in a prison? where awaiting the hour of execution he should have even a more painful parting; or could it be that with the kind help of Heaven he would yet meet them on a distant shore, where, free from pursuit and the ever-present dread of arrest, they should enjoy peace after so dreadful trials?

He could hardly dare to hope that it would be so, and he felt again that it would be better once for all to end the agony by surrendering himself to the police. But he could not forget his wife's pleading words—'Try to live for their sakes and for mine.'—and with an earnest prayer to Heaven for help, he determined he would brave it to the last.

He still clutched in his hand the little package she had given him. Stealthily creeping from his hiding-place, he examined it by the light of a burning log. It contained bank notes—the very last, he felt assured, of all that she had remaining. It pained him to have taken the money; he would gladly have given it back if it had been in his power. But it had been given him to aid him in his flight, and he could not but feel that in devoting it to the purpose of making good his escape he would be best serving the interests of his wife and children, as well as his own.

It was now nearly midnight. Every moment was one of danger; yet he felt it hard to drag himself away. He stood among the ruins. Threading his way among the *debris*, he wandered from room to room, and in his dejection he recalled the scenes of happiness that those now blackened and crumbling walls had witnessed. He left the ruins; he passed through the little plantation that lay between the cottage and the loch, and came to the place where his faithful servant was awaiting him.

Tom had moored the boat under the dark shadow of a bridge that spanned a little stream, and he was walking up and down impatiently and anxiously looking for his master.

For in the interval of his absence he had heard news that boded ill to Mr Dillon. From some passing neighbours with whom he had got into conversation he learned that the police were about to make a raid on the

settlement of the unfortunate tenants on the hill; and that it was most likely to take place that night or the following morning.

The rumour was that the authorities had come to suspect that some criminals were hidden among the huts, and they had determined to have the place surrounded and searched; and numbers of policemen had been seen gathering in the direction of the place, as night set in.

Fortunate it had been for Dillon that he had crossed the loch. He had for some time believed that sooner or later this would happen, and that he would have to suddenly leave the settlement, or be caught. The hour for action had come.

He told Tom that he must fly, and asked him if he would take him down the loch, so as to escape the patrol. But Tom had already seen that flight was necessary, and had been preparing for this, employing his spare time in the absence of Mr Dillon, in loading the boat with farm-produce of every kind, piling up in the stern a great heap of sheaves of corn from a stack still remaining in the hay-yard, which would serve at once as a concealment for his master, and an excuse for his travelling down the loch, in the event of his being overhauled by the police.

They came to the bridge underneath which the boat was moored, and in a few minutes Dillon was effectually concealed underneath the corn, and the sheaves themselves were so arranged as to evade suspicion.

Tom rowed out into the middle of the loch, as far as possible to avoid being seen from the shore. The course intended to be taken by Dillon was to reach the southern extremity of the loch, and then proceed down the river and by the series of locks succeeding one another, until he should reach a point in a distant county where, from the quieter condition of the peasantry, the police surveillance should not be so stringent.

Tom vowed that he would go with him to the ends of the earth, if needed, and that he would do anything to help him to escape; and Dillon, from his concealment in the after part of the boat, directed him to press on, so that by break of day he might be out of the loch and going down the river, where the number of boats on the water would make their little craft less conspicuous, and make it pass, as it appeared to be, for a boat laden with farm produce going to market.

They had been about an hour on the way, and had made good progress. A point of the shore jutting out into the loch lay before them, and in order to shorten the way, Tom steered his boat so as to shave the point as closely as possible. Just as they were passing, 'Boat ahoy! Who goes there?' was shouted from the beach, and, dark as the night was, Tom distinctly recognised the dreaded police patrol.

Without a word of reply he turned his boat from the shore, and, redoubling his efforts,

soon placed a considerable distance between him and the point. But his action had been noticed. 'Boat ahoy!' again rang out loud and peremptory from the shore, and an instant after the sound of a carbine was followed by the whistling of a bullet past the boat.

Tom bent himself to the oars, and the boat flew over the water. Dillon raised himself from his hiding-place and looked behind. Nothing could be seen but the dim outline of the headland they had passed, but in the silent night air there was borne to him a sound that almost froze his blood with dismay. There was no mistaking it—it was that of oars being thrown into a boat; and Tom stopping his rowing for a moment, they could distinctly hear borne over the still surface of the loch the dip of the oars and the rattle of the rowlocks.

They were pursued. The loch had now narrowed to a point, and even the entrance to the river could not be very far ahead, so that there could be no possibility of dodging their pursuers.

The mistake that had been made in not answering the police challenge was now apparent. Had this been done, there seemed no doubt that the appearance of the cargo would have passed muster and that the police would have allowed it to pass. Now suspicions had been aroused by the effort to escape, and a complete overhaul of the cargo must take place.

Dillon saw the danger in an instant and that there was no escape for him unless he got ashore. Every moment the pursuers were gaining on them, and he could distinctly make out the outline of the police boat rushing through the darkness.

They were close in shore; a point which they had to pass was a short distance ahead. Directing Tom to round the point so as to conceal them from their pursuers, he prepared for a spring. The branches of a tree overhung and almost touched the surface of the loch. Extricating himself from his concealment the moment they had got under cover of the point, Dillon sprang at a branch of the tree and lightly swung himself ashore.

Rushing up the bank, he dropped behind a huge boulder, and from the covert of some gorse he saw the police boat shoot the point. Tom had now slackened his pace, and in a few minutes afterwards the police boat was alongside.

Tom was prepared for some rough handling for his attempt to escape, but now that his master had slipped aside and evaded arrest, he was not particularly anxious as to the result.

Affecting surprise he declared his satisfaction that it was a police boat; he had thought he was pursued by robbers. He had been frightened, he said, out of his 'sivin sinnes,' and had given himself up as lost. So well did he play his part that the police, though

sceptical at first, and though they made a search for 'poteen' or other illegal wares which they suspected he had on board, were at last convinced that Tom was an innocent country boy on his way down the river with farming stuff on board, and having rated him soundly for having led them such a wild-goose chase, while Tom complained that they had no business to frighten a poor fellow out of his wits, the police permitted him to proceed on his journey.

Tom declared that he had quite enough for one night, that he would stop where he was till the morning. So he put his boat in shore and moored it to a tree on the bank. In a short time Dillon, from his hiding place among the gorse, had the pleasure of seeing the police boat pass the point and slowly make its way up the loch.

Feeling confident that Tom would make his appearance again when the coast was clear, he waited. After some time he heard a low whistle from behind the point, so leaving the shelter of the gorse he made his way to the beach and was soon stowed away again in his hiding place in the boat.

Dillon congratulated Tom on the adroitness with which he had bluffed the police. Hope was beginning once more to spring up in his heart. Danger passed gave him greater confidence as to the possibility of evading danger to come. Every hour was widening the distance between him and the scene of his escape, and lessening the vigilance directed by the police to the pursuit of the murderer of Captain Lewis, and for the first time since he sprang from the Courthouse window Dillon began to believe in the possibility of ultimate escape.

Warned, however, by this latest danger, he concluded that it would be unwise to excite suspicion again by pushing their journey by night, and as Tom even more than himself was worn out with sleeplessness and fatigue, they determined to remain where they were till the morning. Fastening the boat-rope to a branch stretching far out over the water, so as to be free from intrusion from any chance passer-by, the two travellers were soon deep in slumber.

It was broad day when Tom awoke and began putting his craft in trim to pursue the journey. He dressed it up to appear as much as possible like a boat taking farm produce to market, while from his shelter among the oat-sheaves Dillon directed their progress.

They entered the river, and with the rapid current swollen by the melting snow, the boat went merrily on, while Tom in a leisurely way used the oars more to steady the boat and guide her down the stream, than to assist her progress.

At some of the villages on the banks of the river, Tom had no difficulty in purchasing provisions; and at one of them, by the direction of Mr Dillon, he obtained a suit of clothes at an outfitting establishment. For

the necessity of having something besides the clothing in which he had escaped from the Courthouse and which, no doubt, had been accurately described in the '*Hue and Cry*,' and the description of which must have been in the hands of every policeman—was fully impressed on the mind of Dillon.

For three days they continued their journey, now rapidly borne along by the current, again crossing one after another the picturesque lochs that are linked together like a chain of pearls by the Shannon; travelling by day, and mooring their craft to the bank at night.

They reached a point in the river, where Dillon deemed it prudent to take coach across country on his way to Waterford, which he believed to be the port least likely to be closely watched. Limerick, Galway, Dublin, or any port nearer or easier of access, would be far more likely to be suspected as the place from which a fugitive from his district would probably try to escape.

He wrote a long and loving letter to his wife, giving a narrative of his progress, but giving no hint as to his future intentions lest the letter might be intercepted. This he gave to Tom to convey to Mrs Dillon, concealing it within the lining of his clothes. He directed him to dispose of the boat, which had belonged to himself, as well as the cargo, and to return by coach or train, so soon as he had himself got started on his way.

Gladly would Tom have gone with his master and shared his trials, whatever they were; and sorry did Dillon feel the parting from the last old friend he would see for many a day, and the truest-hearted servant he had ever met. But Tom had strong ties drawing him back in the defenceless state of his poor old mother about to be driven out perhaps from her miserable shelter, and Dillon, too, had other work for Tom.

He knew that nothing would so surely free him from the stigma attaching to this dreadful crime, and so soon restore him to his family as the discovery of the actual criminal. He had faith in Tom's shrewdness; his faithfulness he had long proved, and as Tom belonged to the class who had suffered most severely from, and passionately resented, the cruelties perpetrated on the estate, he believed that no one could better trace out the actual murderer.

That the crime was committed either by some of the evicted tenants or someone acting in sympathy with them, he had not the least doubt, and he put it to Tom as his last request to hunt up the murderer and have him brought to justice, as the best service he could render to his master, falsely and foully charged with such a wicked and shameful crime.

The cross-country coach by which Dillon determined to run the risk of travelling to a somewhat distant railway station left at daylight in the morning. He did not desire Tom to accompany him to the coach, but to watch

from a distance, so that he might be able to report to Mrs Dillon as to whether he had got safely started.

He took his place in the coach before it had left the stables. Three or four others took their places at the same time. He was far outside of his own district, and not likely to be recognised. Nevertheless, when the coach drove through the streets to the Post-office, and when it stopped opposite the door of that building for five minutes—ten minutes—a quarter of an hour—while the letter bags were being put aboard, and the coachman chatted with the ostler, and examined the points of his team, and the beggar women and children came poking their faces into the coach and asking charity, and a solitary early policeman sauntered leisurely past, taking a glance at the passengers within—in that bad quarter of an hour Dillon's pulse was travelling at fever pace, and his heart was in his mouth till the crack of the coachman's whip and the jolting of the old lumbering coach told him they were off.

When night was gathering over the town, Dillon stepped forth that evening from the railway station at Waterford. In one of the common lodging houses in the neighbourhood of the quay, where mariners most do congregate; later on he found himself in conversation with the skipper of a small craft trading with Bourdeaux. It was an open secret that more passed in the '*Coquette*' than passed the Custom-house whether in France or Ireland. But what recked he? He was himself contraband; and when morning broke again, William Dillon was resting on his elbows on the bulwarks of the '*Coquette*' with the outline of the coast of Ireland disappearing in the distant haze.

CHAPTER XIV.

TOM'S RETURN.

SEVERAL weeks had now elapsed since the last sad parting between Mrs Dillon and her husband, amid the burning ruins of their cottage. Sorrowful scenes had been witnessed among the poor outcasts on the other side of the loch; for, despite the inclemency of the dreary winter, they had been driven from their rude shelters by the police, and in front of a large body of troopers they had been expelled altogether from the district.

Day after day, news of the sufferings they had endured was arriving, and formed almost the only subject of conversation and gossip among the neighbours, but nobody knew anything of Tom O'Shea. He had suddenly disappeared, it was said, before the police had surrounded the settlement, and many a surmise was hazarded as to the cause that could

have led him to abandon his aged and helpless mother, and only surviving relation, in circumstances so painful.

Mrs Dillon knew the cause of his leaving, but she could not account to herself for the length of his absence, feeling confident however, that, sooner or later, he would return and bring her intelligence of her husband. She had a certain ground of satisfaction, besides, in the thought of the prolonged want of news about her husband. She knew perfectly well that if he had been caught, the whole country would have been ringing with the news of the capture, and felt that every day of Tom's absence indicated a greater distance between her husband and pursuit. But the anxiety and suspense had become insupportable, and on Manson calling again to make enquiries, it was arranged between them that he should follow up the trail of the outcasts and find whether Tom had returned.

Making the circuit of the northern end of the lake, Mr Manson came to the place where the people had been encamped. No living thing was to be seen, but here and there on either side of the road bits of boards and broken utensils of the humblest kind lay scattered about; here a number of stones laid side by side, the simple flooring formed to keep them from the pools of water in the bottom of the shough; there some ragged scraps of blanket left behind as too poor and worthless to be taken further; while at intervals between the places where the several small settlements had stood were little mounds of earth that told their own melancholy tale. Here a simple cross rudely carved in wood, in other cases pebbles laid on the ground in the form of a cross at the end of a mound told that not even in the bitterness of their sufferings had the outcasts lost faith in mercy somewhere, and marked the spots where in unconsecrated ground some poor wanderer had found a rest which neither eviction process nor trooper could disturb.

It was early spring. The snow had generally disappeared from the fields, but still lingered in sheltered places, giving a mottled dreary appearance to the scene. Manson had ridden for some miles beyond the dismal moorland on which the outcasts had been encamped, and had entered the district where the evictions had been carried out. Ruins of cottages which had been levelled met the eye on every side. Not a sign or a sound of human life, but everywhere desolation and silence.

After passing for some distance through this scene of scattered homes, Mr Manson at last approached what were the remains of a cottage, before the door of which on a stone sat a man with his elbows resting on his knees, and his face buried in his hands. He had not noticed the approach of the stranger until Mr Manson, dismounting and fastening up his horse, had entered on the path leading to the door, when the man, hearing his foot-

steps, slowly raised himself from his seat, and Tom O'Shea stood before him.

'Oh, Mr Manson,' said Tom, 'I did not expect to see you here.'

'It is to see you, Tom, that I have come, and I have been fortunate in finding you, in this desolate place.'

'Yes, Mr Manson, disolate it is indeed, and the pleasant place it was before the cursed crowbar brigade levelled the house I was born in.'

'Was it here you were born, Tom?'

'It was that, your honour; and it was here my poor mother lived, aye, and died wid a broken heart, God rest her.'

'Ah, poor Tom, is your mother dead?'

'She is that, your honour, and I was only just in time to see her die. I was away, your honour, down the river, when the blasted peelers came and druv them out of the huts above the loch; and they druv them off like pigs, but my poor mother could go no further than this, and when she saw the ould walls they could not get her to budge agin, so they left her here. I was just back in the nick o' time, and overtook the peelers here, and when they saw that she could travel no further, they let me stay wid her. I rigged up a shanty agin the wall, and tried to make her warm. But ah, your honour, the blood was froze in her veins wid the cold, and she died in my arms that night. I couldn't see her, your honour, when she was dyin'. She towid me to light the candle that she might see me afore she went away. But I hadn't a light, so she put her hands on my face to feel it was me; and she gave me her blessing, and then she wint away. Thank God she had a decent Christian burial, and that she wasn't buried in the shough like the rest o' them.'

'My poor Tom; my heart's sore for you but what are you going to do now?'

'I am sure I don't know, your honour. It's loth I am to laave this place, but I can't stay here, and now that my poor ould mother is at peace, God rest her soul, I can go to any place.'

'Tom, my boy, you had better come away with me to the colonies, where I live. This is a cursed country, Tom, and you'll be happier there than ever you can be here.'

'Maybe I moight, your honor; I can't be much worse. But I was just takin' a rest before going to see my ould mistress, Mrs Dillon, poor body—God bless her! It would be better for all of us, maybe, if we were in the grave.'

'But, Tom, where is your master—where is Mr Dillon?'

'How would I know, Mr Manson. Shure didn't he escape from the Court-house, God help him! and the poor mistress her heart is breakin' about him and the poor fatherless children.'

'Yes, Tom, but she sent me to find you out,

and get you to tell her where you parted with Mr Dillon and where he is now.'

'Find me? your honor. What div I know about Mr Dillon or where he is.'

'Oh Tom, you must not be afraid of me. I am Dillon's friend, and I want to give him money to help in getting away from the country. And Mrs Dillon sent me to find from you where he is. Tom, you need not be afraid; Mrs Dillon has told me all about it—about you bringing over Mr Dillon in the boat to see her the night the cottage was burned, and how he went away with you, and you did not turn up at the settlement again. And we are both anxious to send some money to your master to help him get away from the country.'

'That is very kind of your honor; but—'

'Tom, I tell you, you need not be afraid. However, come along and see Mrs Dillon yourself. She wants to see you.'

'That I will, your honor. I'll go this very minute. But did she tell ye I was wid him?'

'Yes, indeed she did. Told me all about your having him in your hut on the hill, and your coming over with him in the boat, and your taking him away again. Tom, tell me where he is, for I want to give him money in plenty, and if you will take the money to him—'

'Your honor, he wants no money, and I could not overtake him.'

'What do you mean? has he got off, Tom?'

'I believe he has, your honor; in fact, I am sure he has. But I will tell it all to the mistress when I see her.'

No persuasion could get anything more out of Tom as to where his master was, or how he got off; every question on the subject being adroitly fenced, Tom declaring that he could tell nothing more till he asked the mistress.

It was night before the two travellers, who had ridden and walked in turns, reached the cottage in which Mrs Dillon was staying.

The whole day she had spent in anxious suspense, awaiting the return of Mr Manson, and as night had come on she had put her little ones to bed, and had sat down by the window, having put out the light, and she was peering out into the darkness eagerly listening to every sound that seemed to indicate the return of Mr Manson. At last she heard the opening of the gate and a horse's footsteps, and starting up, she rushed to the door. Before Mr Manson had dismounted, she was by his side.

'Here is Tom, Mrs Dillon, and he has good news, I believe,' whispered Mr Manson.

'Oh, Tom,' she cried, 'is he saved? Where is he?'

'Hush, hush, mistress dear, for the love of heaven!' whispered Tom earnestly. 'I believe he is safe; but here is a letter from

himself. I saw him safely off, and I believe by this time he is out of reach of the peelers.'

Mrs Dillon eagerly seized the letter and hastened to her room. Lighting the candle and passionately kissing the letter again and again, she tore it open.

Little Elsie had raised herself in her bed, and with great wondering eyes was looking at her mother. 'Oh, mamma,' she said, earnestly, 'is that from father?'

'Yes, my darling, he is saved! he is saved! Tom has just brought me this letter from him, and he says dear father has got away.'

The child fell back on the pillow and covered her face with her hands, and with her little heart bursting with gratitude and gladness she sobbed out her thanks to Him whom she had so often and so earnestly asked to save her father, and who had now, she thought, sent her the answer to her prayers.

The letter contained a brief account of the voyage down the river, and referred her to Tom for fuller details. Then it went on to say: 'And now, darling, having got so far as this, I believe I can make good my escape. If I fail I have no doubt you will hear of my capture before this reaches you. But I shall not fail. I feel that the Hand that has saved me so far will bring me through, and that I am yet to meet you and the dear children on some far distant shore beyond the reach of pursuit. Thank you from my heart for the money you gave me; it will be enough to take me out of the country. My only sorrow and anxiety is that you can have so little or none left for yourself. Find Manson, I know he will not desert us; and I shall repay him yet for all he may do for you. I do not know where I may go, as I must take the first opportunity I can find for getting out of the country. Most likely it will be to France as the easiest to reach from Waterford. But wherever I may be I will take the first opportunity of writing to you and letting you know. And now, my poor dear wife, what will you do yourself? You will have to get away from that place, and out of the country if you can. If you can only find Manson, ask him as my last request to assist you to get away. The place to which I would advise you go is Dinan in Brittany. You have heard me speak of my having been there. There is a little English colony there, and you would not be wholly among foreigners, and I feel assured that you could make a living until you hear from me. Tell Manson I implore him to assist you and the children to get there. It is easily accessible and a pleasant place to live, and as I durst not address any letter to you in Ireland, for fear of its being stopped by the police, so helping them to pursue me, I shall address my letters to you at the Poste

Restante in Dinan, to be kept till your arrival. My poor dear wife, my heart would break with grief for you, but I am borne up by the hope that I have escaped, and that we shall yet meet again. Give my fondest love to darling Elsie and the children, and tell Elsie that father's last request to her is to be kind to dear mother, and her little brothers till we all meet again.'

Eagerly and tearfully Mrs Dillon conned every word of the letter; then she told Elsie the message her father had sent to her, and such news of his escape as could be safely imparted to her. The child listened in silence, and grown wise beyond her age from the dark chapters of human life which she had read so early, she refrained from questioning her mother.

Mrs Dillon then sought Mr Manson, who all this time had been standing by his horse intending to return to town after learning from Mrs Dillon the position of affairs. She told him briefly the contents of the letter, and the recommendation contained in it that she should go to France. He cordially entered into the proposal, and as he saw that the anxiety and suspense, as well as the excitement consequent on the new turn of affairs, had completely exhausted Mrs Dillon, he proposed that he should return in the morning, when they should consider over the future course to be taken.

After Mr Manson had left, Mrs Dillon had a long conversation with Tom, who graphically described to her the incidents of the journey, and assured her of the cheery confident spirit in which her husband had started on his journey; and having seen that her old and faithful servant was well cared for and accommodated for the night, Mrs Dillon laid her head on the pillow that night with an easier heart than she had ever once enjoyed since the arrest of her husband.

CHAPTER XV.

THE LETTER.

The following morning Mrs Dillon, in a happier mood than she had felt for months, was early astir and awaiting the arrival of Manson. She felt that now when her husband had escaped from the district there remained no tie to keep her in the place, and that it would be a happy release to be away, not only from scenes that constantly reminded her of the misery through which she had passed, but from the eyes of people who looked on her only as the wife of a murderer who had escaped from the hands of the executioner.

And she earnestly longed to reach the place to which her husband would address his first communication after his foot had reached a foreign shore. The friendly offer of Manson to assist her removal to France,

and the additional kindness of his promise to see that she and her children were provided for, seemed to have removed almost her last trouble, for she felt considerable confidence that as several weeks had passed since her husband had parted from Tom, and no word had come of his arrest he must have made good his escape from the country; and as for the first time she realised the possibility and even probability of their meeting again in safety, her mind rebounded from the depression by which it had been so weighed down.

Breakfast was barely over when the arrival of Mr Manson was announced, and Mrs Dillon, putting on her bonnet and shawl, and bidding Elsie mind her little brothers, went out to meet him. Giving his horse to Tom, he accompanied Mrs Dillon and they proceeded down the road in the direction of her former home. After they had got some distance from Phillips' cottage she handed him the letter from her husband, which he perused with deep interest.

'Mrs Dillon,' he said, at length, 'I am convinced your husband is out of the country. He has not been arrested yet, that is clear, or we should have heard of it, and the police are still under the impression that he is hiding somewhere in the district. I heard as much, last night, at the hotel, and that seems to be the general impression among the people.'

'I hope they will continue to think so till he has had time to get safely away.'

'I am certain he has already got clear away, Mrs Dillon. You see, he would make the port the same day that Tom left him, and if he could only evade observation, there would have been no very great difficulty in sailing away in one of the little vessels that are trading from there to France.'

'Would he be safe if he was in France?'

'Oh, I think so; it is true he could be arrested there if he was traced, but he is not likely to stay there. He is sure to get further away if he has the means.'

'He has not very much means, I am sorry to say; the reason I ask whether he would be beyond pursuit in France is that, if he is not, it will be very necessary to conceal everything about the direction he took. I hope Tom will have prudence enough to think about that.'

'Oh, you may trust Tom, I think. I tried to get something out of him, but it was all in vain; he was as close as the grave.'

'Yes, but he might think that now his master has got out of the country, as he believes he has, no harm would come of his telling all about it.'

'You will have to caution him about that. Besides it would bring the brave fellow himself into trouble if it comes to the knowledge of the authorities that he aided the fugitive from justice to escape. And then that letter, Mrs Dillon—that would be more compromising than all. You must at once destroy it.'

'Do you think so, Mr Manson? I should so like to keep it as the last message from my dear husband. But I do see the danger of it; for it not only tells the direction he has taken, but also where his letters are to come to me. Yes, it is indeed a dangerous letter.'

'I see Tom coming this way. I shall hail him, and you must charge him particularly that he is to give never a hint to anybody on the subject. In fact, I think I shall take Tom away with me to Australia.'

'And a faithfuller, better servant you have never had, Mr Manson; and it would be a mercy to take him away from the wretched scenes here, where I cannot think he could ever be happy again, after the cruel death of his poor mother.'

They were standing at the edge of the little plantation on the Dillons' old farm when they were joined by Tom.

'Tom,' said Manson, 'you are a brave fellow, and you have served Mr Dillon well—you have saved him, I believe.'

'Do you think he has got off, sir?'

'Yes, Tom, I think he has, or we would have heard of it. But did he tell you anything about where he meant to go? I suppose you had some talks together when you were sailing down the river?'

'Well, yes, we talked most of the way; but it was mostly about what he wanted me to do here, and about the murderer, that he wanted me to find out if I could. He said he did not know where he was going after he got out of the country, but he asked me to stay here till I would try and find out who killed the captain.'

'But, Tom, how are you to do that? Every body seems to believe it was Mr Dillon, although I am perfectly sure he never had anything to do with it.'

'No, in troth, sir, they do not. Not one of the boys believes it was the mather done it; and they say the peelers themselves are not so sure of it now. They say that the peelers have got the gun that they think did the work, and they found it in a boghole a couple of miles away on the other side entirely from where the mather joined the coach; and they say it's a fowling piece, and a different kind of gun from any in the country, and that it must have been done by a stranger.'

'Oh, Tom, where did you hear that?' said Mrs Dillon. 'Oh if it would turn out that the real murderer could be found. Oh, Mr Manson, do you think you could do anything in unravelling this mystery? I would be willing to stay here in wretchedness for years, to bear taunts and reproaches as well as poverty if I only thought there was any chance of finding out the murderer. Tom, where did you hear that about the gun?'

'I heard it from some of the boys that came down to Phillips' last night after you had gone to bed, ma'am; and they say they heard it from the peelers themselves.'

'Oh,' said Manson, 'it is only an idle

rumour that has got abroad. I heard it in the town myself, but there is nothing in it. People must talk about something. The police having lost the track of Dillon are sure to hunt up somebody else. It is a dreadful country this; nobody's safe in it. They will be saying next that it was yourself, Tom, that did it.'

'No, your honour, they won't say it was me, because they know I never fired a gun in my life. But it wasn't the mather sure enough; and it must have been somebody. I am going over beyant the loch to where the boys are holdin' a meetin to-night—'

'Yes, Tom,' said Mrs Dillon, 'go for God's sake; and, oh, if they can clear my poor husband from shame—'

'Well, Tom,' said Manson, 'if you go take care you say nothing about your trip down the lochs, or the direction your master has taken, or as sure as you are alive the peelers will be after him if he escaped to the world's end. But my advice to you would be that you should do nothing of the sort, or you'll get yourself into trouble. Do you know that if they find out that you helped to get Mr Dillon away, they will hang you?'

'I suppose, troth, they would be bad enough for anything,' replied Tom, 'but devil a hair I care; the mather asked me to try and find out the murderer, and I know there's a lot of the boys will help me. Not that they'd want to get any man hung for shootin' the Captain, bad luck to him—'

'Oh, Tom,' said Mrs Dillon, 'don't speak so about poor Captain Lewis. I am sure your master would not say such a thing, and—'

'No, ma'am, troth and I'm sure he wouldn't, and I beg your pardon for sayin' it, but when I think of my poor dear mother dyin' in the cowl, I feel bad enough for anything, God forgive me.'

'Tom,' said Manson, 'you'll get into trouble and get other people into trouble too if you stay here. I am thinking of going away this very night, and if Mrs Dillon and you come away with me, I will place her in comfort, and I'll take you away with me to the colonies, and you'll be happy all the rest of your days.'

'God bless you, sir,' said Tom, 'for being kind to the mistress, and if you do that for her I'll pray for you on my bended knees as long as I live; but it was the last word the mather said to me, to try and hunt down the murderer, and I can't go away till I try. The boys want me to go to the meetin' and they say —'

'Well, Tom,' said Manson, 'All I can say is that you are running into danger, for the fact of the matter is—and I did not like to say it before—I have heard that you are yourself suspected, and I would not wonder if it is a trap laid for you by the peelers.'

'Me, sir?' said Tom, 'me?—no fear. I declare I never had a gun in my hands in

my life, only the day that you were out shootin' in the curraghs when I carried the gun for you, and I knew no more how to use it than a baby.'

'That may be all true enough, Tom, but you know that if they take it into their heads they will hang you if you never saw a gun in your life. They are bound to hang somebody, and as Mr Dillon has got out of their hands they will try to prove that you did it. Don't go to that meeting, Tom, if you take my advice.'

'Tom,' said Mrs Dillon, 'perhaps you had better take Mr Manson's advice and let us all get away —'

'Great heavens!' exclaimed Manson, 'there's the police.'

The eyes of all were quickly turned in the direction indicated, and there on the other side of the plantation five or six policemen were seen rapidly approaching.

Mrs Dillon, who, during all the time of the conversation, had held the open letter in her hand, thrust it into the bosom of her dress, but not so quickly as to escape the eye of the sergeant, who was speedily at her side.

'Madam, that paper, if you please,' and he laid his hand on Mrs Dillon's arm.

'What paper, sir,' said Mrs Dillon.

'The paper which you have just concealed. I must have it.'

'Oh, it is only a private letter, with which you have no concern, and I ask by what authority do you interfere with me, sir? Take your hands off, sir.'

'Madam, I have come to make a search in connection with the escape of a prisoner of the Crown, and if you do not instantly give up that paper, I shall feel obliged to use violence.'

'Like a brave man that you are,' said Manson, 'use violence to a lady.'

'Sir, you had better not interfere with me in the discharge of my duty,' said the sergeant. 'If this lady does not give up the paper which she has concealed, she will be obliged to come with me, and I shall have her searched. This is a warrant empowering me to search Phillips' house where this lady is staying, and—'

'And this is Phillips' house, I presume,' interrupted Manson. 'Sir, you know your duty and your powers, I presume; but they do not seem to me to warrant you in interfering with people whom you may casually meet. I know the law, sir, as well as you do, and I warn you that if you exceed your duty you shall answer for it.'

'I know my duty, sir,' replied the sergeant, 'and don't you interfere with me, or I shall place you under arrest.'

'Do so,' replied Manson, 'and if you do you shall suffer for it. Trust me for that.'

'This lady must come with me at any rate,' said the sergeant. 'Officers,' said he turning to the police, 'proceed and surround that

cottage. Now, madam, you will be so good as to accompany me.'

When the policemen had hastened forward in the direction of Phillips' cottage, the party consisting of the sergeant, Mr Manson, Mrs Dillon and Tom proceeded in the same direction.

'Madam,' said the sergeant, 'I should be sorry to subject you to any unpleasantness, but I have my duty to perform, and I am afraid I shall be under the necessity of taking you with me to the police-office.'

'Whatever your duty may be,' said Mrs Dillon, 'you are bound to perform it, and if it is necessary for me, of course I must go, but may I ask what is the meaning of all this?'

'Well, madam, from information received we have cause to suspect that you have been holding communication with William Dillon, a prisoner of the Crown and now a fugitive from justice, and I have been instructed to make a search of the cottage in which you are staying, for anything that may assist us in the endeavour to bring him to justice.'

'It would be a very natural thing, I should think, sir,' said Mrs Dillon, 'that a wife should seek to have such communication with her husband; but if you can discover any such, you are welcome to it. Probably you suppose he is concealed in the house.'

'No, I cannot say that we expect to be in such luck, but if we can find traces of where he is we shall be satisfied.'

'And where, may I ask, do you suppose my husband is? for it would afford me great gratification to know.'

'Well, I do not suppose you would care for my being your informant.'

'Well, not exactly. I should certainly prefer to obtain the information from another source, but in the absence of such information, perhaps you could gratify me with your own opinion.'

'Madam, the police are not in the habit of giving such information. Our custom is to receive information, not give it. Whatever may be our knowledge on the subject I have a suspicion that you could tell me more than I can tell you.'

'And in order to elicit this information you purpose subjecting me to mild torture, I suppose, in the shape of imprisonment?'

'No, madam, we have no intention of submitting you to imprisonment.'

'And yet you have placed me under arrest.'

'No, madam, you are not under arrest; but having reason to suspect that you have on your papers that may possibly throw light on the concealment of William Dillon, I am under the necessity of taking you with me in order to have a search made, and in the absence of a female searcher, being unable to satisfy myself on the subject, I must insist on your coming with me to the police office; that is all.'

On reaching the cottage, by direction of the sergeant, the policemen proceeded to

make a search of the rooms. The sight of the police revived in poor little Elsie's memory the sad scene of her father's arrest, and rushing to her mother she threw her arms around her and sobbed passionately. Manson and Tom remained outside while the search was proceeding, and Mrs Phillips and her children, stupefied by that fear of the police which has been created in the hearts of the peasantry, moved about the house as if bewildered and dazed at the strangeness of the proceedings.

In order to show a willingness to give every opportunity to the police to make their work of searching complete, Mrs Dillon took her infant from the bed where he had been sleeping, and taking her second child by the hand, and with Elsie clinging passionately to her and sobbing as if the little heart would break, she sat down on a stool by the fire in the kitchen, and endeavoured to soothe the sobbing of the child.

In other circumstances she might have yielded to the strain on her nervous system, but the thought of the letter in her bosom gave her firmness. The police were moving to and fro, now and then looking, not without a feeling of tenderness, on the sobbing child and the afflicted mother, but still intent on the work of carefully searching bedding and boxes, and clothing, and everything in which there was a possibility of papers being concealed.

The turf fire was blazing brightly on the hearth, and in the intervals of caressing and seeking to soothe the sobbings of the child, Mrs Dillon was chafing and warming the feet of the infant by the fire. With a quick glance directed from time to time towards the police, she watched their movements, while seemingly absorbed in attention to her children. At no time was the kitchen in which she sat left without the presence of either the sergeant or one or two policemen, who, no matter what their other duties, evidently kept a careful eye on her; but so assiduous was she in her care of her children that their attention seemed somewhat to relax. She knew perfectly well that she was watched, and she felt that every moment was precious. At one moment their eyes were directed to the searchers by some remark made by them in the prosecution of their work, but instantly they were turned to her again. The business had proceeded for some time and was evidently drawing to a close, and nothing had come to light to reward them for their labours. Some of them had even suspended operations and were listlessly watching the others who were giving the finishing touches to their work.

Just then a heavy tread was heard on the doorstep, and the burly form of Phillips appeared in the doorway.

'What in the name of thunder are you up to?' said the master of the house in a loud and surly voice. The attention of all was

instantly turned to the new comer. Mrs Dillon saw her chance. Quick as thought she passed her hand into her bosom and laid the letter quietly on the coals. For an instant it seemed to hang fire, then it suddenly blazed up, and almost before the sergeant had had time to reply to Phillips, the blaze had died away, and there was nothing but the black curling cinders of the paper on the coals. Mrs Dillon had seen the flame shoot up and almost as suddenly extinguished. Nature could bear no more, and she fell heavily in a faint to the floor.

The attention of all was quickly turned to the prostrate form of the mother, surrounded by startled and crying children, and willing hands quickly bore the little ones off and tried to bring the mother back to consciousness.

Quickly as the whole affair had passed, it had not escaped the eye of the sergeant of police. He had not seen her snatch the paper from her bosom, but his attention had been caught by the sudden blaze; and the blackened remains of the paper and the fainting of the lady confirmed his belief that the letter, whatever it was, was now beyond his reach.

He had too much prudence to make any noise over what he knew was beyond recall, and he had too much regard for himself to bring down official censure on his negligence in having allowed such important evidence to escape from his hand. So when Mrs Dillon had returned to consciousness, and remarked to him with a smile that she was prepared to submit to any search he desired, he said, 'No, madam; it will not be necessary now; you have done it well; you have been too quick for me.'

Then the police departed. During the proceedings Mr Manson had taken the opportunity from the action of the police, of impressing on Tom the danger of remaining in the place, and had no difficulty in persuading him to accompany him into the town; and that night, some hours after dark, a large travelling carriage drew up at the gate of Phillips' cottage; and with Mrs Dillon and her three children, accompanied by Mr Manson within, and with Tom O'Shea on the box with the coachman, the carriage drove away into the darkness.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN FRANCE.

THE shades of evening were gathering over the quaint little Breton seaport of St. Malo, when the packet from Southampton slowly steamed up to the quay. The passage had been a stormy one, as it usually is in the early spring, in crossing the chops of the Channel, and the white salt crystallised on the funnels of the steamer, as well as the muffled, wearied,

woe-begone appearance of the passengers leaning over the bulwarks, told how the steamer had been battling with the confused seas rolling in from the Atlantic; and the stillness and silence as the vessel came round under the walls of the town gave a pleasant change to the wild blustering of winds and waves from which they had so suddenly emerged.

A crowd of loungers lined the quay; and the gangways being laid, a long line of passengers were speedily wending their way within an enclosure to the Custom House a little further up the quay, whither presently the luggage was conveyed by waggon, and officers and passengers were engaged in active and noisy search for anything included in the all-comprehensive tariff of France.

Outside the surging throng, in a corner of the waiting-room, was a little group, consisting of a lady with three children. Her luggage was not much of an encumbrance to her, consisting of a single carpet-bag, on which the magic letters of the *douanier* had already been chalked. Beckoning to a lad among the touters who were waiting around the doors of the Custom-house, she handed him her little luggage, and with her infant in her arms, and her two little children by her side, Mrs Dillon emerged from the doors of the Custom-house and proceeded in the direction of the gate of the town.

Passing a long line of booths, where the humbler class of traders ply their calling, outside the walls of the town, and coffee and roasted chestnut stalls minister to the wants of the passing workmen, the little party entered the gate, and slowly made their way through one narrow street after another, with houses seven and eight stories high on either side, almost shutting out the light. At last, under the guidance of the garcon bearing her luggage, they reached the hotel to which she had been recommended by the steward on board, as a place where English was spoken; and worn out and weary Mrs Dillon found herself and her little ones in the apartment where they were to spend their first night on a foreign shore.

It was the first time in her life she had been among absolute strangers. She had parted from Mr Manson and her faithful old servant, Tom O'Shea, in London, as it was considered advisable that they should not travel further together in order to evade observation, and Manson was anxious to return to the colony now as rapidly as he could, having prolonged his stay much beyond what he had originally intended. Tom had agreed to accompany him, and having been persuaded by Manson that no good could arise from his endeavouring to trace the actual murderer of Captain Lewis, and that he might get into trouble himself as an accessory to Mr Dillon's escape, Tom had resolved to leave his country for ever and accept service under Mr Manson in Australia.

Manson had given Mrs Dillon his address

in Australia, with a request that she would keep him advised of everything she heard of her husband and his whereabouts; and what was more to the point in her present circumstances he had given her a draft for a very substantial amount, payable at the 'Banque Roberts' in Dinan, and had accompanied it by a promise of a yearly remittance of a similar amount so long as she required it, and at least until she should be able to rejoin her husband in a distant land.

So far, therefore, as pecuniary matters were concerned, she had no cause for anxiety, but with the exhaustion of the voyage, the loneliness of her position, and the uncertainty still attaching to the fate of her husband, she felt completely prostrate. The refreshment of a night's sleep, however, served to dissipate the despondency, and the following morning brought the cheering thought that she was within a few hours' distance only of the place where she was to receive the dearly longed-for letter from her husband.

The little steamer running up the Rance to Dinan did not leave till noon, owing to the state of the tide, so that it was well on in the afternoon when turning a point in the river the steamer entered the narrow gorge, on the heights overhanging which the quaint little city which was to be her home for a time was perched. The villas embosomed in trees looking down on the placid waters of the Rance, the grim old towers and walls that once made the place one of the strongest in the Cotes du Nord, and more conspicuous still the graceful Viaduct spanning the glen in midheavens, presented a picture, the fairest that had ever met her eyes. Landing on the quay they entered a cab and were driven up the declivity to the Hotel du Commerce.

After she had taken her children to a room and left Elsie in charge of her little brothers she hastened to the Post Office. Writing her name on a card she handed it to the clerk, and with what little French she could command, asked if there was a letter. After some delay she was handed one and to her delight recognised the handwriting of her husband. She hastened to the square across the way and seating herself on a bench beneath the trees, she tore the letter open. It was written from Bourdeaux, and the first few words told her of the safety of her husband. It read: 'My darling wife.—Thanks for ever, thanks to God, I have escaped and I am on a foreign shore, and before this reaches you I hope I shall be again on the ocean on my way to a distant land. When I last wrote to you by Tom, I was endeavouring to make my way to Waterford in the hope of finding a vessel to take me anywhere from the land where I was branded as a murderer. I was fortunate beyond what I could have expected. I found a vessel leaving the very evening of my arrival. And though the police were

watching the docks I was enabled to evade them and got on board. I think the crew suspected that I was flying the country, but they were very good to me and asked me no questions, and after two days at sea we landed here. I had first intended staying in France, but finding that my being a foreigner directed attention to me, and so might lead to my being suspected, perhaps watched by the *gens d'armes*, I have not tried to get into employment, but have been looking for an opportunity of getting away to some place where I might mingle with the crowd and not be recognised as a stranger. Fortunately I have found a vessel leaving for the colonies, and was enabled to make arrangements for working my passage; there being no one on board who could speak English, I am to act as interpreter. We hope to get away in a few days, the destination being Sydney; but I will keep this letter open till the last, that I may add to it if anything occurs. And now, my dear wife, I am so anxious about you and our dear children. I am assuming that you have gone to Dinan, as I requested you in my letter by Tom. You will have to stay there until I can write to you, and, if possible, have you to join me. As I said, the destination of the vessel is Sydney, and you must write to me there, but under an assumed name. I mean to pass under the name of William Melville, and if you write to me the letter will probably be there before I arrive.'

The letter then proceeded to give his wife directions as to what she should do in order to maintain herself, and after many endearments to herself and the children, it closed—with a later date, stating that the vessel was to leave in a few hours.

After reading the letter from her husband, Mrs Dillon sat for some time musing on the contents of it, and following in her thoughts her husband, now on his voyage to the uttermost ends of the earth.

The dreariness of the close of winter in the west of Ireland had given place to the spring of sunny France, and everything around seemed in sympathy with the joyous gladness that filled her heart with the lifting of the dark pall that seemed to her to have shrouded the wretched past.

The trees that fill the *Place du Guesclin* were clothed in their summer foliage, and the birds that twittered in the branches and darted in and out among the leaves were not more blithe than the children that ran and romped and chased each other around the trees; while the merry chatter of the *bonnes*, and the troops of workmen in their blouses passing in the street below and singing in chorus as they wended their way homeward from their work, all seemed so in keeping with the happy turn events had taken that Mrs Dillon could hardly repress the feeling that a new existence had dawned on her.

She was recalled from her reverie by the

thought that Elsie was all this time anxiously waiting to hear tidings of her father. She hastened over to the hotel, and found that already Elsie had put her two little brothers to sleep, exhausted as they were by the excitement of the day. Mrs Dillon read the whole of the letter to her little daughter, charging her to secrecy as to anything contained in it, as well as everything in the sorrowful past; and mother and daughter spent the remainder of the evening in fondly talking and dreaming of the absent one around whom their affections were so tenderly twined.

In a few days Mrs Dillon had secured a pretty little cottage in the suburbs, in the neighbourhood of the old Abbey of Lehon, about half a mile outside the walls of the town, and having simply furnished it and removed to it, she felt that at last she had found rest for a time.

In his letter, Mr Dillon had told her to write to him to Sydney. In the notices in the post-office she found the date of the departure of the mails for Australia, and having been so liberally provided for by Manson's generosity, she determined that she would share with her husband, and so enable him to make a start in the new sphere. In fear, however, lest a draft might be the means of discovering him if there was any attempt on the part of the police to renew the pursuit, she obtained through her banker, M. Robert, Bank of England notes to the amount required, and, writing to her husband a long letter detailing all that had passed since he left, she enclosed the notes in the letter, which, in order to make security doubly sure, she posted not in Dinan, but at Dinard in the neighbourhood of St. Malo, to which place she also requested her husband in future to address his letters to her.

Many weeks had not passed till she had reason to congratulate herself on the prudence of the course she had taken. She had been to the town shopping, and was returning by the way of St. Sauveur's, intending to follow the river bank to Lehon. She was accompanied by Elsie and on reaching that magnificent terrace overlooking the glen, known as the 'English Garden,' so favourite a promenade both with town folk and tourists, they sat down on one of the benches to enjoy the charming scene—the valley of the Rance at their feet, with the wooded undulating plains beyond, dotted over with pleasant villas and farm-houses as far as the eye could reach, till shut in by the lofty forest-covered ranges in the distance.

Dinan was full of English visitors and tourists, and they formed a considerable proportion of the promenaders in the 'Place de la Duchesse Anne.' Directly behind Mrs Dillon and Elsie two gentlemen had sat down, being engaged in animated conversation. The presence of the French lady and her

little girl, as Mrs Dillon and Elsie appeared to be, did not disturb their conversation, the first few words of which were sufficient to arrest Mrs Dillon's attention.

'But I tell you if you had been in the place and seen the sights that I have seen you would not wonder at an occasional outrage.'

'But it is not merely occasional, for outrage seems to rule in Ireland, and a peaceable life's the exception.'

'But that is an exaggeration. There is not more crime there than in England; what there is is more startling sometimes, and as it is nearly all referable to the one great cause of conflict, the most is made of it.'

'Well, I don't know what you would mean by making the most of murder. It is about as bad as well can be; that you must admit.'

'Well, yes; but there are extenuating circumstances sometimes.'

'What! extenuating circumstances for murder?'

'Yes, even for murder. Nothing, of course, excuses any man for taking the life of another—unless it may be that the other has taken life.'

'Even that does not excuse him.'

'Well no, perhaps not; still one feels less pity for one that has brought it on himself as a good many of these agents and bailiffs in Ireland have done. I tell you what, Foster, some of those fellows deserve sticking.'

'I have no doubt there has been a good deal of provocation sometimes; but they've got a devilish hard lot to do with.'

'Yes, perhaps so, when they are driven to distraction, but oppression drives a wise man mad. Now put yourself in a position like this. There was an eviction in one of the districts which I visited, and at which it was my fortune to be present. The whole family had been turned out of the house except the old man, and he was said to be very ill, in fact dying. There was a consultation among the party as to what they would do with him, and it would go to your heart to hear the poor people pleading for the love of God to not turn him out in the snow. It was no use. He was carried out in his wretched bed and laid on the ground, and while the unhappy family, and among them a couple of big stalwart sons, gathered around the sick man, and erected a sort of shelter over him, the crowbar brigade levelled the walls of the house. I afterwards heard that the old man was dead in the morning.'

'Good heavens! they don't do such things as that!'

'I tell you it is done every winter, and I do not care, Foster, what may be the rights of property, a man that orders the doing of such a thing as that is guilty of murder in the sight of Heaven. You would say that gives no right to a man to take a life. That may be,

but place yourself in the position of one of those sons, impulsive, hot-headed but warm hearted and full of the warmest domestic affections as the Irish are, and what would you do? I know what I would be tempted to do, and I fear I could not resist the temptation.'

'But there are not many evictions such as that, or attended by such results?'

'I tell you there are scores of them every winter attended with fatal results from exposure and fever and destitution. Young children and weak women fall the most frequent victims, but strong men have been stricken and died of the fever caused by the hardships of these heartless evictions; and, tell me, can you wonder that a warm-hearted and impulsive people, taught by experience to regard the law as their enemy, and seeing a father or a mother or a child slain in this way as surely as if they were shot down, are tempted and driven to take revenge? Fancy yourself in the place of a son whose mother has been killed by eviction in the dead of winter! What would you do? Could you forgive the death?'

'I cannot say what I might do in the circumstances; but the rights of property—'

'Foster, I do not question the rights of property, but the rights of human life are greater; and the man that deliberately kills in so maintaining the rights of property is a criminal. There was that man Lewis, Errington's agent—'

'Yes, that was a very bad case.'

'A bad case! I do not know which was worse—the agent who caused the death of hundreds, or Dillon who shot him for it.'

Elsie turned up her little white face to her mother. There was a look of horror in her eyes, and of speechless agony. Mrs Dillon laid her finger on her lips in token of silence.

'That was an extraordinary case. The man was not regarded as being in sympathy with the turbulent classes at all.'

'No, but no doubt he sympathised with them in their dreadful sufferings, and he was himself about to be evicted.'

'What an extraordinary thing he should have escaped, though.'

'Very. They say the police have got a clue, however. It seems they have traced him as far as Waterford, and it is supposed he escaped to France. I was over there a few weeks ago.'

'But he must have been concealed by the country people.'

'Of course; they would all sympathise with him, and it seems the police have traced the boat in which he must have gone down the river, and which turned up somewhere about Limerick. I believe they have reason to believe he got away from the country, and since that his wife suddenly disappeared from the district, and it is thought, of course, that she intends to join her husband, so the police

are on the look out for traces of her, in the expectation that through her they may trap her husband.'

'I believe the Government are determined to hunt the fugitive down.'

'So I hear; they have now offered a reward of £1000, and have advised the Continental authorities, and especially the French police. They are sure to catch him through the wife.'

The two gentlemen who had been carrying on this conversation now rose and descended the steps towards the viaduct. The two listeners who were so deeply interested sat stupefied by what they had heard.

'Oh, mamma, it is dreadful!' whispered Elsie. 'They believe father killed the man!'

'Hush, Elsie dear! We may be watched. We shall talk when we get home.'

They rose from the seat and proceeded past the church to the town on their way home. It was the market-day, and the great market square, the Place du Champ, was crowded with country people and their stalls, with their carts of vegetables and grain, their pigs and their bullocks and their horses, their games and their strolling musicians. Among the medley of sounds Elsie's ear caught the sounds of an English song. Coming nearer, they found a little company of strolling minstrels from England, and to the accompaniment of a harp or violin, a woman was singing in a singularly soft and plaintive strain, a song the refrain of which at once arrested their attention. "And where, oh where is father now?" The appropriateness of the spirit of the song to the present circumstances, and the sweetness and tenderness of the music as well as the voice of the singer acted like a spell, and long they lingered drinking in the melody. For a few sous Mrs Dillon obtained a repetition of the song as well as a copy of the words, which the strolling minstrels had for sale, and many a time as they took their rambles along the banks of the Rance thinking and speaking of their loved one far away, the sweet childish voice of Elsie might be heard humming the refrain, 'And where, oh where is father now?'

CHAPTER XVII.

THE CAMP FIRE.

Far away in the interior of New South Wales ten or twelve men were sitting round a camp fire. It was a deep glen, the sides of which were clothed in kurralong and chestnut trees, through the thick foliage of which the rays of the moon could scarcely penetrate; but the scene was lighted up by the blazing logs, in the flickering light of which could be seen a number of bullock drays and American waggons drawn up on each side of a considerable lagoon. The

tinkling of bells from different parts up and down the banks of the creek told that the horses and bullocks had been turned out for the night to forage for themselves, and the men having finished supper and piled up fresh logs, were sitting around, or lying down smoking, in the enjoyment of that most delightful of all repose, the rest by the camp fire, after a day's weary toiling through the bush—fanned by the balmy air of an Australian summer's night, and with only the blue canopy of Heaven above as a covering over them. Yarn, and song, and jest succeeded one another, and tales of bushrangers and hairbreadth escapes by flood and field whiled away the time till tired nature would assert itself and one after another should lay himself to sleep where he was, with his head on a saddle or swag and his feet to the fire.

They were rather a rough and boisterous lot, but there was one among them who did not enter so fully as the others into the conversation, and who, from his manner, and reticence, and the respect that was shown him when he took part in the conversation, was evidently not of the party. He had been travelling by himself, and having been invited by the draymen to join their party, he had gladly accepted the invitation, and having hobbled and turned out his horse, he became their guest for the night.

In appearance, he differed little from the rest of them. In a loose shirt and trousers, with a sash bound round his waist, with cabbage-tree hat and puggaree, he seemed to them a stockman, or a squatter on his way to the city. But although unknown to any of those among whom he found himself on this occasion, William Melville was well-known over a wide district further inland as a successful travelling trader, who had been accustomed for several years to traverse the country, visiting the outlying districts, disposing of his wares to the families and the hands on the stations. He had altered considerably since we last knew him as William Dillon, and with his bronzed face and flowing beard he might have passed without being recognised by those who had known him in other days. Three years had now elapsed since he effected his escape from Ireland, and as a trader he had been fairly successful. Whether the police authorities had entirely lost sight of him, or given over the pursuit, he had not been molested during all this time, nor had he encountered any suspicious identifying him with the fugitive from justice that had escaped. He had, it was true, read detailed accounts of his escape in the colonial papers, but there had been nothing to indicate suspicion that he had found his way to the colonies; so that he had come to the conclusion that now at last it would be safe for him to take out his family to rejoin him in the land of his adoption; and he was at this hour on his way to Bathurst to meet them,

in accordance with arrangement. The Hampshire, in which they had sailed, had arrived at Sydney, and he had calculated that in two days they would reach the place indicated, from which he intended to take them up with him to the remote district on the Darling, in which he had been trading since his arrival in the colony.

He had frequently received letters from his wife of the most cheering kind, although she expressed a conviction that her movements were still watched, and in consequence of this she had some reluctance in acquiescing in his request that she should join him in the colony. Through her he had heard sometimes about Manson, but though he knew Manson's address, and heard of his station on the Murrumbidgee, he deemed it unsafe to visit him, lest their former relationship might suggest to the authorities the probability of his going there, and so put the police on his track.

Filled with the pleasant anticipations of so soon meeting with his family, he had not entered so fully into all that was passing round the camp-fire as he otherwise might; but having fixed himself for the night at a little distance from the fire and from the rest of the travellers, his mind was engaged in planning out the future for his wife and children.

The evening had pretty far advanced, and most of the party had laid themselves down for the night, when the barking of the dogs at the drays announced the arrival of some other travellers coming up country.

Several of those who had not yet gone to sleep raised themselves to see who were the newcomers. They were two gentlemen apparently, not of the bushmen class, but with rather the appearance of city men, and they were accompanied by a servant leading a pack-horse.

With true bush hospitality they were at once invited to accept of the rough fare and accommodation of the camp, with which the gentlemen complied, saying that they felt too tired to go any further; and while two or three of the bushmen piled up the logs and swung the billies for the inevitable tea, and the two travellers seated themselves by the fire, the servant unpacked their baggage and taking out a small tent proceeded to set it up some little distance from the camp fire. When the two travellers had finished tea they sauntered about for a little, smoking before turning in for the night. They seemed to casually pass among the sleepers, but Dillon noticed that they glanced at each face as they passed, and this as well as an indescribable something in their appearance revived in his breast some of the old fears which seemed to have passed away before the pleasant anticipations of meeting in a day or two with his wife and children.

But little conversation had passed between them, and at last, throwing away their cigars, they entered the tent. The servant as well

as the last of the bushmen had fallen asleep, the camp fire had gone down, and all was silence and darkness. The place where Dillon had lain down was near to the tent, and as his fears had again awakened he was eager to catch any conversation between the strangers. After they had entered the tent they spoke to one another in a subdued tone, but the word 'Hampshire,' falling on his ear aroused his most eager attention. He drew himself a little closer to the tent and listened. They scarcely spoke above a whisper.

'Then she has started for the country?'

'Yes, she booked for Bathurst on Tuesday for herself and the children. On the voyage she had said she was going up to the Darling; and so, when I found her started I thought I would push ahead.'

'And did you hear anything about him?'

'I think so; there is a man of the name—a sort of a hawker—away up on the Darling; and when I heard that she was going to the Darling, I knew that was my man. There's a thou, sticking out of it, my boy. Worth while coming from England for that, eh?'

'But he is likely to go down to meet her, don't you think?'

'Oh, that's all right. She is well watched. There's a fellow on the coach with her. He'll spot her all the way. I mean to push on to the Darling, hoping to meet him on the track. Darn these fellows! he may be among them. I couldn't get a look at them. Must be up betimes and have a peep.'

'But, tell me, where has she been all this time?'

'Why, over in France; but we had her watched, and as soon as we heard she was on the move, I was tailed off to escort her.'

'How do you mean?'

'Found out the ship she took passage in, and took passage by the same. Got in tow with some of the old cronies on board, who wormed out of her where she was going. Soon as I heard she had booked as Mrs Melville, I knew I was on the straight track to his lair.'

'Well, it does seem pretty straight sailing. Though I guess you will have to be pretty spy if you nab him. He is pretty wide awake, I fancy.'

'Yes; but he's off his guard now, I dare say, or he would not have sent for the wife.'

'Poor devil; he has affections like other people.'

'I suppose so. Murder hardens them perhaps, but he must be fond of his family all the same, or he would not have run the risk of turning up to them again. And such nice children as they are too. It went to my heart to be watching them. The eldest little girl, one of the prettiest, sweetest little things ever you saw. A perfect little beauty, and so good to her mother and her little brothers. She's like a little mother herself. I heard her one evening teaching them their prayer, and how she

told them to pray for "poor dear father;" I tell you it went to my heart.'

'Poor things. It will take something to save the father I am afraid. Do you know Dillon?'

'Yes, well. I was there when he was tried and saw him make the bolt. I knew him before, besides.'

'Oh, then you will have no difficulty in recognising him.'

'Not a bit. But let us get to sleep. Knock me up at daylight if you are awake. I suppose these bush people move early and I want to have a good look at them. Good night.'

It was barely above a whisper, but Dillon heard it all. It was the dashing down of all his hopes in an instant. For three years he had never had cause for a moment's fear. Now, when he had thought all had ended, danger as great as he had ever known was before and around him. His heart had almost ceased to beat, as with his senses quickened to the utmost intensity he had drunk in every word. What was he to do? To go on to meet his wife he durst not. He was in instant danger where he was. He hardly thought it worth the trouble to make another effort. Better end his life of misery at once. To be so near to those so very dear to him, and yet unable to look upon their faces, to speak to them a word; to not be able even to explain to them his absence. He felt utterly prostrate. He might have known a trap would be laid for him. This was what his wife had feared. She thought she had been watched. She dreaded the venture. He had urged her to come; and now she had come with the representatives of the law actually accompanying her.

He drew himself stealthily away from the tent. Everything was silent save the rustling of the leaves, and now and then the tinkling of a bullock-bell. The whole camp was asleep, except the two travellers, and they would soon be in the same state. Sick at heart, he yet felt he must break the net that had been laid for him. He thought he could not have been saved so long, and saved so wonderfully, to perish at the last; and the singular fact that he should have overheard such a conversation seemed a warning from Providence, and an assurance that he would not even now be abandoned.

With every fibre of his body instinct with animation, he lay still and silent as the night. He was determined to make another dash for life and liberty; but he felt chained to the spot until he should feel assured that the two travellers were asleep. At last, after an hour, which seemed to him an age, he slowly arose; he quietly crept further into the shadow of the trees. He carefully clambered up the bank to the flat above. Fortunately it was there that he had unsaddled and hobbled his horse. He was now out in the

bright moonlight, and if anyone was abroad his movements could be clearly seen.

Without much difficulty he found his horse; to saddle and mount was the work of a few minutes. He turned his horse's head at right angles to the road they had been travelling and dashed into the bush. The clatter of the horse's feet startled the other horses and the cattle; there was a general ringing of bells; it startled the watch-dogs at the drays, and for many miles Dillon could hear the baying of the dogs behind him in the distance as he flew through the forest.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE END.

A FEW days after the incidents narrated in last chapter, the stage coach drew up at the door of a hotel in the town of Bathurst. It was the close of a warm day in autumn, and the dust that covered the coach and all within it showed the long weary day the travellers had passed in journeying over the Blue Mountains. Among the passengers was a lady, accompanied by three children, who, leaving her luggage to be looked after by the servants, eagerly entered the hotel, and, proceeding to the office, enquired for Mr Melville. There was no visitor bearing that name staying at the hotel; and after pausing for a few minutes, as if in disappointment, the lady gave her name to the clerk as Mrs Melville, and requested that she should be called if anyone enquired for her, and was taken upstairs with her children and shown to a room.

Three years had passed since we parted from Mrs Dillon at Dinan in Brittany, and though she was herself but little changed, her children showed the years that had passed over their heads. Elsie had grown a tall and graceful girl, fulfilling all the promise of beauty in her childhood, while the manner in which she busied herself in attending to her little brothers, removing their travel-stained clothing and generally putting them in a presentable state, relieving her mother of the trouble of them, showed her to be the same thoughtful considerate child she had always been.

Somewhat disappointed that she had not found her husband waiting to receive her, but consoling herself with the thought that she had arrived before the time he had expected her, and that a day or two could make no material difference now that she was so soon to rejoin him after their long and anxious separation, she was proceeding with her toilet for some time, when there was a knock at the door, and the servant entering handed her a letter, which, she said, had been in the office on her arrival, but which the clerk had neglected to give.

When the door had closed behind the housemaid, Mrs Dillon, knowing on the instant from whom alone the letter could have come, hastily opened it. It had no signature, and was hurriedly written on a single leaf of note paper. 'Am discovered; must fly; God help me. Go on to Manson.' The paper dropped from her hand and she fell to the floor in a faint. Elsie was instantly at her side, and bustling her little brothers who had begun to cry, she proceeded to take such steps as were needed to revive her mother.

After a little, Mrs Dillon returned to consciousness, and was assisted by Elsie to the bed where, covering her face with her hands, she wept in the bitterness of her disappointment. She had had a presentiment that evil would come of her rejoining her husband, and now her worst fears had been realised. Elsie had picked up the letter and handed it to her mother, who, after again glancing at the brief but sorrowful message, handed it back to her child and gently told her to read it. For an instant, Elsie stood as if transfixed, then realising the whole position she threw her arms around her mother's neck and they mingled their tears in silence.

This sudden change in their prospects was the heaviest blow that had fallen on Mrs Dillon since the escape of her husband. Despite her fears of danger attending her coming to the colony, she had expected to meet him, and that buried away in the far bush they might be beyond the chance of recognition. Every hour's journey inland had been confirming this hope, and now at the very moment when she believed their separation to have reached a close, she had learned that the bloodhounds of the law were on his track, and that he was again a fugitive, she knew not whither. The brevity of the letter told her the imminence of the danger in which her husband felt himself to be, but there was nothing to indicate the direction of his flight, if, indeed he had even had the time to form any plans. 'Am discovered; must fly; God help me. Go on to Manson.'

She had hardly noticed the last words before: 'Go on to Manson.' There was no likelihood that he would in circumstances such as those in which he was placed, himself direct his flight to Mr Manson's, but on a reperusal of the note she saw in these words a hint as to where he intended to communicate with her. Indeed apart from such instructions from her husband, she had been very desirous of going there after meeting with her husband, in consequence of the last letter which she had received from Mr Manson, and which had met her on her arrival in Sydney. In it he had urged her to come and see him as soon as she could after reaching the colony, although he added that he hardly expected

that he would live to receive her. He had met with a very severe accident, having been thrown from his horse, and received internal injuries of such a nature that but little hopes were entertained by the doctors of his recovery. In these circumstances he urged her in the strongest terms to come to him as speedily as she could, as he had communications to make to her of very great importance. The letter in which the urgent request had been sent her was dated nearly a month before, and now that the instructions of the husband coincided with the request that she had been so anxious to fulfil, the prompt decision she was enabled to make in some degree relieved the anxiety of her position.

A few days sufficed to complete preparations. She obtained an American waggon, the owner of which was acquainted with the route, and everything being made snug for the trip, Mrs Dillon and her children started on the journey across country to the Murrumbidgee district, in which Mr Manson's station, of Kurrajong, was situated. After ten days' journeying through the bush they came to their last camping place, about ten miles distant from their destination. From some bushmen camped at the same place they had the first recent intelligence regarding Mr Manson. He was slowly sinking, if he was not already dead, having never rallied from the accident which he had met with. He was looked on as one of the wealthy men of the colony, his station being the finest on the river, and being very efficiently managed it had always been one of the most successful. Being unmarried, the dying man had no relations near him, and speculation was rife as to what was to become of his magnificent property. Making enquiry Mrs Dillon heard that Tom O'Shea was still with him, and that he occupied a position of much confidence and responsibility in connection with the station, and some even thought that as the dying man had no one to leave his property to, Tom was not unlikely to inherit it all. Nobody seemed to understand the relation existing between the proprietor of the station and the wild Irishman he had brought out with him from Home, but they had an idea, generally, that there was more in it than met the eye. Early in the afternoon of the following day, the waggon drove up to the station; and from the clusters of people hanging around it was evident that some one absorbing event engaged the attention of all. Mrs Dillon and her children had hardly alighted till Tom O'Shea made his appearance, and though subdued by the solemnity of the occasion, he gave a cordial greeting to his old mistress and her children.

'Yes,' he replied, to her enquiries after Manson, 'the mather is just gwine away, peace be to his soul; but oh, Mistress, it's him has been longin' to see you, and now

I'm afeard he is too far gone to know you, at all at all. He has been asking me twenty times a day if you had come; and he has been ravin' all the time about the old masher. He had heard that the ship had arrived, the Hampshire I think it was, and, oh, sure hasn't he been frettin' ever since to see you or the masher. But I'll go and tell him you are come, and see if he is well enough to see you.'

In a few minutes Tom returned and beckoned Mrs Dillon to follow him. Leaving the children standing without, Mrs Dillon entered the house and was led to the sick-room.

Two troopers or orderlies were in the passage leading to the door, and a gentleman, whom she afterwards found to be the police magistrate of the district, received her at the entrance, and conducted her to where the sick man lay.

Mrs Dillon was shocked at the change that had taken place since she last parted with Manson, and the hollow cheeks and sunken eyes and laboured breathing told her that he was not long for this world. The medical man of the district and a couple of nurses were by the bedside, waiting as if for the closing scene. Tom O'Shea went forward and standing by the bedside said: 'Masher, Mrs Dillon has come.'

The sick man feebly turned his head in the direction of the door, and, seeing Mrs Dillon, raised his hand a little off the bedclothes. She took his hand in hers; he raised his head, and his lips moved as if in an effort to speak. She bent over the dying man to catch his words, but, as if exhausted with the effort, his head dropped on the pillow, and he seemed to fall into unconsciousness.

As he continued in this state for some time, Mrs Dillon retired, and being shown to a room with her children, she proceeded to put them in order after the journey, awaiting a summons to the sick chamber, whenever the dying man should be able to see her.

After an hour's waiting, Tom O'Shea came to her. 'The poor masher is gone,' said he, 'and the Magistrate has sent me to ask you to see him immediately.'

Mrs Dillon at once returned to the death chamber.

'Madam,' said the magistrate, as she entered, 'you are Mrs Dillon, I believe, and your husband is an innocent man.'

'Sir!' said Mrs Dillon, with agitation; 'I do not quite understand you.'

'Madam, your husband has been charged with murder. There,' and he pointed to the dead man, 'there is the murderer of Captain Lewis.'

'Oh, sir,' said Mrs Dillon as she wrung her hands, 'tell me what is this you mean?'

'What I mean to tell you, madam, is that this dead man, Thomas Manson, has before his death made deposition on oath to me that his hand it was that shot Captain Lewis; and that your husband, William Dillon, where-

ever he is, though found guilty of the crime, had neither part nor knowledge of it.'

'Oh sir,' cried Mrs Dillon, 'are you speaking the truth to me, or are you only mocking at my misery? Oh sir, I have had years of unspeakable suffering; my husband has been flying like a wild beast before the hunters, even now he is fleeing for his life, I do not know where. Oh sir, do not mock me, do not trifle with me; are you speaking the truth that my husband is freed from the charge of murder?'

'Madam, I am a gentleman and a soldier, and I do not mock at suffering. What I say is true, and you can read for yourself. There is the deposition on oath of Thomas Manson, signed by his own hand—perhaps you may know his handwriting—in which he acknowledges to the guilt of having slain and killed Captain Lewis, the agent of Lord Errington. Read for yourself.'

Mrs Dillon took up the document. Her head swam, and her eyes filled with tears; she could not read it but she saw the opening words, she saw the signature, and she knew the writing. She handed it back to the magistrate, and as she turned away she said, 'May the Lord forgive him,' and left the room.

In a few days advertisements were in all the principal papers of the colony addressed to William Dillon, alias William Melville, narrating the circumstances of the confession, and inviting him to report himself to the Police Magistrate of the district whose name was appended to the advertisement; and within a week thereafter, a traveller dusty, weary and worn as after a long journey by forced marches, cantered up to the homestead of the Kurrajong station. His arrival was instantly announced, and in a few moments William Dillon and his wife were clasped in each other's arms, with their children clinging around them, all rejoicing together after the long night of separation and sorrow. But it was not as a mere wandering stranger that William Dillon was welcomed to the homestead, for, after the funeral of the late proprietor, his will had been read by the lawyers in the presence of the assembled people, bequeathing everything to William Dillon, and that night the heights around were all ablaze with bonfires, welcoming the arrival of the new owner of Kurrajong. The confession of Thomas Manson and details of the whole of the circumstances were brought under the attention of the Governor of the colony, and by succeeding mail a free pardon from the Crown was transmitted to Sydney for presentation to William Dillon; while any claim that might have been established for the forfeiture to the Crown of the murderer's property was waived in favour of the man who had suffered so long and so bitterly for another's crime.

About a year after the incidents just narrated, a handsome travelling carriage with liveried servants drew up at the gate of what was once William Dillon's farm in the west of Ireland. From it descended a lady and gentleman accompanied by a fair girl with flaxen curls and two sturdy handsome boys. They walked slowly down the avenue, carefully noting everything as they passed. The little plantation was there, though the trees were taller, and beyond them was the blue lake, placidly sparkling in the sunlight, and still further away the grim moorland heights on which the evicted tenants had camped; and here were the ruins of the cottage still black and crumbling as on that night of sore distress when husband and wife had here said farewell.

They had been visiting all the scenes connected with the great trouble of years ago. They had passed and paused at the mile stone on Knockmore hill, where Mr Dillon had sat awaiting the coach, where he saw the flash of the gun in the distance that killed Captain Lewis. They had visited the Court-house and stood in the dock, and looked out of the window through which the prisoner had escaped. They had driven away up the road by which he ran; and here was the stone wall, and here had been

the snow wreath in which he had been concealed; and there before them were the hills and valleys—then covered in snow, now bathed in summer sunshine—over which he had fled for dear life with the trooper in pursuit, on to those gloomy heights in the distance where he had come upon the miserable encampment of the evicted tenants.

They passed down that mountain road and Mr Dillon showed them the spot where for weeks he had lain in the shough under the wretched shelter-shed with Tom O'Shea and his mother.

And now last of all they had come to visit all that remained of their once dearly loved cottage home.

They showed the children where Elsie and her little brothers had been laid in a corner of the smoking ruins for shelter from the pitiless cold; where the father and mother had leant broken-hearted over them as they slept; where mother clipped the curl from Elsie's hair, and father had taken it away with him to his wanderings.

The memories were very sad, and they turned away with chastened feelings. But the shadows had for ever passed from their path; the clouds had now rolled by, and the days of their mourning were ended.



